COLONIAL EDUCATION AND FORMS OF COUNTER KNOWLEDGE: SCENES OF SCHOOLING IN THE NOVELS OF V.S. NAIPaul, ERNA BRODBER, AMITAV GHOSH AND JULIAN BARNES

A dissertation presented

by

Aparna Mujumdar

to
The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of
English

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
May, 2013
COLONIAL EDUCATION AND FORMS OF COUNTER KNOWLEDGE: SCENES OF SCHOOLING IN THE NOVELS OF V.S. NAIPAUL, ERNA BRODBER, AMITAV GHOSH AND JULIAN BARNES

by

Aparna Mujumdar

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities of Northeastern University
May, 2013
Abstract

This dissertation examines representations of colonial education in V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, Julian Barnes’ *Arthur and George* and Erna Brodber’s *Myal*. It argues that these works historicize the dissemination of imperialist discourses at the colonial school and chart the adverse effects of colonial education on colonized subjects. Moreover, it suggests that these novels recast the histories of colonial education in narratives of fraught development in which protagonists assimilate colonialist ideologies at colonial schools and educational institutions in their childhood. The works chart their coming of age under imperialist rule by portraying them as supporters of Empire. The protagonists’ unquestioning assimilation of colonialist discourses implicates them in perpetuating the colonizer’s exploitative practices and violence over colonized subjects. The novels portray them as confronting crises in their personal and public lives. These crises compel them to question colonialist assumptions and their collusion with Empire. The novels chart the characters’ attempts to overcome the ill effects of colonial education as they acquire self-awareness about their complicity with Empire. The novels thus link the crises with their complacent assimilation of colonialist ideologies thereby charting the harmful effects of colonial education.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the joint effort of many people who have supported me over the years and given me encouragement to pursue my scholarly work. First of all, I would like to thank my wonderful dissertation committee, professors Patrick Mullen, Mary Loeffelholz and Nicole Aljoe, without whose constructive criticism, insightful suggestions and patience, my dissertation would not have been possible. Professor Mullen, my dissertation director, has been a wonderful source of inspiration to me all these years. His critical questions about the novels and recommendations for literary analysis have productively challenged me to improve my work and research. He has encouraged me to think beyond the theoretical and historical boundaries of my field and to wonder about the texts as literary works.

Secondly, I wish to thank Professor Loeffelholz, for the consistent encouragement she has offered me over the years. She has been a scrupulous reader and critic of my work. She has mentored me on many occasions and guided me to key research materials and questions without which this project would have been unthinkable.

Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Aljoe for her close analysis and commentary on my dissertation. She has been a source of inspiration for me on several occasions. Her insightful comments about Caribbean literature and textual analysis have encouraged me to think about my materials in new ways.

Moreover, I am thankful to the Provost Dissertation Fellowship Committee for providing me with much-needed time and support to complete the dissertation.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family and friends who have been there for me from the time I embarked on this scholarly journey. I would like to thank my
husband, Abhay, who encouraged me to undertake this project in 2005. Without his continuing support, patience and encouragement, this dissertation would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my son, Anurag, for teaching me about striking a balance between work and life, and relishing each moment. He has taught me to question the value of educational experiences in shaping our lives. My sisters, Dipti and Shailja, who have always been there for me in trying times, I owe many thanks. They have always been ready to lend a patient ear to me. Lastly, I would like to thank my father and mother, who raised three daughters in India with unparalleled love and joy. I thank them for giving me the freedom to choose my calling and chart my journey. I dedicate this dissertation to my father, without whom I would not have cultivated the love for reading and writing and the courage to ask the right questions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract............................................................................................................................................... 3
Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................... 4
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 7

Colonial Education and Forms of Counter Knowledge: Scenes of Schooling in the novels of Naipaul, Brodber, Ghosh and Barnes ................................................................. 7

Chapter 1............................................................................................................................................. 25

England through the Mimic’s Eyes: Examining V.S. Naipaul’s Reflections on Colonial Education in the Enigma of Arrival ................................................................. 25

Chapter 2............................................................................................................................................. 73

Examining Native Collaboration and Mimicry in Amitav Ghosh’s the Glass Palace ....... 73

Chapter 3............................................................................................................................................. 118

The Makings of an English Gentleman: Education and Empire in Julian Barnes’ Arthur and George ................................................................. 118

Chapter 4............................................................................................................................................. 165

Spirit Thievery and Colonial Education in Erna Brodber’s Myal ............................................. 165

Conclusion........................................................................................................................................... 204
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................................... 209
Introduction

Colonial Education and Forms of Counter Knowledge: Scenes of Schooling in the novels of Naipaul, Brodber, Ghosh and Barnes

This dissertation examines the representations of English colonial education in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*, Erna Brodber’s *Myal* and Julian Barnes’ *Arthur and George*. By examining the link between colonial education and the internalization of colonialist discourses among colonized subjects in the postcolonial novel, this dissertation argues that the novel represents the adverse effects of colonial education by casting it within a narrative of fraught development of the colonized subject. Each novel under discussion in the dissertation depicts scenes of education where the young protagonists assimilate colonial ideologies in their childhood or adolescence. The internalization of colonialist discourses embroils these subjects, who mature into adults over the course of the novel, in the perpetuation of imperialist violence and colonialist discourses of racial difference. The novels chart the adverse effects of colonial education on the experiences, self-conception and interactions of the adult protagonists. The novels portray that the reexamination of their educational experiences enable these subjects to critique colonial violence and explore possibilities of undoing the ill effects of their assimilation. Thus while these novels reinscribe histories of colonial education, they also explore strategies of undermining the influence of colonial education among these subjects. But the narratives portrayed in the novels also suggest that these attempts at redressing the legacies of colonial education are not always successful or smooth. Several characters remain mired in their espousal of colonialist
ideologies underscoring the tensions that accompany the negotiations with colonialist discourses among colonial and postcolonial subjects.

The exploration of the legacy of colonial education on the beliefs of colonial subjects is a crucial area of study among postcolonial scholars. It is common knowledge that colonial education played a significant role in interpellating the colonized subject into Empire. Thomas Macaulay’s “Minute on Education,” presented in 1836, set the stage for the spread of colonial education in the colonies. Macaulay called for educating a select section of men from the colonized context. These men were to be “‘ a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern- a class of Indians in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’”(Bhabha 124-5).

Macaulay’s Minute provided the impetus for educational reforms by colonials across the British Empire. Their objective was to educate men who could aid the British in the political administration of the colonies. Education was aimed at reforming Indians, civilizing them and uplifting their status from a purportedly anarchic feudal community to a progressive nation. Indians, especially those from relatively affluent backgrounds, were to be modernized through the reformative processes of English education. They were to be Anglicized but just enough so as to serve the imperial masters. English texts were to introduce them to the purportedly superior culture of England. With these aims, "provincial education departments, government and voluntary schools, and universities based on the London model of affiliated colleges" were set up all over India to facilitate Macaulay’s plans for teaching English to Indians (Viswanathan 5). But English education was also intended to impart discourses of racial inferiority of the native subject and the superiority of the white colonizer to the colonized. Colonizers believed that by absorbing
these lessons about their inferiority, natives would consent to imperialist rule, even support and participate in it. As Gauri Viswanathan suggests in *Masks of Conquest*, in the colonial context, colonial education, and in particular “the institution, practice, and ideology of English studies” in colonies across Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa, perpetuated unequal relations of power among the colonizers and the colonized, and enabled colonial control (1). The teaching of English language and cultural texts to the colonized was done with the purported aim of “educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England” but its central objective was to “strengthen Western cultural hegemony” in the colonies (2). She suggests that English literature served as “an instrument of [imperialist] ideology” that conveyed to natives their moral and intellectual deficiency and the relative cultural superiority of the world from which the literary texts originated (4).

Different scholars have charted the effects of internalizing and absorbing colonial discourses disseminated in the schools and other spaces in the colonies. In *the Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon explores the ways in which the imitating colonized subject becomes overly conscious of the Manichean binary of black and white and its associations with inferiority and superiority respectively. To better himself he identifies with the white subject by suppressing all native socio-cultural traits. In “Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don’t: The Dilemmas of Colonizer-Colonized Relations”, Remi Clignet extends Fanon’s argument about the psychological and mental split engendered by internalization of colonalist ideologies in the fraught colonial subject and suggests that colonial education engenders a "double alienation" (297). According to him, the
practices, ideologies, and philosophies imposed on him are alien to his framework of reference and his own tradition:

His first alienation results therefore from his exposure to educational and cultural stimuli that tend to erase the significance of his own past. But his second alienation results from the selective nature of the elements of the metropolitan culture with which he is confronted. The machinery books, the movies, the curricula, and the labor force exported to the colonies reflect the specific needs experienced by the segments of the metropolitan society present at the local scene. As such, they offer a distorted image of the metropolitan culture. (297)

Colonial education erases the native socio-cultural affiliations of the native subject. Moreover, as Clignet points out, it introduces the native subject to a colonialist view of the metropole. He suggests that colonial education should not be understood as faithfully replicating English models of education but ought to be seen as the specific tailoring of English and European discourses to meet the requirements of colonialist rule.

Mimicry of the colonizer is one of the significant effects of colonial education. But as Bhabha suggests, the native subject’s mimicry is never straightforward narcissistic identification. Rather it is “partial representation” that exposes the “ambivalence of colonial discourse.” According to Bhabha, by repeating colonial discourses, the colonized subject exposes the slippage between sign and signifier. The colonized subject’s cultural and historical differences produce disturbances that “menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority” (126). In repeating imperfectly, the colonized subject “returns the disciplining gaze of the disciplined” such that the observing and governing colonizer becomes the observed. His essentialized identity is exposed as a construct, and worse, as a performance that can be assumed through discursive repetition. And once the colonized challenges the essentialized identity of the colonizer, he also questions his claims to Universal Reason and colonial authority. Despite these challenges to Eurocentric
rationality, mimicry entails the imitation of the colonizer for the assimilation of his behavioral traits and discourses. As scholars have charted, this assimilation alienates mimicking natives from their socio-cultural affiliations and draws them into stances of complicity with Empire. The imitating subject absorbs colonialist discourses and collaborates with the imperialist regime, thereby becoming complicit in the perpetuation of colonialist violence.

The colonial school played a significant role in the dissemination of colonialist discourses to native subjects. As Partha Chatterjee has indicated in *The Nation and its Fragments*, in India, a large number of intelligencia and elite, educated subjects internalized discourses about the universality of Eurocentric values and rationalist thinking at colonial schools. These discourses were deployed for reformatory practices to what were viewed as archaic and superstition-ridden Indian social institutions (Dirks suggests this too was in a large part the product of internalization of colonial knowledge), nationalist and anti colonial protests, and demands for self rule. Among other things, colonial education also played a pivotal role in disseminating discourses about native inferiority and racial difference. Education contributed to the maintenance of colonial hegemony in the colonies by projecting European culture as superior and civilized compared to the barbaric native culture. Natives absorbed these discourses at the educational institutions and became implicated in sustaining imperialist hegemony.

Colonial education did not remain restricted to the colonies. In the metropole, imperialist education, aimed at recruiting future officers, technicians and teachers, was disseminated at schools, where children learned to support Empire as English subjects. Both John MacKenzie and J.A. Mangan have extensively explored the role of the English
public school in disseminating colonial discourses to schoolchildren across Britain. According to Edward Said, the literary genre of the novel functioned as an epistemological tool that familiarized English masses with imperialist representations of colonize subjects and their spaces. In some ways the novel educated English masses about their roles as imperialists and as universally superior subjects in a hierarchized global context.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson suggests that “the paradox of imperial official nationalism was that it inevitably brought what were increasingly thought of and written about as European ‘national histories’ into the consciousness of the colonized- not merely via occasional obtuse festivities, but also through reading-rooms and classrooms” where colonial youth imbibed a European education (118). “Youth” in colonies meant English-speaking youth, who were “the first generation in any significant numbers to have acquired a European education, marking them off linguistically and culturally from their parents’ generation, as well from the vast bulk of their colonized classmates” (119). Anderson shares Partha Chatterjee’s belief in the “unique role played by the colonial school-systems in promoting colonial nationalism” as elite youths imbibed discourses about Enlightenment values, nationalist freedom and self-rule in colonial institutions (120). But these reformatory effects were the consequence of strategic mediations among colonized subjects with Eurocentric discourses of modernity and Reason. In the colonies several burgeoning nationalists, many of who were educated at colonial schools, challenged imperialist violence and exploitation by referring to Eurocentric discourses of liberal humanism.
Thus not only have postcolonial scholars examined the causes and effects of the dissemination of colonial discourses at schools across Empire, but they have also discussed how natives variously negotiated and resisted the imposition of colonial cultures and Eurocentric discourses in ways that allowed for anticolonial resistance, survival and self-consolidation of identity in affirmative ways.

The dissertation explores how the Anglophone novels illustrate the relations between the internalization of colonialist discourses and learning of the English language at school, and mimicry of the colonizer and support of Empire among native subjects. The writers link the support of Empire with both the native’s attempt to survive in a hegemonic imperialist regime and with the negotiations with Eurocentric “middle class sensibilities”, which are disseminated at the colonial and English school. These writers link colonial education with the production and circulation of bourgeois discourses of middle class respectability and morality that determine the experiential realities of elite colonized subjects as well as their colonizing counterparts. In addition, the novels portray the colonial school, military academy and other educational institutions as spaces in which racial discourses and Eurocentric class hierarchies are disseminated to the colonized subjects. The novels chart the effects of colonial education through their representation of subjects who absorb colonial ideologies for self-development. By portraying the characters’ fraught development, the novels depict the adverse effects of unquestioned assimilation of colonialist ideologies of Eurocentric hegemony, racial difference and native inferiority on colonized subjects. A brief discussion of each chapter will illustrate these claims about the postcolonial novels.
Chapter One focuses on V.S. Naipaul’s, partly autobiographical, partly fictional work, *the Enigma of Arrival*, which was published in 1988. Its narrator bears resemblances to Naipaul the writer and serves as his mouthpiece. The novel depicts its narrator, as a writer of Indo-Caribbean descent whose ancestors came to Trinidad as indentured laborers in the mid nineteenth century. At the time of the narration, he resides in England. His migration to England and many of the events that comprise his narrative have already occurred before he begins his narrative. As he wanders about the English countryside he wonders about the therapeutic and gratifying effect of finding correspondences between remembered literary images, which he encountered in colonial textbooks as a child in Trinidad, and the external English landscape. The novel portrays him as a mature writer who reminisces about his colonial schooling in Trinidad as he observes the English countryside. It charts how his childhood reading of English literary texts shaped his perceptions of England as a culturally rich space where he could achieve literary success. The mature narrator suggests that, the study of English literary texts at the colonial school engendered in him the desire to depart for England to be a writer in the “metropolitan mode.” Where colonial education shaped his views of England as the superior other place, it also shaped his perceptions of Trinidad as devoid of any cultural value and empowering social structures. The mature narrator underscores that colonial education and his upbringing in the closed Hindu community in colonial Trinidad shape his perceptions of home and abroad. In England, his initial attempts at writing produced texts that were poor imitations of others’ works given his tendency to mimic canonical writers that he had encountered in Trinidad. The narrator suggests that these literary failures suggest his mimicry of English literary texts. The narrator indicates that the
assimilation of colonial discourses shaped his understanding of his literary vocation in his youth. Distancing himself from his younger self, the mature narrator suggests that as he matured, he acquired an understanding about his mimicry and his self-conscious attempts to fashion himself on colonial writers. The novel depicts him as an analyst, who examines his mimicry and assimilation. The depiction of his literary failures enables the narrator to question received colonial instruction, critique colonial rule and reassess his assimilation of colonialist ways of seeing. The mature narrator seems to acquire self-knowledge about his assimilation. But the novel complicates this notion, for despite its representations of his understanding of the adverse effects of colonial education that dominate the second half of the work, it depicts the narrator as embroiled in reinscribing colonialist ways of seeing. His discussion of a relatively recent work betrays the mature narrator’s immersion in colonial ways of seeing.

Chapter Two discusses Amitav Ghosh’s the Glass Palace, a historical novel published in 2006. Covering the years between 1896 and 1956, Amitav Ghosh’s the Glass Palace portrays the consequences of colonial education on the colonized subject’s experiences and perceptions through its representation of Arjun and Collector Dey’s collaboration with Empire. It charts the training of Arjun at the colonial military academy, which educates natives to be military officers in the British army. The novel charts Arjun’s assimilation of the eating habits and speech rhythms of his English supervisors at the institute, which also trains him to be an efficient army officer in the British army. The novel portrays his assimilation of colonialist discourses through his emulation of his supervisor’s behavior. Among other things, Arjun echoes colonel Buckland’s opinions about the childlike Indian soldiers who are loyal to the colonial
masters and regurgitates colonialist descriptions of the mutiny of 1857. The novel depicts Arjun’s support of Empire as a direct consequence of his internalization of colonial ideologies- among other things he believes that the colonial regime will engender socio-cultural reform in India and lead the country to self-rule. He cites this belief as his rationale for support of Empire. As a British army official, Arjun pledges to defend the British Empire against its opponents, native and foreign. Several of these subjects remind him of his assimilation and collaboration. As years pass, Arjun and Hardy accomplish their training and are deployed to fight in the Second World War. This is a necessary stage in their development and maturing. By casting them in the middle of the war, the novel depicts how their experiences under duress force them to question received discourses of England’s imperialist hegemony. The war as crisis signifies a major turning point in their notions about Empire and their support. The novel plots Arjun’s interaction with anticolonial nationalists, disaffecting soldiers and native civilians who remind him of his collaboration with Empire against the Indian community to which he belongs. These subjects cast Empire as a violent regime, forcing Arjun to reassess his received instruction. Indeed, the novel uses these encounters to chart Arjun’s growing insight about his collaboration with Empire and conflicting allegiances. Ghosh’s depiction of the violent and devastating effects of the war in the region also serves as a background against which Arjun’s confident assertions that Empire will transform India from archaic to progressive state are challenged. Experiences during the war enable him to reexamine and critique the discourses disseminated by his colonial supervisors in the military academy. He also questions the discourse of a benevolent empire that aimed at civilizing native populations as he witnesses death and destruction unfold. But, despite his
questioning, Arjun cannot efface the influence of colonialist discourses on his beliefs. Unable to reconcile with his native community and skeptical of the nationalist struggle for decolonization, he dies fighting against Empire on behalf of the Indian National Army, Arjun’s inability to reconcile suggests his inability to extricate himself from the influence of the colonizer’s discourses.

Chapter Three discusses Julian Barnes’ *Arthur and George*, which was published in 2005. Education is not the central concern of the novel. Yet the novel’s plot suggests that educational lessons imbibed in childhood shape the mature characters’ responses to particular events and experiences. Again the plot charts the characters’ development from children to adults who confront crisis by deploying the discourses they have assimilated as children to respond to the situations. The novel portrays young George and Arthur as schoolchildren who assimilate discourses of Englishness, Empire and Victorian gentility at school and home. George’s father catechizes him about his imperialist affiliations and English identity while Arthur reads about adventuring colonizers who undertake expeditions to England’s colonies in the novels of Mayne Reid. At school, George encounters racial abuse but overcomes the challenges to his Englishness by assiduously imitating his English schoolmaster who represents the ideal Englishman The narrator’s matter of fact tone to describe these scenes of schooling downplays the significant role their education plays in determining their responses to their experiences later in life. The narrator casts each character in the midst of a major life event. Their response to this event signifies their assimilation of imperialist ideologies and recalls the scenes of education described by the narrator in the novel’s beginning. The first turning point occurs in the life of George. The novel portrays George as defending charges of animal
mutilation against him. George’s persecutors suggest that his mixed racial heritage, especially his Parsee upbringing might be to blame for his propensity for violence. Half English, half Parsee, George takes recourse to his belief in his Englishness, an identity position he assiduously cultivates as a child at school and home. He defends the allegations about his barbaric nature not by questioning the racist assumptions of his persecutors but by asserting his belief in England’s commitment to justice and reason. The novel repeatedly projects George’s unwillingness to grapple with the racism of his fellow Englishmen as a deliberate shortsightedness on his part. Barnes indicates his discomfort about his racial identity. This discomfort manifests as the anxiety to consolidate his identity as an Englishman. Indeed Barnes’ novel suggests that George’s racial anxiety and the racist attitudes of his fellow Englishmen are related to the nineteenth century investment in Englishness and the production of the idealized notion of the white English gentleman. In the novel, Arthur, modeled after the real life Arthur Conan Doyle embodies this idealized English gentleman. By portraying Arthur’s involvement in the Boer war the novel reveals him to be implicated in imperialist violence as well. The novel links Arthur’s decision to fight in the Boer war to the instruction he received at home as well as to his leisurely reading as a child. Arthur’s participation in the Boer war recalls earlier scenes of education where he imbibes the discourse of chivalry and honor as a child. His justifications for participation in the Boer war, which his mother calls a dishonorable struggle for gold, and that readers know was a struggle between Dutch colonizers and English for appropriation of Bechuana land in South Africa, are evocative of the images he encountered as a child in Mayne Reid’s novels about colonial adventurers to America. Barnes’ novel foregrounds how literary
texts and discourses about idealized English identity and empire encountered at home and school shape the experiences of the characters and their espousal of Empire.

Chapter Four focuses on Erna Brodber’s *Myal*, which was published in 1988. The novel depicts how colonial education determines the experiences and beliefs of Ella. The novel begins with a scene in which Mass Cyrus cures Ella through a ritualistic healing that incorporates the use of herbs, ritualistic chants and Afrocentric myalist practices. The narrator proceeds to narrate the events that have led to this healing ceremony before proceeding to chart the aftermath of the cure. The novel takes us back in time to the colonial school setting where a younger Ella recites Rudyard Kipling’s poems. Brodber depicts Ella, as identifying with the textual images of the literary works. She is depicted as distanced from her peers yet desiring to be like her mother. Different characters observe her recitation but Maydene Brasington, the Methodist parson’s white wife undertakes to take Ella under her wings. Ella unquestioningly acquiesces to leave with her and later marries the American, Selwyn Langley, with whom she departs for America. There she begins to miss her Caribbean home. Journey makes her remember. The crisis in Ella’s life comes in the form of her realization that Selwyn misappropriates her cultural knowledge. As Ella witnesses the “coon show” she wonders about her educational experience. Through the representation of her self-recremimation, the novel reminds readers of the earlier scene of Ella’s education. Selwyn’s misappropriation of Ella’s narratives about the Caribbean shocks her. The shock manifests as a sickness. The novel’s characters compare Selwyn’s appropriation to the black magic practiced by Obeah practitioners in the Caribbean and Africa. The narrator suggests that western medicine fails to cure Ella who is instead healed by Mass Cyrus- through the herb cure of
the novel’s beginning that frames the narrative. Mass Cyrus’ knowledge is also emblematic of the Afrocentric cultural discourses that have been suppressed by the colonizer. Cured of the ill effects of one kind of spirit thievery the novel casts Ella, now a schoolteacher as confronting another kind of spirit thievery in the colonial classroom in Grovetown. The novel thus charts her education and gradual maturity to adulthood. Saddled with the knowledge her experiences afford her, the newly returned Ella questions colonialist depictions in school textbooks. The novel represents Ella’s realization as emerging gradually over the course of her teaching at the school. The novel concludes with conversations between Ella and other characters about the need to revise the written text which represents the colonized as dependent and elides histories of Afrocentric resistance.

All the novels under consideration take up the issue of colonial education in varied ways. The chapters on V.S. Naipaul and Erna Brodber’s novels allow for a discussion of the Caribbean writers’ representations of British educational policies in the Caribbean. Naipaul is considered as a native informer, the mimic man par excellence who denies any socio-cultural validity to Afro-Caribbean cultures, while Brodber is associated with anti-imperialist critiques of Empire and the articulation of an affirmative Afrocentric identity. By choosing to discuss their works, I draw focus on their shared concerns about the ways in which colonial education, especially discourses of racial difference, engendered self-alienation among Caribbean subjects. I aim to foreground the ways in which, despite their seemingly distinct ideological beliefs, both writers conduct contrapuntal reassessment of their colonial legacies to foreground imperialist violence and explore possible ways of challenging colonial discourses.
The discussion of Julian Barnes’ *Arthur and George*, allows the dissertation to incorporate the analysis of a contemporary English novel within the exploration of postcolonial novels by writers from England’s former colonies. I foreground how contemporary England too is postcolonial. By examining Barnes’ representation of English education, especially public school learning, and his exploration of the role played by literary texts in the production of an imperialist English identity, I suggest the thematic and ideological proximities between contemporary British fiction and postcolonial literature. I point out that Barnes’ novel suggests that contemporary British literature shares the concerns of postcolonial scholars about the racial and imperialist underpinnings of English identity. Indeed, Barnes suggests that discourses of race and class difference consolidate ideologies of middle class respectability in England and have historically sustained bourgeois hegemony both at home in England and abroad in the colonies. Accordingly, I frame my analysis of Barnes within a discussion of Paul Gilroy’s *Postcolonial Melancholia* and his persistent reminder that England has been historically multicultural, even though the national imaginary has portrayed it as exclusively white and racially pure. Gilroy also underscores the racist contours of English self-imaginings. Barnes’ protagonists do not challenge colonial discourses and the imperialist premises of their English identity, but where they fail to produce and acquire counterknowledge about English education; I suggest Barnes draws the attention of contemporary English subjects to review the ideologies of racism implicit in Englishness and their educational discourses. This comparative analysis is in keeping with my desire to explore the relations between English education, Empire, anticolonial resistance, English national identity, and discourses of racial difference of non-western subjects. Barnes’ depiction of
English education and the effects of literary representations of Empire in England in contiguity with the discussions of the other works indicates that socio-cultural hegemony is articulated in the colonies and the metropole through the repeated dissemination and circulation of discourses of racial, class and gender difference.

Lastly, the analysis of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* points out that colonial education was not only confined to the training of colonial elites who could work on behalf of the English state in the varied institutions and “sarkari daftars”, or administrative offices of the colonials, but also imparted through ritualized performances and events. I suggest that Ghosh portrays how the colonial state disseminated knowledge about its hegemonic power to the illiterate and the literate through public executions in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. More crucially, Ghosh’s work suggests that many ideologies and practices of the native community that were defined as archaic and traditional by the colonizers were in fact constructions of the colonial state. The emphasis on regional and caste divisions as the basis of Indian identity for instance was, as Nicholas Dirks has suggested in *Castes of Mind*, a modern invention of the colonial state, set into place to ensure the divisiveness of the native community and quell its potential for unified anti-colonial resistance (5). He suggests that caste was the product of an historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule which “became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all ‘systematizing’ India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization” (5). The colonizers made caste the central symbol of Indian society and a signifier of India’s religious and traditional past as well as of its enmity to modernity. Ghosh echoes this belief by indicating how practices
that are seen as traditional and naturalized are in fact constructs brought into effect through their repeated circulation and performance.

In diverse modes, all novels chart histories of colonial education at a time when the postcolonial context grapples with the purported failures of the nationalist state in ensuring civic rights to people, especially those of the subaltern classes. One reason for this is that the political leaders and intellectuals of the nationalist state, increasingly exposed as mired in corruption and neoimperialist negotiations with the West, are inextricably linked with Eurocentric discourses and modes of being given their education in elite institutions that are informed by colonialist ideologies and policies. Another reason, related to the first, is that in the aftermath of decolonizing struggles, there were but few educational reforms in postcolonial communities, which seamlessly absorbed the colonizer’s models of educating the masses. Colonialist ideologies continue to frame the material realities, class hierarchies and self-perceptions of postcolonial subjects, who while they are politically and legally free, continue to engage with imperialist forms of thought and ways of seeing. As Mangan has aptly noted in ‘Benefits Bestowed’?

*Education and British Imperialism*, the focus on colonial education emerges out of the understanding that there is “still much to discover about the past and present impact of British imperialism on the educational systems of Britain, dominion and colony and by extension, on their societies and cultures” (1). He echoes Paul Gilroy’s claim in *Postcolonial Melancholia* that “the roots of current attitudes to ‘race’ and colour lie deep in the imperial past”(1). Perhaps, the best impetus for recasting and reengaging with colonial education and its impact is given by Viswanathan who hopes that the exposure of the embedding of educational discourse in the hegemonic imperialist and
neoimperialist systems of representation will “check the propensity of formerly colonized societies to employ upon themselves the structures of cultural domination inherent in the language of educational discourse” (5). In the South Asian context, this is especially relevant given the fact that a majority of legal, military and economic discourse continues to be conducted in English. In India, English is popularly conceived as the official language of the nation and is seen as a unifying cultural accouterment that facilitates communication among India’s diverse regional communities. I extend Viswanathan’s understanding of the structures of domination inherent in Eurocentric educational discourses to economic, social as well as cultural realms.

But more significantly, I suggest that the engagement with histories of colonial education will enable formerly colonized subjects to examine the ways in which their bourgeois identities partake of imperialist ideologies and racial prejudices. The novels do not merely conduct contrapuntal recasting of English education in colonies and the metropole, they also alert contemporary readers to the ways in which educational institutions, and teaching and learning become mechanisms for interpelling subjects into hegemonic socio-cultural regimes in the contemporary context that often perpetuate unequal powers of relation through the circulation of certain discourses and suppression of others.
Chapter 1

England through the Mimic’s Eyes: Examining V.S. Naipaul’s Reflections on Colonial Education in *The Enigma of Arrival*

The first few pages of V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival* introduce us to the narrator of the novel in a bucolic English landscape. He records his observations of the weather and the landscape on one of his walks around the Wiltshire countryside. He establishes his status as a stranger there by noting his misrecognition of the grounds: “I saw a forest. But it wasn’t a forest really; it was only the old orchard at the back of the big house in whose grounds my cottage was” (7). This initial misrecognition of reality for what it appears to him, rather than what it actually is, becomes a stepping-stone on which he builds his narrative about overcoming some of the newcomer’s anxiety. He reveals that he deployed images and ideas imbibed at his colonial school in the service of establishing familiarity with Wiltshire:

It was Salisbury. It was almost the first English town I had got to know, the first I had been given some idea of, from the reproduction of the Constable painting of Salisbury Cathedral in my third-standard reader. Far away in my tropical island, before I was ten. A four-colour reproduction which I had thought the most beautiful picture I had ever seen…. Apart from the romance of the Constable reproduction, the knowledge I brought to my setting was linguistic. I knew that “avon” originally meant only river… I knew that both “walden” and “shaw” meant wood. One further reason why…I thought I saw a forest. (7)

He reveals that he has some prior knowledge about the English town in the rural countryside. His understanding comes from ideas garnered from school textbooks in Trinidad: “The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education”(52). He belongs to a “tropical island” where he had encountered images of English landscapes in colonial textbooks at school for the first time. There, he had learned of the meanings of English
words and encountered English landscape in reproduced works by nineteenth century landscape painters like Constable, images that existed as art recast in colonial textbooks. Linguistic knowledge had made him familiar with a literary England and its rural countryside, and now enabled him to feel at home in the strange setting.

As the texts had introduced him to England in Trinidad, the landscape now reminds him of the texts he had encountered years ago in the Caribbean, where he cultivated the impression that England signified “the larger world, the idea of civilization, and the idea of antiquity” (153). He illustrates how the colonial school had inculcated an understanding of England as the apex of the civilized world. This understanding informed his desire for departure to an England, which would mirror this belief. He reveals that with this understanding of England’s history and culture, he had associated a special past of grandeur and placid peasant life, which seemed to have survived “industrial revolution, deserted villages, railways, and the establishing of great agricultural estates in the valley” (18). Depictions of English institutions had suggested that they had been established centuries ago and had matured over time, their traditions preserved by a people who could trace their lineage centuries back with the coming of the Nordic conquerors and William the Conqueror. Years later, when he sees Stonehenge, he draws sustenance from the realization that the landscape indeed mirrors the works of Constable and Thomas Gray.

His tendency to recast the observable external reality as an image in a literary text gives readers an insight into his “way of looking”, and his “linguistic or historical fantasies”, which enabled him “to shed the nerves of being a stranger in England” after his arrival in the countryside (19). Colonial education also enabled him to forge an
affective relationship with the Wiltshire landscape, which from the very first moments of his arrival and walks there, “enabled me to surrender to my way of looking, to indulge my linguistic or historical fantasies; and enabled me, at the same time, to shed the nerves of being a stranger in England” (19). His solitude on his earliest walk allows him to “indulge” in perceiving reality “with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature.” Equipped with knowledge of the language and the “history of the language and the writing”, he is able to find a “special kind of past in what I saw” (18). Once he was in Wiltshire, the purported “center of things”, the literary images transformed everyday reality. A solitary farmer working on his field changed into a “figure of literature in that ancient landscape” (16). The real consistently brought to his mind literary correlative from texts he had read. Jack’s father-in-law became a “Wordsworthian figure: bent, exaggeratedly bent, going gravely about his peasant tasks, as if in an immense Lake District solitude” (16). Images cultivated from those first brushes with English literature at school, and as he later reveals, from his years at Oxford, where he took courses in English Literature, had earlier shaped the “colonized intellectual’s” desire for departure from Trinidad, and now make a strange space familiar. As soon as a structure or person corroborates to his literary idea of it, he begins to feel more at ease in his surroundings.

These early passages of the novel suggest that the influence of the narrator’s colonial education is indelible and both contributed to and framed his understanding of landscapes and their aesthetic and cultural value. For implicit in his comment that the Salisbury Cathedral was the most beautiful picture for the ten-year-old boy, is the idea that, as a young colonial, he grew up desiring English landscapes and linguistic and representational registers that were used to describe these spaces. Later, the absorption of
linguistic modes continued as he spent more and more time in England. Among other things, these meditations on the functions of acquired and assimilated literary knowledge also facilitate *the Enigma*’s narrator’s discussion of the influence of colonial education on both his understanding of the world and his inner desires and ambitions, including his decision to become an English writer. Among other things, his education had “partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years”(52). Indeed these passages reveal how he assimilated English literary education in Trinidad, regarding it both as necessary for furthering his literary ambitions and as the legacy of Empire. In these sections in particular, he pays homage to colonial knowledge. He values its capacity to transform lived experience and observation by furnishing him with linguistic correlatives. It provides self-sustenance to the narrator who travels to the English countryside to recuperate from illness and an array of literary failures.

In “Bitter Dispatches from the Third World”, an essay written in the 1970s and published in *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said suggests that in his literature, V.S. Naipaul examines the non-west through westernized lenses and accordingly imposes a Eurocentric interpretation on his representations of native communities. He claims that in Naipaul’s works “third world” communities are depicted as “counterfeits of the first world” (100-101). According to Said, Naipaul fails to historicize anticolonial struggles of the colonized in his works and as a consequence, “the only past that matters in Africa or South America is European (hence to be regretted for its disappearance), and second, that all attempts to deal with both a multilayered past as well as the present are bound to lead to ridiculous mimicry, tyranny or some combination of both” (102). He sees Naipaul as a
colonized subject who assimilates colonial discourses, especially the colonizer’s modes of historicizing the non-west in order to gain a sense of self-worth, and continues, even after decolonization, to uphold imperialist ideologies.

Interestingly, Naipaul takes up this critique himself in *the Enigma of Arrival*, a novel published in 1987. In it, he addresses this issue of colonial mimicry by depicting his narrator, a figure who closely resembles him, as a colonized subject who imitates the colonizer by adopting his behaviors and discourses. Indeed, it is interesting that Naipaul’s self-representation as a colonial subject in *the Enigma* validates and illustrates Said’s claims about his imperialist beliefs and formative influences. Naipaul’s narrator depicts himself as having been heavily influenced by colonialist ideologies, which shape his writing career and perceptions about Trinidad and England. Indeed, Naipaul depicts his narrator as a colonized subject who inherits the English “language but with it a different tradition” (98). Colonial school exposed him to an English literary tradition and the English language, which did not depict his Indian upbringing in colonial Trinidad. He is overtly conscious of his community as “people who have been cut off” from their traditions and original homeland (99).

This chapter examines *the Enigma* as a novel, which depicts how colonial education interpellated colonized subjects into the hegemonic imperialist state. It discusses *the Enigma* as a work in which Naipaul illustrates how the colonial school shaped both his perceptions of the non-west and the west, and his desire to depart for England to be a writer. I suggest that in *the Enigma*, Naipaul implicates himself as a colluding native by laying bare his imperialist self-conditioning at the colonial school. *The Enigma*’s narrator, a stand in for Naipaul, discusses in detail how internalization of
colonial ideologies shaped his desires and his colonialist beliefs. This representation of the self as a native shaped by Empire offers insights into the beliefs of the colonized intellectual.

I frame my examination of the narrator’s reminiscence of colonial education within Homi Bhabha’s suggestion that remembering is “never a quiet act of introspection of retrospection” but a “painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Location 90). In the Enigma, Naipaul addresses Trinidad’s colonial past and examines the varied and often contradictory, consequences of the dissemination of imperialist discourses by the colonial state and its racist ideologies through the narration of his personal life. I also frame my discussion of the Enigma as a meditation on colonial education around Frantz Fanon’s claim that “the colonized intellectual is permeated by colonialism and all its ways of thinking” (Wretched 45). According to Fanon, the colonized intellectual imbibes imperialist “manners and forms of thought picked up during their association with the colonialis bourgeoisie” (48). I suggest that Naipaul depicts his narrator in the role of the Fanonian “colonized intellectual”, and the colonial school as the site where the colonialist bourgeoisie implants the belief about the universality of western values in the colonized students (46). Bhabha suggests that the colonial mimicry entailed in the dissemination of colonial knowledge signifies the desire among the colonizer for “ a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (122). Mimicry is both a strategy of discipline and reform, and appropriates the ‘Other’, but is also a sign of recalcitrance, which “poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized knowledges’ and
disciplinary powers” and intensifies surveillance (122-23 Location). Bhabha suggests that the mimic man can only manage “partial representation” in his desire to “emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry” (126). Naipaul’s narrator depicts the ways in which he internalized particular colonial discourses and recast these in his earliest writings in the effort to become an English writer. He illustrates the process of partial representation that Bhabha associates with the mimic man, thereby casting himself in the role of the mimic man who modeled his writing career after the English writers he encountered in his school textbooks. But does this depiction of self as “partial presence” allow the narrator to articulate “those differences of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority”(126)? Does the narrator reverse “‘in part’ the colonial appropriation by producing a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence” (126)? Does he embody the “displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence”(127)? I will also examine the Enigma in the light of these questions.

This chapter analyzes Naipaul’s representation of the varied effects of colonial education on his narrator, who assesses his struggles to be a writer in England. I suggest that Naipaul charts his narrator’s realization that the mimicking of colonialist discourses, implicit in his imitation of the literary styles and content of English writers, contributes to his development as a writer. In addition, Naipaul indicates that mimicry, while seeming to promise literary success, leads to self-alienation and distances the narrator from his Caribbean community. The narrator illustrates how it adversely affects his writing. In

---

1 Bhabha suggests that the mimic men “are the parodists of history” for despite their “intentions and invocations they inscribe the colonial texts erratically, eccentrically across a body politic that refuses to be representative, in a narrative that refuses to be representational” (126).
charting both the therapeutic and adverse effects of his education, the narrator betrays a
tension in his opinions about colonial education and the colonial enterprise. English
education informs his desire for a literary career but it is also the legacy of an exploitative
colonial government that usurped local knowledge and modes of being of the colonized.
Worse still, he indicates that it instilled particular ways of seeing in the colonized that
alienated them from their community.

He suggests that colonial education was both a curse and a boon that facilitated
his inheritance of the English literary tradition, but condemned him to stances of mimicry
of the English, the result of which was imitative, unoriginal literature. In linking his
literary failure and communal alienation to colonial education, the narrator draws the
reader’s attention to histories of imperial rule and violence, especially the displacement
of indentured laborers from India to the Caribbean in the 1830s. His meditation on his
mimicry also doubles as a critique of colonial education. In the process he also
historicizes imperial violence in the Caribbean.

Part autobiographical and part fictional, the Enigma is divided into five sections
and begins with the narrator walking across the Wiltshire countryside in England. As he
describes the English landscape and its structures, he compares them with those in
Trinidad, his birthplace. The second section describes his journey from Trinidad to
England and his initial struggles to become a writer. The third and fourth sections
delineate his successes and failures in England, his move to the English countryside from
London and his observations of the estate, which symbolizes the decline of Empire, and
of the landlord who suffers from imperialist nostalgia. The narrative of his personal
development and journeying serves as a backdrop for discussions of the work’s major
themes of change, death and renewal, all of which are symbolically immanent in Naipaul-narrator’s descriptions of people, places and personal experiences. These descriptions are also interspersed with references to Trinidad and its colonization by the British. The fifth section solidifies the work’s thematic preoccupation with death and renewal as it takes up the subject of his sister’s cremation and his travel to Trinidad, both of which disrupt his sojourn at the estate. The narrator points out that he begins to write upon coming back from there. The confrontations with mortality have a sobering effect on him and persuade him to both reexamine his formative influences and reclaim his ties to Trinidad and his Hindu community.

The narration is in past tense, and there is a sense that the narrator, who reflects back on his past from his Wiltshire cottage to record his earlier years, is a mature and seasoned counterpart of his younger self who had journeyed to England years ago. It appears as if the events in the first section of the book had just occurred before the narrator began putting them down on paper in novel form, where he established all the connections and associations between earlier episodes in England, his youth in Trinidad, and the recent events, crises and experiences. All these diverse experiences contribute to the composite, non-chronological, story woven by the mature narrator. This mode of narration, of using a set of recent experiences as a stepping stone for connections with earlier stories in order to reach new, unthought-of conclusions about them, allows him to not just portray his younger self as a naïve persona who grows in self-understanding, but it also enables him to convey a sense that he has accrued insights over time with experience and through cross-cultural travel. Each new experience brings back memories of an earlier event, and opens up a new line of thought, a revelation about self, the west.
and the non-west, and the socio-economic relations between the two spatial
configurations. In fact, several times the narrator hints that certain ideas that emerge after
reflection about an experience did not occur to him earlier; the effect created by the
narration is thus sedimentary as a qualification of earlier beliefs occurs with every
observation and reminiscence.

In the first half of the work, the mature narrator establishes the therapeutic
functions of literary images culled from colonial textbooks in the context of the English
countryside to which he arrives as a youth. Fresh from a disappointing run as a student at
Oxford and later as a struggling writer in London, he comes to Salisbury, it seems to
re recuperate, and sets about establishing a sense of belonging and familiarity with the
countryside. He takes recourse to the literary. The “high- headed geese” belonging to
Jack, the farmer whose peculiar, seemingly traditional ways of farming warm his heart,
are reminiscent of “‘Goose, If I had you upon Sarum Plain, I’d drive ye cackling home to
Camelot,’” which are lines from William Shakespeare’s King Lear (18). Not only does
he appreciate the literary for providing imagery that enables him to understand his reality,
he also associates a sedimented past with the landscape, which is traceable to the
Elizabethan age. The narrator’s determination to apply the literary eye to external reality
motivates him to see on his walk vast tracts of land around the Stonehenge, that must
have looked the same since the middle ages: “The setting felt ancient; the impression as
of space, unoccupied land, the beginning of things”(10). He recalls that on an autumn
day, the landscape induced in him the desire to reread Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,
a poem he had “read more than twenty years before at Oxford as part of the Middle
English course. Memories of literary allusions and textual images find a home in the world outside, and in turn make him feel at home:

The hips and haws beside the windbreak, the red berries of this dead but warm time of year, made me want to read again about the winter journey in the old poem. And I read the poem on the bus back from Salisbury, where I had gone to buy it. So in tune with the landscape had I become, in the solitude, for the first time in England. (21)

Literature allows him to be “in tune with” an alien, new and unfamiliar space. It sustains his sense of solitude and awe, feeds his “idea of antiquity, at once diminishing and ennobling the current activities of men,” and allows him to regard the landscape as an ancient site, that has survived despite the “highways”, “army barracks” and the noise of the “military airplanes” (20).

So powerful is the sway of English literature on his perception of his reality that the young narrator overlooks the violence implicit in the militaristic activities in Salisbury that ironically undercut his understanding of the town as an idyllic rural space. The mature narrator records the signs of modernization and industrialization to underscore the naiveté of the youth who seeks to recuperate through the imaginative forays into literature. Situated close to hills where Larks had burrowed, it had reminded him of “larks of poetry” in his first year. But now just as the cattle, once regarded by him as bucolic, appear to have been victims of “malformation” due to “mechanical” breeding and signify the “mistakes of an industrial process”, the army school suggests the “new kind of soldier” and modern warfare (11).

Other literary images and remembered references too do not match his experiences and observations of the actual space. The narrator records that more and more, he encountered a discrepancy between expectation and reality. This disjunction
between reality and textual image framed his experience and expectations of a range of issues, even weather: “The idea of winter and snow had always excited me; but in England the word had lost some of its romance for me, because the winters I had found in England had seldom been as extreme as I had imagined they would be when I was far away in my tropical island” (5). In Trinidad, the idea of snow had inculcated anticipation about encountering English weather, but the actual experience of an English winter fails to reproduce the expected emotions even though snow retains “the fairy-tale feel”(7). Colonial instruction in the Caribbean had engendered a romantic, even fictive notion of England in his mind, which he sought to corroborate upon his arrival there. He mistook “walden” and “shaw,” to be references to a “forest”, rather than the “old orchard at the back of the big house” (7). He had expected something grander but what he saw turned out to be something quite quotidian and commonplace. The novel begins to gradually reveal that the youth formed heightened and unrealistic expectations based on his childhood encounters with literary representations of England. There is a suggestion that the colonial textbooks had also informed his impression that the English were possessors of lofty traditions and grand landscapes. The discrepancy between sign and its signified reality allows the mature narrator to suggest that as a youth he lacked the knowledge that literary worlds didn’t always mirror the reality faithfully, but rather were fabricated constructs.

By exposing the discrepancy between reality on one hand and his assumptions about it on the other, the mature narrator illustrates the hold of the literary idea on the colonial youth. This enables him to suggest that colonial education closely shaped his

---

2 Lucienne Loh points out that “the schoolhouse of empire had taught Naipaul to imagine a landscape superior to his own, and sympathetically and emotionally to align himself with an imagined landscape – seemingly the cornerstone of the basis of the traditions and culture of a great nation” (156).
idea of England as the romantic space that would fulfill his literary ambitions. He illustrates his unquestioning belief in the represented realities and discourses of the colonial text. Indeed the novel’s narrator is preoccupied with charting himself as a naïve and slow learner who assimilated colonial discourses at school and only later learnt to question his colonial education as he acquired experience in England.

Yet, Naipaul’s narrator points out that despite these early revelations about the discrepancy between image and reality, he persisted in seeing through a literary eye. In the farms, and the forests, he was to see men at work, clearing up natural debris but while he saw “the hand of man” he didn’t “take it in, preferring to see what I wanted” (24). A seemingly natural aspect of the landscape turned out to have been constructed and preserved by human hands. At times, it appeared to have been the consequence of “Jacks way” of cultivation (47). The mature narrator possesses the understanding that what he had once regarded as natural had been assiduously worked upon by human hands.

Colonial education had cultivated an impression of an unchanging England, with its idyllic country life, which was immune from change and death, and untouched by urbanization and industrialization. He notes that the cows in Wiltshire were “healthy big animals on the downs, and had reminded him of Gray’s or Goldsmith’s herds and of the cows that he saw on the labels of condensed- milk tins (85, 84). In Trinidad, he had associated “romance” with these images, as they furnished a “child’s fantasy of the beautiful other place” (84). To the young narrator, the poetic descriptions had stood in stark contrast to Trinidad’s cows, which appeared to him to be “poor things” compared with their English counterparts and the literary images (85). The memory of this discrepancy furnishes the mature narrator with an occasion to suggest that the state of the
real animals was a consequence of Trinidad’s colonization by the British: “… we had no herds like that in my island. We didn’t have the climate, the pasture; the island had been developed for the cultivation of sugarcane” (85). Thus the memory of his earlier observations enables the mature narrator to historicize Trinidad’s colonial past.

The lack of correlation between image and reality had ironically shaped his idea of a romanticized England. Naipaul illustrates the formation of the beliefs of the young mimic man as he unquestioningly assimilated the ideas that he acquired at school from his English textbooks. The child naively absorbed the ideologies implicit in the images and with it formulated his understanding of the superior metropolitan space and the seemingly decrepit local context.

Wilson Harris points out in “Artifice and Root” in The Womb of Space that the literary reminder that schoolchildren in the West Indies “used to write quite naturally and innocently, it seemed, of English snow and daffodils that they had never seen, rather than palm- groves or cane-fields or rainforests,” functions as a “caveat of blindness inculcated by colonial institutions stereotyped and bound within other cultural landscapes”, such as English or French (134). Seen in this light, Naipaul’s self-representation as a colonial student who absorbed the colonizer’s representational modes functions as a “literary reminder”, firstly, of how the colonial state imposed its own socio-cultural discourses on colonized subjects, and secondly, of the effects of colonial education on impressionable colonized subjects. The Enigma represents the ways in which the internalization of the colonizer’s discourses often incapacitated colonized students to view their reality through the referential lenses of their own cultures.
The discussion of the discrepancy between the literary images and Trinidad’s landscape enables Naipaul’s narrator to illustrate the blindness inculcated by colonial education. As a child he had regarded the colonial image as the standard for judging reality. The mature narrator points out that this image itself was indeed a “stereotype” for it did not corroborate with an English reality. It was literary. Under its romantic connotations, it elided the more utilitarian and violent reality of cattle rearing for meat production. The child had had no understanding of these material contingencies. These references also allow Naipaul to underscore the role played by Empire in perpetuating Trinidad’s poverty. Moreover, as he projects Trinidad as a peripheral colony of the British Empire and describes its population’s colonized status, he undercuts the succoring attributes of his colonial education that he so assiduously depicted in the first few pages. After all, colonial education was an intrinsic part of colonial rule and was implicated in colonialist subjugation of the colonized.

The narrator reveals the ways in which the colonial state, which controlled the content and nature of referential frames for representing reality, perpetuated “blindness” among the colonized about their socio-cultural contexts. In Trinidad, “the signs”, whether as pictures of English cows on pastoral downs in advertisements for condensed milk, or as literary images in English textbooks, referred to English paradigms but did not convey the original “meaning intended by their makers” (118). Nor did they convey Trinidad’s socio-cultural reality. These discrepancies suggested colonial control over signage but also indicated Trinidad’s socio-cultural difference and marginalization vis a vis England. It underscored Trinidad’s dependency to the young narrator. The narrator implies that he internalized the way of seeing suggested by the signs and as a consequence, both desired
English paradigms and looked for correlations between the signs and his Caribbean reality.

English images referred to English landscapes, to English weather and English ways of life. He had memorized them in an abstract, detached fashion: “All my life…had been devoted to … monkish way of observing, studying, committing to memory… study of the abstract sort I have tried to give some idea of. And then this idea of abstract study had been converted into an idea of a literary life in another country” (116). Already alienated by his close knit Hindu family’s distancing from the racially diverse communities in Trinidad, the abstract study caused him to experience “further withdrawal” and alienation. Withdrawing from his Caribbean community, he turned to literature that suggested some other place where he would be able to lead a fulfilled life: “My real life, my literary life was to be elsewhere”(116). The literary images had suggested a desirable place where he could succeed economically and find social cohesion. In addition to English literature, he “lived imaginatively in the cinema” which provided him a “foretaste of that life aboard” as well (116).

Both the withdrawal from his local socio-cultural context and the assimilation of colonialist discourses through the perusal of western aesthetic forms, which also fed his imagination and desire to escape, prepared the narrator to seek metropolitan England as the space where his personal ambitions would be fulfilled. The colonial context in Trinidad seemed to offer little opportunities for the pursuance of a literary career, which could only be fulfilled in England. Charting the desires he had as a young boy, the mature narrator portrays how, to the adolescent, who had been educated at the colonial school, England emerged as the metropolitan “center” while the colony was seen as peripheral:
“…my [literary] ambition caused me to look ahead and outwards, to England… In Trinidad, feeling myself far away, I had held myself back…for life at the center of things. …aspects of the physical setting of my childhood…encouraged that mood of waiting and withdrawal” (130). He had believed that a fuller life could only be possible in England for it promised personal fulfillment while Trinidad appeared to offer no hope for economic or literary success.

These scenes of self-assessment also enable Naipaul to reveal the practices that aided in his internalization of colonial discourses. Memorization in particular made him a “mimic man” who absorbed the ideologies of English supremacy from his school textbooks. The narrator emphasizes his tendency to memorize and the ways in which it distanced him from his everyday reality:

I had never seen a French film in my life. But I knew much about French cinema. I had read about it, and I had even in some way studied it, in case a question came up in a fresh cultural 'general' paper. So much of my education had been like that, abstract, a test of memory…monkish, medieval, learning quite separate from everyday things. (116)

Memorization ensured the grades he needed to succeed as a scholarship boy. It precipitated desire for departure, congealing his withdrawal from “everyday things” in Trinidad. Naipaul depicts his narrator as a subject who grew distanced from his socio-cultural context through assiduous scholarly study.

The novel thus portrays the colonial school as a site that precipitates communal alienation, another instance of the blindness inculcated by the internalization of colonial instruction. ³ For the narrator, this blindness further manifested itself in the split within the

³ In Writing in Limbo, Simon Gikandi associates school as a space that fosters a certain kind of knowledge and internalization of discourses that shape the lives and thoughts of students. In the colonizing context, “the modernizing power of the school marks the apotheosis of the colonial subject’s socialization away from its ancestral sources”(83).
He imagined himself in the role of the English writer, a persona he could successfully inhabit through assiduous study of English texts and their creators. This alienated him from his Caribbean and Hindu affiliations: “To be that kind of writer… I had to be false; I had to pretend to be other than I was, other than what a man of my background could be. Concealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing personality, I did both my material and myself damage” (146). Naipaul’s narrator illustrates the consequences of “partial” imitation on him. Again he underscores that colonial education contributed to the idea of the ideal image of the writer, and to the distancing of the youth from “the colonial-Hindu self,” whose close knit Indian community had sought education as a way out of poverty and ancestral shame, both being the product of collective memory of indenture (110-111, 116). There is a suggestion that he replaced something tangible, perceivable cultural practices and discourses, which reminded the displaced community of their Indian heritage, for something vague and abstract, for signs without meanings:

‘Anticlericalism’ - that was one of the abstract issues of European history that I had got know about from teachers’ notes and recommended textbooks, at Queen’s Royal College in Trinidad…. I could write essays on French history without understanding, without having any idea about, kings and courtiers and religious sects, any idea of the government or social organization of an old and great country. (143)

The mature narrator assesses his inability to understand the complexities of meaning, of events and histories, portraying it as a consequence of the hegemonic sway of the colonial state, which controlled the academic institutions and discourses of the colony and shaped his upbringing within the “little Asian-Indian community: small world within small world” (143). He memorized abstract ideas without learning to apply them to question his reality and wonder about his sociocultural context. He had had little idea of Trinidad’s past and political struggles, possessing knowledge pertaining only to the
colonial state, its “colonial governor and a legislative council” (143). Reading about European societies and their pasts forced him to develop a fantastic and abstract idea of history and he took this notion to England. Moreover, rather than understand Caribbean’s history, he read about European battles and events. As a consequence, he cultivated a Eurocentric notion of History.

What is the precise nature of this “abstract” knowledge that he imbibes in Trinidad and which shapes his desire for a life as a writer? I suggest that Naipaul has his narrator illustrate the precise contours of this knowledge by tracing its effects as well as by charting specific references to texts and ideas in the narrative. The narrator suggests that once he arrived as an immigrant in England, this abstract knowledge shaped perceptions and expectations of reality in relevant ways, some of which I have discussed earlier. In the 1950s, he realized that his imagined London belonged to “an earlier time” (131). He had read about London, in essays written by Charles Lamb, “in a schoolbook” (133). The essay described the experience of “going to the theater” in London, just as another schoolbook had a description of the “Embankment” in “Lord Arthur Seville’s Crime” (133). His impressions of London and British history at that time were particularly influenced by his readings of works of Victorian writers like Charles Dickens, who framed the desire for departure to London: “The London I knew or imaginatively possessed was the London I had got from Dickens. It was Dickens- and his illustrators- who gave me the illusion of knowing the city. I was therefore, without knowing it, like the Russians I was to hear about (and marvel at) who still believed in the reality of Dickens’s London” (133). The narrator points out that Dickens had endeared himself to the young child whose knowledge of London appeared to be as rudimentary as
his knowledge of the English language. The references to Dickens too become a medium for the illustration of his internalization of colonial ways of seeing. Dickens conveyed the grandeur of London in simple terms and therefore endeared himself to the child who had grown up amidst “corrugated tin roofs” and shacks of the colony (133). Removed from the young child of his childhood years, the mature narrator of the novel points out that, for the young student Dickens’ descriptions about the solid English architecture had cast the seeming shabbiness of his immediate surroundings in stark contrast, and had further reconfirmed his notions about the Caribbean’s poverty and backward institutions. The absence of lofty institutions in Trinidad became more pronounced as he read Dickens. The English text served as a medium of comparison between Trinidad’s decay and England’s grandeur. Naipaul again depicts the naiveté of the colonial child who encounters an English image in the colony. His education in the colonial school, with its emphasis on memorization had rendered him ill equipped to question and investigate the causes of his space’s decay or to even see his socio-cultural context through alternative frames of reference. Indeed, these descriptions of his perceptions of Trinidad’s shabby structures justify Said’s estimation that Naipaul refuses to analyze the ways in which Empire contributed to the decrepitude manifest in colonized spaces. But nonetheless, the narrator’s self-analysis suggests his awareness that his colonialist frame of reference clouds other ways of seeing and perceptions of his reality. He seems to be conscious that it blocks access to alternative discourses. He identifies the colonial school as the locus of this overshadowing of alternative modes of knowing.

Throughout the narrative, the mature narrator is keen to cast the child and youth’s naiveté and mimicry into relief. He is also eager to suggest his own knowing and critical
perspective, projecting himself as someone who has developed a more nuanced understanding about the fabricated worlds created by texts, writers and their teachers. He points out that he soon realized that Dickens too embellished reality by using particular literary terms such as “old fashioned” to describe the city structures (133). Armed with his literary ideas, the youth did not see the city as it really existed: an urban and industrialized city, still recovering from the ravages of war. But instead he saw it only as his textbooks had represented. As he reminds us of his naïve correlations between text and the real world, he also points out the functions that this embellished literature performed in spaces where it was circulated and taught. In the colony, for instance, the teaching of Victorian literature, in particular, shaped understanding about an idealized Englishness, English spaces, and English hegemony, and consolidated the belief in the invincible power of the Empire.

He records that upon his arrival in England, he began gradually to discover the discrepancies between expectations that were fanned by Dickens and the reality that he encountered in the lived world: “I had come to London as to a place I knew very well. I found a city that was strange and unknown.” He reveals that the city was also as “unread-about as the Englishness of South Wind,” a novel he had picked up in America (134). Norman Douglas’s South Wind, published in 1917, depicted English and Italian characters preoccupied with debates about assorted subjects like the New Woman, sexuality, Englishness, Empire, Nationalism and morality. Its discussions of overt sexual expression would have perhaps been uncharacteristic of the Victorian characters that the narrator had encountered in his books. At any rate, despite these new literary encounters and the opportunities they offered for a revision of his beliefs about Englishness and
Empire, he deliberately molded his literary style, and with it his choice of subjects, on particular writers and works that he associated with a distinct and covetable English identity. To support this he again describes how the reality did not mirror his textual representations. In the city of London too, when he set out to “do the sights” in London, his experience was “savorless” and mean (101). He noticed the everyday reality, in the form of a “wartime bomb site” that signified the ravages wrought by the two World Wars as well as diminishing imperial powers of the nation but didn’t think about its relevance (132). Nor did he record the hustle bustle of the life that he saw around him in the boarding house, but instead searched for “metropolitan material.” He explains that to him metropolitan material meant the textual style and content of particular English writers: “…material, which would enable me to compete with or match certain writers. And I also meant material that would enable me to display a particular kind of writing personality: J.R. Ackerley of Hindoo Holiday…” (135). He includes Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh to this list (135). To him they were writers who assumed a certain worldly persona. Full of wisdom, knowledge and confidence they were writers who were “aloof,” “unsurprised” and “immensely knowing”(135). What is interesting here is that the narrative reveals that the younger narrator emulated English writers who belonged to the elite, bourgeoisie and upper class sections of society. Many of these literary figures were supporters of Empire and ardent nationalists.

In some ways then, English literature, part and parcel of the colonizer’s discursive arsenal in the colonies, not only disseminated discourses of the hegemony of Empire and descriptions of idyllic English landscapes, but also gave intimations to him about the kind of writer he could be and about prospective thematic preoccupations in his works; in
other words, it also influenced his literary identity and subjects: “Because of my ideas about the writer, I took everything I saw for granted… I thought that as a writer I had only to find out what I had read about and already knew” (146). Under the aegis of the colonial school, he cultivated the desire to mold himself after the figure of the gentlemanly writer: “…in an unlikely way, the ideas of the aesthetic movement of the end of the nineteenth century and the ideas of Bloomsbury, ideas bred essentially out of empire, wealth and security, had been transmitted to me in Trinidad” (146). The Bloomsbury figures, artists like E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf among others were emblematic of a range of modernist responses to England’s imperialist expansions and its role in the two world wars, they were also regarded as aloof, upper class personalities, detached from the English masses and the lower classes, and were representatives of elite English society.

Naipaul uses discussions of the youth’s notions about and desire for the identity of an English writer to further illustrate his mimicry of English discourses and behaviors. By pointing out that Forster and others influenced his earlier writings, the narrator-Naipaul self-reflexively points to his willing internalization of particular imperialist stances and discourses, which emerged in texts like A Passage to India and in the Hindoo Holiday. These representations were also informed by Eurocentric ideologies of class and gender. And he took this cultivated, if incomplete, understanding of English writers and their lives to England as a student writer. Little wonder that he had missed the socio-cultural complexities of English life suggested by the inhabitants of the boarding house. The narrator rues that colonial education had imposed on him a restrictive literary frame
in England that compelled him in the 1950s to mold his writings on seemingly canonical writers:

It wasn’t only that I was unformed at the age of eighteen or had no idea what I was going to write about. It was that the idea given me by my education—and by the more “cultural,” the nicest part of that education—was that the writer was a person possessed of sensibility; that the writer was someone who recorded or displayed an inward development. So in an unlikely way, the ideas of the aesthetic movement of the end of the nineteenth century and the ideas of Bloomsbury, ideas bred essentially out of empire, wealth and imperial security had been transmitted to me in Trinidad. (146)

Such a narrow understanding of a writer’s vocation, identity and subjects contributed to the production of writing that was as “abstract” as his education had been. His novels recorded inner development without the analysis of socio-cultural context. The mature narrator suggests that the English writers, under whose influence he wrote, had written at a time of imperialist wealth. He suggests that his earlier imitation of their styles was doubly ironic, as he did not share their economic prosperity. He was in fact the colonized subject whose ancestors had contributed to English capital. The narrator reflects on the effects of his unquestioning imitation. His work ceased to be meaningful and became a mere parody of the other works.

The narrator illustrates the consequences of this internalization through a short story that he wrote shortly after his arrival in England. An account of his acquaintances, it comprised of materials “he half-knew from other writers already”. He “improved everybody’s circumstances”, “suppressed memory” and inaccurately described people (140). When he molded a fictional character after a real life acquaintance, Mr. Harding, he portrayed him as a quintessential Englishman, aristocratic and charming. Looking back, he notes he would foreground the effects of war on the setting, and on both Harding’s drunkenness and his forced attempts to conceal his shabbiness. In other words,
he would add details about the socio-cultural context and note the effects of the
cracter’s material conditions on his life. But back then he had been full of romantic
notions of Englishness and was eager to embellish his own identity as an English writer.
His writing and portrayal of characters suggested his mimicry and his consolidation of his
Anglicized, bourgeoisie self-identity: “I suppressed the boardinghouse background”
(140). The narrator records that the blindness inculcated by his education manifested in
other ways as well. Not only did it cause him to adhere to an alien creative mold, but it
also blinded him to alternate modes of representation. The mature narrator notes that the
youth ignored to perceive that while Harding had not been as regal as he had depicted
him, he had nonetheless been a lively figure, “full of wit and bravado”(140). This ability
to see the nuances and contradictory impulses in people, settings and places, came later
with experience and a critical self-assessment of his education and beliefs.

References to, “Gala Night”, a short story that he wrote as a youth upon his
arrival in England allows the mature narrator to illustrate the adverse effects of colonial
mimicry on his work and beliefs. In some ways, these descriptions allow Naipaul to chart
the moments of crisis that enabled the narrator to develop self-awareness about his
colonial mimicry. He notes that the story was intended to appear as the work of a man
who possessed “experience.” Its writer was “knowing and unillusioned”, a
“traveler”(120, 122). It was his “first piece of writing based on metropolitan material”
(120). The story was based on his experience aboard the ship that took him on his first
journey to England. He points out that he stuck to people who suggested “metropolitan
material” (122). The story illustrates the ways in which this desire for a particular content
blinded the fledgling writer to the rich possibilities suggested by the people he met and
transformed into fictional characters. It also allows him to point out how his education made him see external reality and people through colonial eyes. It imposed a colonialist outlook and understanding of the world. As a writer, he saw his material through these lenses. To be metropolitan was to be knowledgeable in seemingly Universalist values, but to be a metropolitan writer was also to see particular behaviors as ludicrous and barbaric.

Consider this passage:

There was a man, originally from the Middle East but now in spite of his Muslim name entirely American, who said he was an entertainer. He spoke familiarly of famous stars…and it never occurred to me to wonder why this entertainer was traveling tourist. He read me some of his material—“Material”- that was what he called it… That was impressive and strange and “American” to me: that such trivial “material” should be typed and…given such formality… Just as his “material” became part of mine, so his language became part of my material as well. So that I was having it both ways with him: making use as a writer of his metropolitan knowingness, appropriating it, yet keeping myself at a distance from him (not on the ship, only in “Gala Night”), as though he, being only an entertainer…and dubiously American, was a kind of buffoon (the kind of buffoon such a person should be, in writing of the sort I was aiming at) as though I- now adrift, supported only by the abstractions of my colonial education – stood on firmer ground than he. (123)

The mature narrator self-reflexively points to the figurative violence he perpetuates on the entertainer whose purported knowingness furnishes him an imitative model on which to base his derisive description of him. The description in turn mimics colonialist descriptions of non-western, colonized subjects, such as him. The “buffoon” is identified as such by the “dubiously” Anglicized writer, who has in turn abrogated a role that sits uneasily with him. In another scene, he left out discussions about race, which “though it was good, familiar material, and could prove my knowledge of the world- formed no part of “Gala Night”, as it was “too close to my disturbance, my vulnerability, the separation of my two selves”(124). He reveals that on seeing a black man from “ Harlem or black America on his way to Germany” he should have seen “aspects of myself” but he had
“resisted the comparison” and refused to engage in the implications of these similarities between migrants to Europe:

…I was travelling to be a writer. It was too frightening to accept the other thing… it was to be diminished as man and writer. Racial diminution formed no part of the material of the kind of writer I was setting out to be. Thinking of myself as a writer, I was hiding my experience from myself; hiding myself from my experience. And even when I became a writer I was without the means… to cope with that disturbance. (127)

The representation of this confessional discussion of the narrator’s short story allows Naipaul’s work to delineate the ways in which the mimicking writer repeats racist ideologies of the colonizer. If the Anglicized writer is to mimic the English text faithfully, he must suppress feelings of racial diminution suggested by his color and racial background. The youth fails to investigate feelings of racial inferiority as the legacies of colonial education. By recording this, the mature narrator suggests that Empire had engendered in him a sense of self-hatred, which manifested itself as self-alienation and as anxiety about his place in the world. The lines suggest the psychic violence perpetrated by the colonizer. And the mature narrator proceeds to take his education and his younger self to task for upholding racist ideologies. He emphasizes that in those early years, he did not see creative materials in the increasingly multicultural communities that were beginning to formulate in London: “If I had a more direct, less unprejudiced way of looking; if I had noted down simply what I had seen; if in those days I had had the security which later came to me… what material would I not have had”(142).

The realization of the prejudice offers new literary themes. The narrator points out that the discussion of his colonial upbringing became one of his central literary subjects and offered him a way of overcoming the realization that his impulse to be a writer had been “the most imprisoning, the most insidious, and in some ways the most corrupting”
for “refined by my half-English education” it had ceased to be a “pure impulse” and had given him a “false idea of the activity of the mind” (245).

As the narrative proceeds, the narrator reveals that the arrival in England and the discrepancies spelled the death knell for the “metropolitan” mode of writing for he soon realized the shortcomings in the works he produced, writing of which “the Gala Night” was emblematic. He had to devise another literary style, search for other content: “…it was necessary to shed many of the ideas that went with the ambition and the concept my half-education had given me of the writer” (245). He reveals that at this juncture his decision to write a history of Port of Spain rescued him from despair. He realized that as a writer he would have to cast a backward look to his Caribbean socio-cultural context for themes and ideas: “So the past for me- as colonial and writer- was full of shame and mortifications. Yet as a writer I could train myself to face them. Indeed, they became my subjects” (245).

It seems that the narrator achieved self-stability only when he began exploring the contentious relation between migration, Empire, and colonial Trinidad in his literature, in works like the Enigma. The Enigma delineates the aspects of the narrator’s past that caused shame and mortification as he historicizes colonial violence in Trinidad, tying it to his communal displacement from India to the Caribbean, to his particular education and to the systematic denigration of alternative modes of being and discourses by the colonial state. Shame and mortification are products of his awareness of indenture, and of the

---

4 In a Writer’s People, he points out that England soon revealed itself to be a place “which really had no room for me, which had its own ideas of what writing was, and where, contrary to what I had thought since concrete ambition had come to me, there was no republic of letters.” Among other things he realized that the colonial education that was to lead him to literary success had cultivated in him at best a richly allusive and imaginative literary mind, a “way of seeing and feeling” that had been influenced by writers like Dickens and Somerset Maugham, at worst a fantastic and limited version of the world and its socio-historical contingencies (56).
poverty of his community. He suffers from shame at being a colonial in a colonized setting. As a colonized subject with intimations of greatness elsewhere, he had bided his time, not understanding till later that ironically, the colonial school and his community’s fears about preserving cultural identity had shaped his perceptions of Caribbean’s intellectual poverty. In *A Writer’s People*, Naipaul echoes the narrator’s revelations about growing up in the close-knit Indian community in Trinidad, a social group that preserved its cultural traditions and links to India through repeated rituals. Naipaul discusses that he had little inclination to engage with other communities and their material contingencies given his Hindu upbringing. The consequence was a mind schooled by the familial influences of a father struggling to write and a grandmother emphasizing the practice of Hindu ceremonies, and the educational instruction of a colonial school where education in English literature fed the imagination and framed his literary ambition:

The writer, or the boy traveling to be a writer, was educated; he had a high idea of nobility of the calling, which he was travelling…But the man, of whom the writer was just a part…the man was in the profoundest way- as a social being-untutored. He was close to the village ways of his Asian-Indian community…that half Indian world, that world removed in time and space from India,… that half-Indian world was the social world the man knew….he knew little about his community in Trinidad…And he knew nothing of other communities. He had only the prejudices of his time, in that colonial, racially mixed setting. He was profoundly ignorant. (111)

The passage charts the effects of displacement on the Indian community in Trinidad as it attempted to hold on to native socio-cultural traditions and practices. Naipaul also reminisces about the debilitating consequences of the community’s self-imposed isolation on his development as a young man. He did not engage with the other communities in Trinidad and instead chose to assimilate colonial beliefs at school to consolidate his self-identity. The passage is interesting because like *the Enigma*, it too suggests that for all the
knowledge he imbibed as a youth at the colonial school, he lacked the confidence and

ease of the “metropolitan” writer he had set out to be. More significantly he suggests that

he had in fact been ignorant. Education at the colonial school had developed in him a

knowledge that seemed to clash with his Hindu upbringing, but also with the “real” world

of everyday events in Trinidad. Naipaul has taken this up as a recurrent theme in his

works. In *The Mimic Men*, most of the schoolboys are taught in a closed setting, which is

remotely connected to and barely reflects their everyday lives or the political and cultural

events of their multiracial community. The consequence is that the main protagonist

grows up with a colonial outlook, repeating some of the discourses of his colonizers. As a

political leader, he regurgitates colonialist policies and is unable to engage in any

fulfilling ways with blacks, Indians or the creole community in his fictive Caribbean
town.

A recurring picture of the narrator as an ignorant and anxious mimic emerges

within these books, where the protagonists are equipped with only a parochial colonial

education, lacking the worldly know how with which to deal with the real world of

chaotic strife in a social context where varied cultural groups struggle to survive under

the colonial state and fight for political self-determination. The works chart the

protagonists as preferring to collaborate with the colonial state. Rather than undertaking

political defiance, these figures passively absorb colonialist ideologies in order to survive

colonization. That this is an autobiographical literary gesture, an attempt to reflect on his

own upbringing is clear from Naipaul’s reflections in *A Writer’s People* about his

anxieties about his “half-world” where the Indian community had self-imposed cultural

isolation on itself (52-3). Whether imposed from outside or self-imposed, isolation has
the same effect that it has in his works: it makes textual reality more appealing and
desirable:

To read in this setting, about the court of Louis fifteenth (in the “Teach Yourself
History” series in order to get background for Moliere and others), or the French
Revolution… was to read about a fairyland. …In this way I picked up many facts,
insubstantial…but I lived in a cloud of not-knowing, and the world around me…
in my school books, was a blur. (54)

Education teaches him much but as he claims in A Writer’s People, he had in fact learned
little. The idea that his education was in the “abstract,” and was replete with ideas that
had no practical uses and little correlation to lived life remerges in A Writer’s People. A
stage is set for self-transformation as it is gradually revealed that the “particular
education” has rendered the narrator unfit for an engaged and honest attempt at a literary
career. Following his understanding of literary guides he can it seems only be an imitator,
copying styles and writing from literary texts that were alien to him and that were not part
of his Hindu upbringing.

In a Writer’s People, Naipaul also suggests that writing, “a way of seeing and
feeling”, a “vision” is heavily influenced by a writer’s socio-cultural environment, by the
varied events, past and present, that inform his cultural and political context: “Every kind
of writing is the product of a specific historical and cultural vision” (41). This too is an
interesting claim for it suggests that for Naipaul, writing must be informed by his
particular Indian community’s socio-cultural beliefs, the colonial state, and the larger
social context of the Caribbean. The fledgling writer in the Enigma doesn’t possess this
understanding, choosing to ignore the personal histories that frame his upbringing and his
community’s experience. He writes as a mimic man, exclusively using colonial education
and English materials as frames of reference in the early writing. Years later, a reading of
*South Wind*, recommended by an English teacher in Trinidad reveals to the narrator that his material, which was to help him set out on establishing a literary career, was not only borrowed, but like Ackerley’s style, also “alien”, “far from anything in my experience, and beyond my comprehension”(119).

Said and other postcolonial scholars have expressed their reservations with the representations of writers like Ackerley whose exoticized and imperialist depictions of native subjects helped consolidate dehumanizing myths of natives’ racial inferiority and irrational behavior. Ackerley, in particular, represented Indians in a comic light in the *Hindoo Holiday*, and derided them for their archaic traditions in passages that compared the seemingly uncivilized modes of being of the Indians to the superior customs of Englishmen. Seen in this light, the younger narrator’s preference for Ackerley’s literary style and “metropolitan material” suggests his dislike for the colonized, positioning him as a native informer who lacks sympathy for the non west. But the mature narrator distances himself from this former self whose prejudices are reminiscent of Said’s critique of Naipaul as the native informer. And indeed the younger narrator is more akin to the Naipaul who drew ire from postcolonial scholars for his orientalist travelogue, *Among The Believers*. I suggest that the mature narrator of *the Enigma*, a stand in for an older Naipaul, is eager to castigate these literary texts as signifiers of his imperialist stance, as his references to “the Gala Night” suggest.

But where he ought to provide a more nuanced representation of colonized communities and their postcolonial contexts, the mature narrator can only manage to rearticulate colonialist assumptions in his narratives. His allusions to his more recent work, an African novel suggests that he persists in seeing the non-western context
through colonial lenses. His Africa is imbued with “solitude and emptiness and menace” (170), rather than diverse communities engaged in complex socio-cultural and economic struggles. The narrator reveals that not only is it informed by “a vision of romance”, garnered during his last visit there, but it is also influenced by his prolonged stay in Wiltshire and his personal mood of “pain and exhaustion” (171). It is ironical that the mature narrator reveals himself as repeating the same literary short sights and representational blunders that he had associated with his younger self. Naipaul’s mature narrator of the Enigma cannot undo the adverse effects of colonial education. He persists in depicting Africans through colonialist frames of reference. His depiction of Africans as “black men with threatening hair” is reminiscent of imperialist portrayals of non-western subjects. His Africa is not a continent but an undifferentiated amalgam of three or four nations that he visited. He imbues Africa with “violence”, which is further informed by his personal tumult (171).

Indeed, this small but relevant discussion of his recent work implicates the mature narrator in replicating the cultural violence of the imperialists and in stances of mimicry. It is evident that despite his historicization of colonial education and its effects on the colonial subject, he cannot rid himself of internalized ways of seeing and thinking. The Enigma replicates the colonizer’s discursive violence through its representations of Africa.

On the metanarrative level as well, the Enigma paradoxically reinscribes the imperialist discourses that it holds responsible for creating a split between “the man and the writer.” Indeed in the Enigma, despite his awareness of his socio-political past of colonization, displacement and indenture, Naipaul can only manage to depict socio-
cultural reality in ways that foreground the former colonies’ dependency on the West. Desiring to shed certain prejudices and aiming to do so by producing particular works, he seems to only re-present histories of colonial violence rather than forge empowering narratives of anticolonial resistance. These colonialist ways of looking are represented to us as those of a mimic man, who absorbs colonial education and regurgitates imperialist beliefs. The novel does not portray the observations of an anti-colonial intellectual who is eager to shed his imperialist beliefs but instead offers a complex depiction of an Anglicized writer who examines his colonial education and char's its effects on his work and self-identity.

Among other things, his mimicry, which is one of the crucial effects of his assimilation of colonialist discourses, is illustrated by his assumptions about the aesthetic functions of “gardens” and the signified reality, which the term conveys. Perhaps this description redeems the narrator as he addresses England’s exploitation of the Caribbean’s resources. He points out that gardens in England suggest the growing of plants for aesthetic pleasure and pastime; in Trinidad, they evoke plantations of sugarcane, and the plots of land cultivated by laborers for food. In applying English associations to the Caribbean, the mature narrator exposes Caribbean’s colonial past and England’s exploitation of the land and its resources: “We didn’t have the climate, the pasture; the island had been developed for the cultivation of sugarcane”(85). People there do not have the luxury of creating spaces that are not for strictly utilitarian purposes. Land is cultivated for colonial commerce. He lays bare how economic considerations of modern imperialist institutions governed the lives of people and affected Trinidad’s ecology. The Caribbean emerges as a crucial contributor to English commerce.
But where he historicizes colonial exploitation in Trinidad, he also suggests that he has assimilated the English discourses of gardening and aesthetic value. Thus the passage also draws attention to his mimicry. Indeed, both unquestioned absorption of colonialist discourses and the passive acceptance of colonial exploitation suggest complicity with Empire. They also signify an intellectual abstruseness in the narrator and his refusal to grapple with, question and challenge coercive and hegemonic socio-political forces that perpetuated imperialist violence in the Caribbean. His description of the sugarcane fields contains neither critique nor condemnation of the imperialist state or of the English administration.

A telling confessional passage reveals the narrator’s self-indictment in imperialist violence and his attempts to analyze his compliance with colonial discourses:

Thinking back to my own past, my own childhood… I found so many abuses I took for granted. I lived easily with the idea of poverty, the nakedness of children in the streets of the town and the roads of the country. I lived easily with the idea of brutalizing of children by flogging; the ridiculing of the deformed; the different ideas of authority presented by our Hindu family and then, above that, by the racial-colonial system of our agricultural society. (244)

Despite his education at the colonial school, or perhaps, because of the abstract nature of his education, which did not equip him with the insights into the island’s poverty and squalor, he grew up accepting certain aspects of his life as normative rather than as the exceptional attributes of a colonized and displaced community. The mature narrator condenses many aspects of his community in this passage and relates them to each other in a chain of causality- the poverty and nakedness are attributes of the deprivation imposed by colonizers, to which is also related the parochial attitude adopted by a displaced Indian community that tries to adhere to its cultural beliefs in the Caribbean. The racial-colonial system dominates and governs all practices and discourses. The
school does not examine the socio-cultural reality of the Caribbean. There are no discussions of active resistance to colonial violence, or even an analysis of it in this passage and the narrator reveals that the young child had little idea about these anticolonial movements. The narrator underscores colonial hegemony and violence as key factors for his passive internalization and his inability to question oppression.

I suggest that this revelation of the colonial system of Trinidad, though not always comprehensive, is nonetheless telling of the ways in which the colonial state produced passive compliance in the colonized. As a character in my last chapter indicates, one of the strategies of colonial oppression is the suggestion that the colonized have no space for development outside the colonial paradigm. The only recourse seems to be complicity and internalization. As Naipaul’s narrator reassesses his colonial community he suggests that he had indeed believed that colonial education, “that had been like a competition”, was the only way out of Trinidad’s poverty. The anxiety of failing to imbibe colonial education was “like the fear of extinction.” This understanding had colored his “perception of the Caribbean as a youth” (152). Colonial education thus contributes to his fraught development.

*As the Enigma* charts the narrator’s self-assessment as a mimic man, it also explores the possibilities of accessing alternate histories that imperialist representational texts had elided. The narrator thus charts his attempts to undo the adverse effects of his colonial mimicry. But it seems that the work can only reinscribe these within imperialist frames as the narrator addresses the effects of his mimicry and internalization of colonialist ideologies. One of the consequences of his absorption had been his departure to England to be a writer. This had in turn led to the gradual awareness of the split in the
self. The Anglicized writer had become distanced from the colonized Hindu subject. The reconciliation came through the acknowledgement that Trinidad had shaped his thoughts and beliefs as well as his writing:

But the island— with the curiosity it had awakened in me for the larger world, the idea of civilization, and the idea of antiquity; and all the anxieties it had quickened in me— the island had given me the world as a writer; it had given me the themes that in the second half of the twentieth century had become important; had made me metropolitan…(153)

He points out that his understanding of becoming metropolitan changes with experience, especially as he matures as a writer and a traveler. He points out that he is no longer metropolitan in the sense of being an English gentleman, but in terms of being multiracial, well traveled and in some sense creolized (153). But this realization alone does not enable him to overcome the ill effects of his colonialist ways of seeing.

His account of his earlier vision of the Caribbean too reveals his assimilation of colonialist ideologies and ways of seeing. His earlier perceptions, which he held as a young boy, had been akin to the first Spanish conquistadores who came to the Caribbean to search for gold: "like the Spaniard, having arrived after so much effort, I saw very little. And like the Spaniard who had made a perilous journey down the Orinoco or Amazon, I had very little to record” (144). His Caribbean was characterized by a lack. He saw only “torpor” and drabness, which seemed to him to belong naturally to the Caribbean and its people (156). The narrator reveals that over the years, he broadened this understanding partly through researching historical documents preserved in British libraries. These materials give him access to a past that exists in “fragments,” and comprises of “great names and events,” such as Columbus and Cortes, Sir Walter Raleigh, the black Haitian Revolution, the French Revolution, the appearance of Spanish
Empire and the establishment of British rule over Trinidad and the abolition of slavery (155). And he goes on to observe landscape in Caribbean islands that still bears fragmentary marks of earlier lives, of “aboriginal Indians” who had been “killed off three hundred years before by the English and French” (161).

These passages suggest his attempts at investigating the Caribbean’s past in order to supplement his colonialist beliefs. Looking back at his youth, he suggests that as a young boy he would not have investigated colonial violence, which he researched only after traveling to England to become a writer:

These references— to the Spanish empire and the Haitian revolution— would not have occurred to me when I had lived on the street. …everything in Port of Spain seemed to have been recently put together; nothing suggested antiquity, a past. To this there had to be added the child's ignorance; and the special incompleteness of the Indian child, grandson of immigrants, whose past suddenly broke off, suddenly feel away into the chasm between the Antilles and India. (156-7)

He learns of the Caribbean’s past through research for his historical novels, but he also learns that there is a paucity of documentation and historical materials on the lives of native communities in the Caribbean. He realizes that the “source books” which were “created or manufactured to meet a demand” did not exist in Trinidad and so he has to go to “the documents themselves”, which were placed in English libraries, a telling reminder of Empire’s hold over textual production and representation in the Caribbean (155). In these he finds “the lineaments of the world I had grown up in.” He fills a chasm in his historical knowledge which academic instruction at colonial institutions did not fill:

Asian-Indian immigrants had come in the period of nineteenth century torpor. As a schoolboy I had assumed that torpor to be a constant, something connected with the geographical location of the island, the climate, the quality of the light. It had never occurred to me that the drabness I knew had been manmade, that it had causes, that there had been other visions and indeed other landscapes there. (156)
Naipaul’s narrator reveals the imperialist contours of the particular instruction that he receives at school, which foregrounds the “squalor” of the colony and its inhabitants as a justification for Western superiority and colonial rule. When he learns the historical facts about the region at school, they “lack imaginative force” as the “squalor” and “the dinginess” seem too new: “everything in Port of Spain seemed to have been recently put together, nothing suggested antiquity, a past” (157). He reveals that the documents make him realize that the islands had been peopled by native inhabitants, informing him of the presence of human life in a region that to his eyes had always seemed to be stricken by “colonial torpor” (157).

In a quest for romantic histories that imbue the Caribbean with a sense of antiquity and cultural grandeur, he travels back to the Caribbean and charts his understanding of its past. In the process, he narrates the history of imperialist violence through observations of landscape and structures that suggest the region’s brutal past of suffering and the exploitation of black and indigenous communities by imperialist rulers:

St.Kitts was the earliest British colony in the Caribbean… It had a central mountain, forested at the top, and the slopes, covered with sugarcane, ran all the way down to the sea. The island was edged with a narrow asphalt road, and there were the little houses of the workers, descendants of slaves, along this road. Sugar and slavery had created that simplicity, that unnaturalness in the vegetation and landscape. (160-1)

Naipaul points out that imperial commerce changed the political economy and the ecology of the islands as well as produced some of the spatial stereotypes that colonial historians have long associated with the landscape of the Caribbean. He points out the similarities of the European and colonial structures even though they evoke different and unequal relations of power and histories. Instead of the English church, he observes a churchyard- in a tropical setting…palms instead of yews…Pall Mall where slaves were
put up for sale…(160-1). He notices hieroglyphs and carvings with paintings made by aboriginals before the Spanish massacred them (161). He proceeds to talk of his travels to Anguilla and later to Guatemala City, which was “laid waste by Cortes and successors,”(163). In England, he traces Georgian furniture in London showrooms to mahogany that was shipped from Belize, noticing the ways in which imperialist commerce supplied raw materials for English cultural and aesthetic establishments and adornment (163).

This recovery and representation of a particular past fulfills the mature narrator’s desire for a sense of rootedness and belonging to a place, which has “antiquity,” that is, which suggests human presence and activity, particularly cultural activity. This cultural heritage is suggested for instance by the aboriginal carvings on the boulders: “I had an intimation of the wonder of the New World and the tragedy and usurpation of the Spanish usurpation”(163). The narrator suggests that even though this burgeoning knowledge about the Caribbean’s past is framed by the desire for “romantic” origins, which was inculcated at the colonial school, it reconciles the “man” with the “writer,” or the Hindu self with the colonial mimic, as it allows him to suture the split self by associating “romance” with the Caribbean where his ancestors arrived as indentured laborers.

But as he has delineated earlier in the narrative, these feelings of romance as well as the desire for a space, which had a rich cultural lineage, are products of an imagination fed by English literature. This desire finds fulfillment through the research into Caribbean past: "I had given myself a past… one of the loose ends in my mind had vanished; a little chasm filled…the romance by which I had attached it to the rest of the world continued to be possessed by me…”(164). Historicization seems to suture the inner disjunction caused
by internalization of colonial ideologies and ancestral displacement even though it is closely linked to his assimilation of colonial beliefs about history and cultural heritage.

Indeed, because it is the product of the very internalization it seeks to redress, his historicization of the Caribbean’s cultural heritage and aboriginal communities functions as little more than a consolation on his behalf. It underscores his fraught attempts to overcome his anxieties about colonial mimicry. It also exposes the mature narrator as a subject who perpetually imposes a western motif on his reality.

By charting his narrator’s attempts to re-present the Caribbean’s colonial and precolonial past, the novel suggests that for colonized subjects who have suffered double alienation and displacement, the desire for history is implicated in the search and construction of identity in the face of ancestral displacement. As the narrative reveals, others in the Indian community display this desire for origins as well. In the last chapter, the mature narrator records the discussions among other Indians about Caribbean’s Indian community and notes that these conversations help men “have an idea of who they are” (353). But the construction of “History” is premised on the linear narration of events, a tracing of journeys and experiences that are supervised by the Europeans. Thus, though these attempts at historicization contribute to communal and individual development, they repeatedly endow the Caribbean community with a western provenance. One of the Indians notes that Columbus discovered Port of Spain, which was later annexed by the Portuguese and subsequently by the English. The aboriginals had been “killed or made to die away” as their “sacred world vanished” (354). He does not mention any active non-western communities. The narrator does not record any discourses that suggest native resistance to the colonizers. We may blame his colonialist upbringing for this elision.
After all he asks us to relate his ideological beliefs to his “half-education.” At an earlier point in the novel, while discussing his ignorance about the English cows’ commercial value, Naipaul’s narrator tellingly reveals his entrapment within colonialist modes of seeing: “One sees what one sees. Harder to imagine what one doesn’t see” (84). This self-assessment can be applied to his understanding of Caribbean history, his narrative and his colonial mimicry.

The narrator then seems to be primed between the consciousness that to “become a writer it was necessary to shed many of the early ideas that went with the ambition and the concept my half-education had given me of the writer”, and the incapacity to rid himself of colonialist referential frames (245). But where he represents his development from a naïve mimic to a self-aware writer who perceives his implication in colonialist frames of reference and struggles against these, he does not explicitly condemn colonial violence. Nor does he chart anticolonial movements in the colonies that overthrew colonial rule. Indeed, the Enigma neither counter colonialist depictions of the non-west nor produces a counter-discourse that foregrounds native resilience in the face of colonial brutality.

Indeed, for the most part, self-awareness of mimicry does not contribute to anti-imperialist critique and the representation of counter-knowledge in the Enigma. Nonetheless, there are a couple of literary moments that indicate the mature narrator’s consciousness of alternative modes of representing imperialist histories of the colonies and suggest his awareness that colonialist frames of representation produced fabricated images of non western contexts that were used to justify colonial expansion.
One such literary occasion emerges in his discussion of the Larkhill Army Institute. He denounces the school as a place that reminds him of his own school in Trinidad (231). The military academy trains men to kill and produces the “killer soldier, a “new style British soldier.” Rather than expounding on the academy’s role in consolidating England’s national security, the narrator wonders about its involvement in training men to kill. And his thoughts become an occasion for questioning the claims about English military prowess, evident in its quelling of the Indian mutiny of 1857: “It was astonishing now—after its ineptitude in the nineteenth century, which was yet the century of the great glory of the empire, and after its great but wasting achievements in the Second World war, at the end of that imperial glory…the British army should be concentrating on producing this kind of elite soldier” (232). I suggest that the reference to the “ineptitude” of the army in the nineteenth century is an oblique reference to the mutiny, which suggested to the British their opponents’ formidable characteristics and forced the colonial state to deploy strategies of discursive control in India. The narrator points out that despite the violent and “wasteful” engagements of the army, the institution continues to flourish. He notes that soldiers and army vehicles were not seen in Salisbury but nonetheless existed. They comprise a crucial aspect of the seemingly bucolic and peaceful English countryside. The narrator suggests that their presence signified a murkier, more violent and dangerous England than the one suggested either by the bucolic town or by the books in which he had first encountered its images.

Another significant section that indicates the narrator’s critique of colonialist representation is his discussion of the “simple” story written by the manor’s owner in the 1920s. The mature narrator reveals that it is a “short story in verse” about a woman, who
bored by the “English social round,” decides to become a missionary in Africa. He reveals that the story repeats the motif of an orientalist tale. It is reminiscent of a Conradian journey to the purported heart of darkness:

A ship; the ocean; the African coast; a forest river. The young missionary is captured by Africans, natives. She has fantasies of sexual assault by the African chief to whose compound she is taken; fantasies as well of the harem and of black eunuchs. Instead she is cooked in a cannibal pot and eaten; and all that remains of her… is a twenties costume draped on a wooden cross…. (282)

Indeed, as the narrator suggests, the story echoes other exoticized narratives of its time, which depicted the colonies as spaces of unseen dangers and barbaric races. Rather than praising the landlord’s imperialist representation of Africa as an uncivilized space, the narrator points out that not only did the landlord represent worlds and realities that he had never visited from a position of power and ownership, but he also perpetuated and sustained the production of an orientalist and imperialist knowledge that was exemplary of colonial knowledge and discursive practices. His anger and denunciation are barely concealed by Naipaul:

This was the joke knowledge the young boy of eighteen had arrived at; this was the knowledge (which would have appeared like sophistication) that had been fed by the manor and the grounds. And perhaps later the joke knowledge had not gone beyond the joke: outside England and Europe, a fantasy Africa, a fantasy Peru or India or Malaya. (282)

The narrator is aware that the landlord’s narrative imperfectly represents non-western reality and imbues it with an imperialist agenda. Indeed, his portrayal betrays his lack of knowledge about the non-western paradigms, which he attempted to portray in his work. His portrayal betrays his imperialist thinking but also suggests his comfort at blindly portraying the colonized context as backward and dangerous. Naipaul suggests that the landlord depicted worlds he had encountered in colonialist texts and could only repeat the
fabricated representations that he saw in these works. Indeed, the texts and the landlord’s descriptions are akin to the images the younger narrator had encountered at school in Trinidad, where he formed his desire for the relatively safe and ordered society of England.

In this section, Naipaul takes up the task of contrapuntal analysis, by taking up a colonialist work and underscoring the dehumanizing myths it represents. Indeed, the mature narrator displays an understanding that imperialist discourses created particular images and perceptions about the non-west that represented them as irrational, archaic and immoral. If, as Said claims, “any sympathetic feelings he might have had for the things he sees [in the postcolonial context] have been obliterated” in his descriptions, Naipaul’s description does not spare the metropolitan context either, castigating it for its falsified versions of the non-west (102). The narrator, and through him, the self-reflexive Naipaul wonders if the west has ever revised its understanding of the non west in the postcolonial context.

But there was a time in his life when the narrator had himself assimilated the “joke knowledge” as a reservoir of factual truth and information about the non-west and the west. If English literature had created a fantasy England, he had used that image to belong in a nation that had once colonized him. Indeed, he had closely imitated its discursive norms.

The Enigma historicizes the development of the narrator as an Anglicized writer, who develops a consciousness of the fabricated reality of English literature, but does not deploy that knowledge to investigate either colonial violence in the Caribbean or the possibilities of other narratives about it that are free of colonialist frames of reference.
His “third world” is represented as irrevocably marred by colonial violence rather than emblematic of anticolonial resistance. It is always represented in relation to western influences and as having succumbed to superior western technologies. Said suggests that such representations signify that to be “non-western is ontologically thus to be unfortunate in nearly every way” (304). Indeed, Naipaul’s narrator seems to uphold the view that mimicry is the only mode of survival under the colonial state even though it causes him to experience self-alienation and adversely affects his writing.

But where the novel fails to offer alternative ways of representing the socio-cultural contexts of the Caribbean, it succeeds in representing the effects of colonial education on colonized subjects in the mid twentieth century. Naipaul’s narrator is emblematic of those Indians for whom integration into the colonial system appeared to be a necessary step toward survival in the multicultural context of the Caribbean. As Simon Gikandi indicates in *Maps of Englishness*, for writers like Sam Selvon and Naipaul, this was a community in which they were still marginalized and denied access to social institutions like the school. In the novel, the colonial school emerges as a site where colonized students cultivate certain impressions and assumptions about their socio-

---

6 Gikandi suggests that Indian descendants of indentured laborers were isolated from Caribbean subjects of African descent on the basis of their ambivalent status in relation to “the social and historical forces that were shaping the new Caribbean nations” in the 1940s and 1950s, such as increasing nationalisms, pan Africanism and negritude (113, 162). They were also denied access to important colonial institutions, such as schools and colleges, which were paradoxically, becoming the training grounds for Caribbean nationalism as well. When they ultimately had access to colonial education and the English language, they faced a corresponding erosion of the linguistic base of traditional Indian culture (114). Gikandi quotes Sam Selvon to foreground the sense of displacement among Indians in the Caribbean: “As for the Caribbean man of East Indian descent, he was something else. He wasn’t accepted by those from India, and he wasn’t wanted by the others because he wasn’t a black man so he couldn’t understand what was going on” (114). Gikandi suggests that Selvon shares Naipaul’s anxiety about place and culture, and writes about loss and alienation as symptoms of repressed desires for western modernity and colonial education, which was denied for so long to Indians, but which also alienated them from their Indian cultural practices. It seems to me that for Indian descendants of indentured laborers acculturation into the colonial system took precedence over anticolonial resistance for the former ensured economic and social survival.
cultural and economic development. Most often these assumptions align with Eurocentric ideologies of progress and middle class respectability. Ideas of personal progress through the accumulation of scholastic knowledge and personal wealth are constructed as much here as they are outside the school’s confines. The narrator suggests that the influence and role of the colonial school in shaping experiences of colonized subjects do not end with the end of one’s time there, but continues at home where the student works for exams, reads books and ponders about the lessons he learnt in the classroom.

In *The Enigma*, Naipaul depicts colonial mimicry by representing his narrator as a mimic man who internalizes colonial discourses at school. *The Enigma* delineates the effects of this internalization of English instruction on the colonized subject. The repetition and absorption of colonial ideologies engenders self and communal alienation, a splitting within the self, but I suggest that it also equips the colonized subject with the literary tools for analyzing Empire as an oppressive and exploitative institution. Naipaul associates a Universalist value and transcendental authority to the English text, as evident in his narrator’s desire to mold himself after the English writer and his imitation of English styles, but the result of this mimicry is portrayed as poor writing that signify frustrated attempts at writing. Thus he suggests that mimicry perpetuates further compliance with the colonizer’s dictates and engenders communal alienation and frustration. The narrator puts the English text on a pedestal confirming his position as an ardent imitator, but he also points out that he develops a critical insight and alternative knowledge over time and across spaces that allows him to question received knowledge and inflect it with other discourses and ideologies. Indeed, he points out that he even turns back to discourses that he had repressed in order to become a writer in the English
mode. Among the repressed discourses were the beliefs of his Hindu community. *The Enigma* concludes with the narrator reinscribing these in his narrative where he recognizes their potential for sustaining empowering conceptions of communal and individual identity in the face of displacement and death.

The narrator portrays how as a mimic man he associated English text with Universal Truth and transcendental authority but over time he learnt to adapt its conventions to portray his reality and history (Bhabha 108). He discovered that close imitation would only lead to frustration and realized that he would need to find a different form to portray his socio-cultural community. But he also realizes that his mimicry was developed under colonial conditions and was a consequence of his desire to survive imposed poverty. The narrator suggests that he has attempted to undo the adverse effects of his mimicry by allowing his repressed non-western beliefs and his burgeoning self-awareness about his colonialist upbringing to shape and guide his literary imagination. He believes that his forays into literature can be successful only when he appropriates the English language to address a reality and cultural context intimately known to him. But do these attempts and resolutions free him of his immersion in colonialist discourses? The novel suggests not, but nonetheless it provides an insight into the making of the fraught colonized intellectual. His articulation of colonial ambivalence is implicit in *the Enigma’s* narrative of the colonial mimic.
Chapter 2
Examining Native Collaboration and Mimicry in Amitav Ghosh’s *the Glass Palace*

The history of native collaboration in the British imperial armed forces of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been explored by only a handful of historians including Heather Streets and Pradeep Barua, but has received little attention from postcolonial scholars engaged with questions of colonial discourses and native mimicry. This history of native collaboration with the imperialist armed forces is crucial to understanding how Thomas Macaulay’s *Minute on Education* of 1836 produced English speaking official intermediaries between the British administrative government and the Indian masses and set the stage for the training of an entirely new kind of colonial subject who could be educated as a loyal, Anglicized soldier and an Indian military officer, and engage in modern warfare on behalf of the colonizers.

As Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* illustrates, in India, this project was undertaken by the Indian Military Academy, established in Dehradun in the late nineteenth century with the view of educating a class of Indians to fight on behalf of Empire as soldiers and officers in the British Indian Army. Hitherto soldiers had fought on behalf of the British Army, but had been rarely educated at British run military institutions. As Streets suggests, confronted with the threats of emerging nationalist struggles in India and Empire’s challenged global position, England’s imperialist regime had to consolidate its military prowess in the mid nineteenth century. This step necessitated the recruitment of native soldiers from the colonies, which in turn required their training and education in English discourses about manliness and loyalty to Empire. In addition, soldiers were to assimilate the colonalist discourse of martial races, which
implied that only certain ethnic and racial groups were suitable for conducting warfare on behalf of the English soldiers given their greater physical prowess compared with others. Sikhs, for instance, were depicted as more powerful than Marathas and Bengalis. Streets suggests that this dissemination of the discourse of martial races in particular was a crucial counterpoint to the claims for nationalist self-rule made by Indian educated elites, many of them from Bengal and Western India (161). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, in the face of global and internal conflicts, the colonial state contradicted these ideologies by offering recruitment and educational training to the purportedly weaker regional communities in India as well.

The presence of native soldiers in the British army is a disturbing phenomenon that suggests socio-cultural strife within the subject population and the willingness of many Indians to be educated at imperialist institutions. How do novelists writing at the onset of the twenty-first century look back on this history? How do they depict the colonizer’s education of a wide section of the colonized to be soldiers with a particular set of imperialist beliefs? What role does education play in manipulating the psychology of these men such that they display attitudes of “idealized loyalty” towards the English colonials? 7

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* represents the historical juncture when Indian soldiers were incorporated into the British Army and trained to fight both Indian dissenters and foreign armies outside India in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This chapter examines Ghosh’s representation of colonial education of Indians at elite

---

7 In *Martial Races*, Heather Streets suggests that Indians absorbed martial discourses that propounded an “image of idealized loyalty” to Empire and promoted “exclusionary recruiting policies”, according to which, only Sikhs and Gurkhas from northern India displayed masculine traits suitable for soldiering (157).
institutions like the Indian Military Academy. Ghosh addresses the effects of internalization of colonial discourses on colonized subjects by casting them within a narrative that traces their educational training at the military academy. The narrative depicts the adverse effects of their internalization of colonial discourses by representing their experiences. It suggests that of the significant effects of the dissemination of colonial discourses was the collaboration of Indians with Empire as officials on behalf of the colonial army.

Both Streets and Barua have noted that in the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, the British Empire consolidated its political sway over the South Asian subcontinent, by recruiting Indian men into the military. Ghosh portrays the stories of these men through the figure of Arjun in *The Glass Palace*. Arjun is a Bengali youth who joins the British army after undergoing training at the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun, India. In the colonial state’s discourse of martial races, Bengalis were depicted as effeminate and unfit for physical warfare. They were instead projected as erudite and therefore suitable for working as Babus in the administrative institutions of Empire. Over years, the discourse had become normalized and shaped the beliefs of many in the native population. Ghosh’s characterization foregrounds the constructedness of this discourse, and by extension exposes the constructed nature of other imperialist ideologies and assumptions that were projected as transcendental truths about native populations.

Science and anthropology, among other branches of socio-cultural analysis and empirical

---

8 As Streets suggests in *Martial Races*, Indian soldiers were present in large numbers in the British colonial army, mostly as members of supporting princely states, and in the armed forces that fought native dissenters in the 1857 Mutiny. In fact, the Mutiny was purportedly instigated by a number of disaffected Indian soldiers who rebelled against their British counterparts over dissatisfaction with pay and oversights of their religious customs. But only in the late nineteenth century did the English colonial state put into effect the resolve to educate and incorporate Indian men as imperial soldiers (25-8). Also see, Pradeep Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj* (31-33).
knowledge, aided the normalization of this discourse. It could be variously revised, ignored and supplemented by its creators to suit their needs. Arjun’s participation points to the change in the English policies of recruitment in the army, which began to induct Indians to posts of Army officers in the early twentieth century. But it also suggests the eager and willing participation of Indians in English pedagogical and military institutions. The narrator illustrates Arjun’s enthusiasm at his induction into the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun: “Ive got in! Ive got in! Arjun was dancing around the courtyard, dressed in his usual dirty vest and torn longyi, waving a letter in one hand… they’ve accepted me as an officer cadet” (257). As Arjun enthusiastically informs them about his recruitment, the other characters marvel at his recruitment:

They passed the letter from hand to hand, marveling at the fine stiff notepaper and the embossed emblem in the top right-hand corner. They could not have been more astonished if he’d announced that he’d sprouted wings or grown a tail. In Calcutta at that time, to join the army was almost unheard of. For generations, recruitment into the British Indian army had been ruled by racial policies that excluded most men in the country, including those from Bengal. Nor was it possible, until quite recently, for Indians to enter the army as commissioned officers. The founding of the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun dated back only five years and the fact that some of its seats were open to public examination had gone largely unnoticed…. But Arjun’s father was not at all displeased…This is a ready-made career…there’ll be an excellent pension. (257)

Early on, the narrator indicates that Arjun and his father regard the recruitment to the army academy as a sign of Arjun’s personal development. By charting his induction into a colonialist institution, which seems to offer Arjun opportunities for economic progress in the form of a “ready-made career” and a pension, the novel traces Arjun’s development from a young boy whose “slovenliness” and lazy nature compelled people to question if he was “ever going to make anything of himself” to an elite, Anglicized Army officer (256). The passage illustrates Arjun and his father’s relief and happiness at
receiving the authoritative letter from the colonial state about his induction into the Academy.

In addition, the passage historicizes the founding of the Military Academy in Dehradun, which was established in 1932 and the colonial state’s decision to induct Indians into the British Army. Arjun does not inform his family that he has taken the examinations, as he believes he will not be accepted. His acceptance to the Academy symbolizes the state’s revision of its racial policies. It offers Arjun a chance to prove his potential for self-advancement: “…everyone’s always saying I’ll never amount to anything- so I thought, all right, let’s see.”(257). The novel thus portrays Arjun’s self-perception that the British Army offers him opportunities for self-advancement.

His beliefs are undercut by his aunt Uma’s apprehensions. Uma wonders if Arjun is too young to join an institution that teaches men to be violent: “But he’s just a boy, and what if he gets injured? Or worse still?” (258). The narrator undercuts Arjun and his father’s joyous proclamations about Arjun’s guaranteed personal success by depicting Uma’s concern about Arjun’s safety in the army. Arjun’s father tells Uma that her concerns are baseless and she should think instead of the “status, [and] the prestige” entailed in his recruitment (258). The narrator informs us that Uma supports the Indian nationalists and joins the anticolonial movement for India’s independence. Unable to convince Arjun and his father about colonial violence, she can only warn them: “‘The Mahatma thinks that the country can only benefit from having men of conscience in the army. India needs soldiers who won’t blindly obey their superiors…”’ (258). Uma indirectly advises him to become a soldier with a “conscience” and to deter from blindly following the dictates of the colonizer. She supports Mahatma Gandhi’s policies of non-
violent protest against colonial rule, and accordingly warns Arjun against taking up arms against Indians: “she saw now that the Mahatma was decades ahead of her in his thinking” as he professed non violent protest as a medium of opposing imperialist rule rather than violent rebellion (254). The narrator portrays Gandhi’s views and Uma’s endorsement of his policies through her thoughts about the efficacy of nonviolent protest. She “remembered the words of Gandhi” who regarded “the movement against colonialism” as “an uprising of unarmed Indians against those who bore arms - both British and Indians” (254).

Ghosh thus portrays Uma as the voice of caution and indeed of conscience as she warns Arjun about the ethical implications of taking up arms against other Indians. She is also the embodiment of the nationalist “movement against colonization” in the work (254). Ghosh depicts her support of Gandhi as a signification of her commitment to the anticolonial movement of nonviolent protest against colonization. Indeed, Gandhi’s movement played a significant role in forcing the colonial state to transfer political power to Indians in 1947. More significantly, Uma focalizes Gandhi’s condemnation of the British Army’s deployment of Indian soldiers in the quelling of native rebellions across South Asia. She focalizes how Indian soldiers had successfully quelled several native uprisings against the annexing British in Burma. Her memories of the destruction and violence, which were perpetuated by the Indian soldiers in the British Army, frame her caution to Arjun:

…she saw now that a popular insurrection, inspired by legend and myth stood no chance of prevailing against a force such as the Empire- so skillful and ruthless in its deployment of its overwhelming power; so expert in the management of opinion. In retrospect it became clear that disarmed, technologically backward populations such as those of India and Burma could not hope to defeat by force a well-organized and thoroughly modern military power; that even if such an effort
The novel frames our perceptions of Arjun’s recruitment and feelings of joy within Uma’s cautious advice and references to Gandhi. Her historicization underscores the “ruthless” colonial state’s military prowess in the region and its possession of modernized weaponry for securing its political hegemony in South Asia. But more significantly, she wonders about its deployment of native soldiers to fight on the colonizer’s behalf. Again, Ghosh locates Arjun’s induction into the Indian Military Academy in 1932 within this historical context. As Uma suggests, Arjun joins at a time when Indians and Burmese were reeling from the sustained violence and oppression of the British colonial state, which had consolidated its colonial rule by inducting Indian soldiers in its army. Henceforth, the novel links Arjun’s training and development as a colonial official to colonialist violence.

Arjun’s experiences and struggles in particular become Ghosh’s narrative vehicles for portraying the internalization of the discourses of martial races among Indian soldiers at the Military Academy in Dehradun. The academy as Barua has suggested was established to “deliver a public school education on English lines for unmarried Indian and Anglo-Indian youths” and to impart military training along Eurocentric lines (33). In tracing Arjun’s internalization, the novel also historicizes the particular nature of instruction that was disseminated to the young Indians by British colonial officials. First, let us consider, Arjun’s internalization of colonialist discourses at the academy. Arjun’s letters to his sister Manju enable Ghosh to illustrate both the nature of military knowledge imparted at the institute and Arjun’s eager absorption of the instruction:
…we’re at our home station in Saharanpur… only difficult thing is getting up early to go to the parade ground for P.T. with the men. … we stroll around taking salutes and watching the NCOS as they put the men through their drills and their weapons training. But it takes only a couple of hours and then we change for breakfast, which is at nine (stacks of eggs, bacon and ham). Then some of us go to the orderly room just in case any of the men are brought in. Once in a while the signals officer takes us through the latest field codes, or else we get lessons in map-reading or double-entry book-keeping- that kind of thing. Then there’s lunch- and beer and gin if you want it… Later there’s usually time for a game of football with the men. … We call the mess the Nursery… because potted plants die the moment they are brought in…chaps say it’s because of the Dust of Colonels past… I look around and even now, after all these months here, I just can’t believe my luck. (260)

Arjun continues to display his happy surprise at his recruitment as he describes his training schedule to Manju. He suggests that while “weapon training” and the disciplining drills are an integral part of his education, the assimilation of particular eating and drinking habits also forms a crucial part of the lessons imparted at the academy. Arjun adopts the eating habits of the English officers. He and his fellow trainees play sports that have been introduced to the colony by British officers. In addition, they learn modern forms of accumulating data such as “map reading” and “double-entry book-keeping.” These skills comprise the colonizer’s technological knowledge and scientific modes of familiarizing the colonized landscape.9 Arjun thus reveals his internalization of both Anglicized behaviors and colonial knowledge, and disciplinary mechanisms at the Academy.10 The image of the dying plants is in stark

---

9 As Maria Misra suggests, “In [British] India, the chief tool of identity-shaping was held to be modern forms of governmentality. The census, map-making, history-writing, anthropology, linguistic research, early criminology, and medical intervention all had the power to categorize, harden, and ‘fix’ fuzzy identities of religion, caste, and community into rigid form (140). See Maria Misra, “Colonial Officers and Gentlemen: the British Empire and the Globalization of ‘Tradition’,” Journal of Global History (3) 2008, 135-161.

10 In Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson suggests that one of the consequences of the implementation of Thomas Macaulay’s “Minute on Education” was that it anglicized Indians. In other words, it transformed certain Indian subjects into “culturally English” people despite their irremediable colour and blood (91).
contrast to Arjun’s description of his development and education at the academy. The narrator has Arjun compare the academy’s mess to a “Nursery.” Arjun’s colleagues believe that the older colonial officials’ dust kills the plants. Through their description, the narrator suggests that imperialist officials are indeed implicated in perpetuating violence over all living things in the colonized region.

But the academy teaches other lessons as well. In another letter, Arjun reveals that he perceives the Jat regiment as his “home.” He historicizes his regiment and battalion, proudly informing Manju that this group of Indian soldiers had been faithful to the Empire in quelling several native rebellions in the past:

What I’m really chuffed about, though, is my battalion. Officially, we’re the 1/1 Jat Light Infantry… you’ll come across some ancient Colonel walrus who’ll still use our old name, which was ‘the Royal’. The story is that the battalion fought so well in the Mahratta wars that when Lord Lake reached the coast, he honoured us with a special title: The Royal Battalion… I and Hardy were looking at the battalion’s battle honours… the list was as long as my arm. During the Mutiny our troops stayed loyal- one of our companies was in the column that captured the old Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, at his hidy-hole at Humayun’s tomb. ….the Royal was in Burma during General Pendegrast’s advance on Mandalay and it fought so well that it came to be known as ‘journal sahib ki dyni haat ki paltan’- the general’s right-hand battalion.(262)

Arjun is “chuffed” about his battalion’s colonialist exploits and its legacy of imperialist support. He relays the popular stories that circulate at the academy and are narrated by colonial officials to students to instill a sense of pride and loyalty in them. Arjun displays his pride and pleasure at being part of the First Jat Battalion, which fought in Burma. He informs Manju that it had also been loyal to the British during the mutiny of 1857. As Arjun reads about the battalion’s history in the colonial account of “battle honours,” he encounters colonialist re-presentations of the event. It is written from the colonizer’s perspective. In proudly describing it, Arjun indicates his identification with the colonizer.
He unquestioningly absorbs colonial discourses. Arjun’s description also suggests that colonial historians who produce the account of honors appropriate the narrative of Indian rebellions against Empire and recast it as a story about British power and native inferiority in the region. This official colonial discourse is disseminated to the soldiers and is an integral part of the academy’s curriculum.

Ghosh narrates Arjun’s development and experiences at the military academy to represent the links between colonial education and native collaboration with Empire. By representing Arjun’s letter, Ghosh undercores his mimicry of the colonizer. His repetition of the colonizer’s description signifies his assimilation of colonialist ways of seeing. Indeed, Arjun’s focalization enables Ghosh to underscore the connections between the internalization of the colonizer’s discourse and the mimicking native subject’s direct involvement in Empire. Arjun’s description of the mutiny implicates him in supporting imperialist policies of the British Empire. Arjun absorbs the colonizer’s language and derisive description of the Mughal King and in the process challenges the traditional structures of pre-colonial India, re-placing the linguistic registers that were conventionally and traditionally used to address native princely rulers with colonialist forms. Rather than subverting the colonial state’s authority or wresting its power to historicize India’s political past, Arjun echoes its colonialist sentiments about the Indian rulers.

Through his representation of Arjun’s training, Ghosh represents the colonized subject’s assimilation of the colonizer’s discourses as one of the crucial effects of colonial education. Arjun undergoes a “mental miscegenation” at the Military Academy as he mimics the language of his superiors (Anderson 91). He mimics the idiomatic
English of his colonial supervisors. To Manju, it is “unfamiliar, idiomatic English, with
words of slang” that she does not recognize (259). Arjun’s cousin, Dinu notes that other
Indian trainees at Arjun’s mess also speak idiomatic English, replete with slang words
such as “chap” and “ragging”, and assume particularly Anglicized identities. As Dinu
observes Arjun, he realizes that they perform particular roles that seem to empower them
and make them resemble their English superiors. Thus Arjun becomes “a Ladies’ Man”
while Hardy becomes a “Spit- and- Polish perfectionist” (278).

Ghosh charts Dinu’s impressions of the soldiers to direct our attention to the
performance entailed in the assumption of an Anglicized identity. Arjun and his peers
take great pains to portray their successful imitation of the colonizer. Dinu realizes that
“their assessments were so exaggerated that they seemed to be inventing versions of
themselves for collective consumption” (278). He observes that while physical training
makes them Anglicized soldiers, their adoption of particular behaviors and actions and
heightened performance signify their mimicry of the colonizer: “He’d regarded a
soldier’s training as being… physical, a matter of the body. It took just one conversation
to show him that he had been wrong” (277). He also notices that Arjun and his fellow
soldiers take pleasure in displaying a camaraderie that is not meaningful but premised on
exchanging jokes and “mucking” around (277). His description betrays his skepticism
about Arjun’s sense of pride in serving the battalion: “These paper thin portraits were a
part of their collective lore of camaraderie” (278). Their self-conception is not based on a
deep sense of socio-cultural affiliation. Rather as Dinu observes, it is the product of
hurling jokes at each other and their common display of their mimicry.
More significantly, the narrator suggests that their sense of affinity also arises from their feelings of being more progressive than other Indians. Arjun informs Dinu that the institute symbolizes a decisive challenge to archaic Indian traditions: “Where else in India would you come across a group such as ours—where region and religion don’t matter—where we can all drink together and eat beef and pork and think nothing of it?” (278). But Dinu undercuts Arjun’s proud claims about his education and self-transformation through his training at the academy. As he listens to Arjun’s description of the battalion’s “‘entrainment’ routines with as much pride as if he had physically conducted each soldier around”, Dinu concludes that Arjun acquires satisfaction from “working on details of plans that had been dictated by others—not necessarily people either, but manuals of procedure” (278). Dinu wonders if all Arjun and his peers do is to follow manuals of rules and regulations devised by his superiors. Dinu’s opinions evoke Uma’s earlier warning to Arjun against blindly following his superior’s orders. Indeed, by casting Dinu’s observations of Arjun’s actions and beliefs, the novel suggests that Arjun does not heed Uma’s advice. He takes pride in blindly assimilating the colonizer’s instructions. The novel sets the stage for Arjun’s future involvement in a battle against the natives, for if Arjun refrains from listening to Uma, he is only too eager to fight on behalf of Empire in the South Asian region.

Ghosh’s characters thus observe Arjun’s development into a mimicking Anglicized soldier. Ghosh underscores the transformative effects of Arjun’s colonial education. Uma’s advice seems to be more of a prophecy, as Arjun becomes the kind of soldier she warns him against. Arjun himself draws attention to his mimicry. Repeatedly in his letters, he compares his position at the academy to a student in training. He writes
about his days as a “gentleman–cadet” and of the “lashings” of sandwiches, as well as of
the transformation of the name of his compatriot, Hardayal Singh into Hardy (259).
Hardayal becomes Hardy just as Buckland becomes Bucky. The Anglicized name Hardy
suggests the ease with which the training Indians absorb Anglicized nomenclature, which
also seems to signify to them their modernization. In addition, Arjun’s reference to his
professor as “Bucky” suggests that an informal atmosphere is established at the
institution where the lecturing authority encourages casual relations with students and
possesses an intimate knowledge of his regiment.

Through his representation of Arjun and his peers, as well as through the portrayal
of Uma and Dinu’s beliefs, Ghosh charts the process through which Arjun constructs a
particular image of the elite army officer for himself. Ghosh suggests that the suppression
of familiar socio-cultural affiliations for an externally imposed yet desired western
context, entailed in this performative undertaking of new identities, leads to the constant
espousal of the external as intimate and intrinsic among Arjun and his peers. It entails
both the repetition of certain non-native acts and behaviors as one’s own, and the
continued insistence that those are endemic to one’s selfhood and cultural milieu. It also
entails the disavowal of native modes of being.

Arjun displays this disavowal of native socio-cultural discourses through the
adoption of colonialist discourses of Empire’s civilizing mission. Arjun believes that by
absorbing the colonizer’s linguistic modes of representation, he becomes modernized and
civilized. His modernized outlook is evident in Arjun’s lack of deference or mourning
for the last Mughal king. It is also evident to him in his consumption of meat and alcohol,
which signifies not just the aping of English officials but also his modernization. Thus
after “a whisky or two,” Arjun boasts about being a “free” Indian: “…we’re the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we’re the first Indians who are not weighed down by the past” (279). To Arjun, this clash of local and western modes of eating and speaking heralds a modernized outlook among Indians. He regards changing food habits, especially the imbibing of meat, as indicative of his rapid modernization but also as suggestive of his break with traditional eating rituals and behaviors, which he regards as archaic and old-fashioned: “Every meal at an officer’s mess, Arjun said, was an adventure, a glorious infringement of taboos. They ate foods they had never touched at home… every mouthful had a meaning- each represented an advance toward the evolution of a new, more complete kind of Indian” (278). To Arjun, the defiance implicit in the consumption of foods that had been traditionally connected to the dilution of one’s religious identity suggests his transcendence of his traditional affiliations. It implies to him both a break with an archaic past and his modernity. His comments offend Dinu who points out that “It’s not what you eat and drink that make you modern…” (279).

Dinu challenges Arjun’s notions of modernity. But Arjun disregards his warning preferring to regard his assimilation and proximity to the British officials as emblematic of his modernity. Indeed, Dinu believes that men like Arjun thought that only by working closely with the British could they transform into westernized and progressive Indians:

Dinu understood that it was through their association with Europeans that Arjun and his fellow-officers saw themselves as pioneers. They knew that to most of their compatriots the West was a distant abstraction; even though they might know themselves to be ruled by England, very few Indians had ever actually set eyes on an Englishman and fewer still had occasion to speak to one. The English lived in their own enclaves and followed their own pursuits: most of the day-to-day tasks of ruling were performed by Indians. In the army on the other hand, Indian officers were a band of the elect; they lived in proximity with
westerners...in this, their situation was unlike that of any of the Empire’s other subjects. (279)

Dinu focalizes Arjun’s self-perceptions about his proximities to the British colonials. He wonders whether for Arjun, modernity merely means his affiliations with the colonizers. Dinu points out that for men like Arjun, the proximities suggest the success of their attempts at assimilating colonial discourses.\footnote{In Along the Archival Grain, Anne Stoler points out that Empire and England’s imperialist government conventionally associated themselves with rationalist discourses and the dissemination of Reason, order and justice to seemingly backward populations. These subjects were imagined as being inclined to deploy emotions and feelings in their thinking and conduct rather than logical reasoning. Of course as Stoler points out, affects were an integral part of the colonial state’s political operations as well. Their rationalist discourses were often based on emotional responses and the cultivation of certain sensibilities about native contexts (58-9).}

Dinu observes that Arjun’s sense of superiority vis a vis other native subjects also emerges from his proximity to the British. By charting Dinu’s perceptions, Ghosh suggests that Arjun internalizes the discourse of native inferiority, as he believes that only the interactions with the seemingly superior English colonials can modernize the otherwise inferior natives.

Ghosh explores the history of natives’ loyalty to Empire, often manifest in acts of collaboration, through his representation of Arjun’s thoughts about empire. Through his portrayal of Arjun, he depicts the psychological contours of the loyal native subject of Empire by linking loyalty to the native’s desire to assimilate western practices and Eurocentric discourses of rational progress and enlightenment ideologies.

The novel suggests that one of the ways in which loyalty became part of colonial discourse was the conferring of awards for native displays of this affect. Arjun mentions the various medals awarded to the Jat regiment, such as the, “Victoria Cross from the Somme; two military crosses for putting down the Arab rebellion in Mesopotamia in
‘18’’ and the OBEs, and DSOs from the war with the “Boxer rebels in China,” in his letters (262). These adorn the Academy’s walls, which functions as a colonial museum that cultivates and preserves the evidence of the British Army’s exploits across South Asia as emblematic of its historical legacy in the region. The medals lining the walls of the academy serve as symbols of native loyalty for subsequent generations of soldiers who, like Arjun, eke inspiration from these artifacts. In additions, the medals monumentalize the past, and confer traditional value and “hoariness” on both native loyalty and Empire, making it a desirable institution with far reaching power and influence that rewarded bravery and self-sacrifice and seem to suggest to Arjun that he has joined an institution with a grand past and traditions (Hobsbawm 9).

The display of artifacts at museums was a political project that signified the process of “political inheriting” through which British colonials claimed ownership rights over India’s socio-cultural and political institutions by seeming to preserve the artifacts that appeared to be crucial signifiers of India’s past (Anderson 178). At the Academy, the display of artifacts, particularly the medals, which span the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, enables colonial officials to confer historical continuity to Empire. The medals function as signifiers of the reward for loyalty to Empire and metonymically evoke a legacy of self-sacrifice on the behalf of Indian soldiers for their British masters. By evoking the legacy of native service in the British Army in other colonized spaces across Asia, they also function as signifiers of the Indian soldier’s official induction into Empire.

Arjun’s description of the medals indicates that as objects that are meant for display and visual observation, the medals possess crucial symbolic value for both the
recipient and the conferring power. They symbolize the transcendental image of the British Empire both to the British officials and to the recipients. Years after these honors have been conferred they continue to function as emblems of power and a grand past of bravery that needs to be reestablished in the present, and signify particular ideologies that embed them. Bernard Cohn points out that artifacts like medals functioned as “entitlements” or awards that had been part of the traditional state interactions in India, and were gradually appropriated by the British. According to him, “the basis of entitlements became specified by acts of loyalty, outstanding and long–term service in the government” among other things (181).

As “entitlements,” the medals carry cognitive import in that they carry particular knowledge about duties and rights between the recipient and the conferring authority. Ghosh’s narrative suggests that the British intended them to connote native loyalty to Empire, both at home in India and abroad in other colonial spaces. They also carry political and cultural implications, ideological beliefs, and a certain implicit contractual understanding about affiliations between the recipient and the conferring source. Indeed, as Cohn has suggested, distinct epistemologies and narratives are associated with these visible signifiers of loyalty and service. The associative values may change over time, but they often become congealed as traditional ideas and values due to their repeated use and circulation. Accordingly, Arjun continues to draw inspiration from the medals in the 1930s, which signify native service in the First World War.

The medals enable Arjun to consolidate his loyalty to Empire and his sense of privilege as a member of the Empire’s army, in which he and Hardy are the “first Indian

---

officers.” He regards it as “a huge responsibility” to be “representing the whole of the country”(262). The medals thus suggest to Arjun the Empire’s capacity to provide him with access to other spaces, socio-cultural paradigms, and globalized contexts, rather than parochial ones within which to display personal power and potential. Thus Arjun seems to consolidate a sense of an empowered self, or at least a promise for future self-empowerment and movement, from these visible testimonies of Empire’s power, such as the medals. They consolidate, as well as signify, a particular discourse of colonial supremacy of Empire, its geographical expanse and power and its magnanimity towards its loyal members. In addition, the medals signify a history of travels by army men across the globe to foreign locales that were part of the British Empire. They produce a particular discourse that the British were also representing in official histories and textual modes of representations. Natives imbibed the discourses whether they were symbolically manifest in artifacts and objects on visual display, or in texts.

Through his depiction of Arjun’s response to the medals, Ghosh thus suggests that visible objects like medals were as relevant as the lectures given by the visiting British colonels, and are significant “forms of knowledge” through which the British controlled and modified the discourses and beliefs of the colonized. 13 Like artifacts in a museum, they informed people about the history of the institution, its values and modes of being, its strengths and attractions and drew responses of support from the colonized.

Thus the novel repeatedly charts Arjun’s development as an Anglicized soldier by depicting his internalization of colonial discourses. 14 Other characters variously advice

---

14 In Black Skin, White Masks, speaking of the colonized black man in the Antilles, Fanon suggests that his internalization of Euorocentric ideologies is engendered by his absorption of the colonizer’s language. He
Arjun and question his perceptions about the British. But Arjun refuses to heed their advice. By charting the thoughts of characters like Uma, the novel links Arjun’s burgeoning affiliation with the British colonizer to the history of colonialist violence. Indeed, his internalization reminds readers of Uma’s belief that Empire consolidated its power in the region through the “control over opinion.” Empire controls the opinions of soldiers and officers like Arjun who train to fight colonial battles against dissenting natives and absorb the beliefs of their colonial officials. At the academy, Arjun learns to celebrate imperialist victories and colonial violence over rebelling natives.

But Ghosh is not merely interested in charting Arjun’s physical training and his assimilation of technological skills and imperialist ideologies. Ghosh also aims to chart the effects of Arjun’s training as a violent soldier on his self-perceptions and identity. The narrator suggests that the internalization of traits that signify his identity as a “New Indian” allows Arjun to adopt a hypermasculine identity: “…these were small but essential battles and they tested not just their manhood, but also their fitness to enter the class of officers”(279). Arjun becomes Ghosh’s emblematic figure for depicting the ways in which colluding subjects, in particular men, adopted colonialist practices and discourses to not only become modern but also regain what they perceived as their lost manhood. Eating new, western foods then performs a pivotal semantic role as it allows Arjun and other soldiers to suggest a new self-identity, a different kind of soldier who

who has “mastered the language” of the colonizer, becomes “almost white” (20-1). Fanon points out that the internalization of linguistic modes is but a first step to imitating the colonizer’s modes of being, supporting his practices and discourses, and adopting his ideologies of race and civilizational progress. As my first chapter has delineated the internalization of colonial and imperial ideologies is precipitated among other spaces, at the colonial school and educational institutions. In the Glass Palace, Amitav Ghosh depicts colonized subjects imbibing colonialist discourses at the military academy, an institute that trains the imperialist soldier in modern warfare against purportedly inferior colonized subjects.
signifies not just the ability to fight, but is an educated gentlemanly figure, in other words, an officer.

The characterization of Arjun thus enables Ghosh to chart the possible reasons for the internalization of colonial discourses and practices among several elite Indian men in the early twentieth century. Ghosh’s narrative suggests that men like Arjun desired to prove themselves as modern, westernized Indians who could, when the time came, take over the reins of rule from their colonial masters: “They had to prove, to themselves as well as to their superiors, that they were eligible to be rulers, to qualify as members of an elite…” (279). Internalization of colonial discourses was already implicit in their belief that the native community was archaic. The absorption of the white military officers’ discourses was to further consolidate their difference from the archaic native community as well as their relative superiority over them. In turn it signified to them their capability to rule over the natives.

Arjun ascribes to the myth perpetuated by the colonial establishment that the process of economic and social reform and modernization in India, of which military training comprised a crucial part, would enable it to reconstitute its seemingly run down

---

15 In the Intimate Enemy, Ashis Nandy points out that native modes of being and beliefs were increasingly represented as effeminate, pacifist and traditional in colonial discourse, and were often negated by those colonized subjects who “sought a hyper-masculinity” over seemingly passive and effeminate native attitudes. This was also an exercise in regaining self-esteem under an oppressive colonial regime (52 Nandy).

16 In Masks of Conquest, examining a range of essays written by Indian students at colonial academic institutions in Calcutta in the nineteenth century, Gauri Viswanathan points out that “English literary instruction, with its pedagogical imperative of nurturing a historically minded youth,” reinserted the Indian reader into the course of development of civilized man, and enabled him in “recovering his true essence and identity from the degradation to which it had become subject through native despotism” (141). She points out that “English education cleared the path to a perception of the British government as a fair one promoting national prosperity and justice” (141).
political system as a self-governing nation state. The colonial state repeatedly represented Indians as incapable of self-rule, given their propensity for certain behavioral modes of being such as deviousness, lethargy and naiveté. At the same time, as Gauri Viswanathan points out, English education was seen as propelling Indians, despite their racial inferiority, toward civility and modernity. Arjun absorbs the colonizer’s discourse of racial difference and native inferiority. He also internalizes the discourse of the backward native community, which was governed by strife and archaic beliefs. He regards the jettisoning of native cultural modes for the western ones as proof of the fact that his compatriots in the army and he were the “first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free” and civilized. He thinks that by partaking beef and smoking cigars, that is, by performing certain acts of imbibing, he can achieve the same social status as the British: “They had to prove to themselves as well as to their superiors, that they were eligible to be rulers, to qualify as members of an elite: that they had visions enough to rise above the ties of their soil, to overcome the responses instilled in them by their upbringing” (279). Arjun’s belief that his training at the academy will enable him and others to transcend the “ties of their soil” indicates his unquestioning assimilation of colonial assumptions about native character and habits.

Ghosh suggests that Arjun perceives himself as a future political leader of India. Indeed, Arjun seems to believe that the British were training educated, elite Indians and

---

17 In Nation and its Fragments, Partha Chatterjee suggests this promise clashed with the colonial state’s discourses of the exclusivity of the modernist paradigm to Western contexts and of the native’s inherent racial inferiority and incapacitation for reform (18).
18 In Masks of Conquest, examining a range of essays written by Indian students at colonial academic institutions in Calcutta in the nineteenth century, Gauri Viswanathan points out that “English literary instruction, with its pedagogical imperative of nurturing a historically minded youth,” reinserted the Indian reader into the course of development of civilized man, and enabled him in “recovering his true essence and identity from the degradation to which it had become subject through native despotism” (141). She points out that “English education cleared the path to a perception of the British government as a fair one promoting national prosperity and justice.”
preparing them for self-governance. Here again, the reader is reminded of Uma and Dinu’s observations. Arjun’s paper-thin self-portraits lack any substance as he links the ability to self-govern to his mimicry of the colonizer’s speech and behaviors. As Dinu suggests, Arjun is devoid of any meaningful substance as he thinks that mere Anglicization signifies his political expediency. Worst of all, through his implicit espousal of violence, he deviates from the Gandhian belief that non-violent protest would emancipate Indians from the British Empire. The novel reminds its readers, most of who are aware of the success of Gandhi’s non-violent movement against British rule in India, of Uma’s description of Gandhi’s beliefs: “She remembered the words of the Mahatma… that the movement against colonialism was an uprising of unarmed Indians against those who bore arms- both Indians and British- and that its chosen instruments were the weapons of the weaponless, its very weakness its source of strength” (254). Uma’s perceptions suggest that men like Arjun were taking up weapons against “weaponless” colonized subjects. The novel underscores Arjun’s communal alienation and points to his burgeoning insensitivity to the suffering of weaponless colonized subjects. It underscores the irony manifest in Arjun’s naïve belief that he is the New Indian who will usher India’s modernity and represent Indians as a political leader; as an “armed” Indian he represents the life destroying forces of Empire rather than the life giving forces of Gandhi’s anti-colonial followers.

As a historical novel, the Glass Palace assumes its readers’ familiarity with India’s independence struggle against the British Empire. Arjun’s internalization of colonialist ideologies emerges against this historical backdrop. Ghosh intersperses chapters that delineate Arjun’s internalization and training at the academy with those that
describe the nationalist struggles against Empire. These chapters also portray characters that question Arjun’s imperialist support and attempt to enlighten him about his betrayal of the nationalist cause. For instance, in chapter twenty-four, one of Arjun’s friends encounters “an eminent congressman” at a wedding. The narrator points out that this figure is dressed like “Jawaharlal Nehru, in a khaki cap and a long black sherwani.” Unlike Arjun’s friend who is dressed in “the uniform of the 14th Punjab Regiment”, he is dressed in the traditional garb of Indian nationalists. His clothes signify his allegiances to the anticolonial nationalists. The politician asks the soldier about the significations of his imperialist uniform: “‘And how does it feel,’ the politician said, turning to the soldier with a sneer,’ for an Indian to be wearing that uniform?’” (287). The politician reminds the soldier of the ironies entailed in his representation of a colonial regime that oppressed his own community.

The novel also depicts other native subjects in stances of condemning the Indian soldiers’ imperialist support. These characters underscore the adverse effects of colonial education on mimicking subjects like Arjun. The narrator points out that other nationalists from Burma and India criticize Arjun about his colonialist affiliations: “Arjun found himself facing a strangely assorted crowd of Buddhist monks, Burmese student-activists and Congress Party workers. The congressmen had bitter memories of their confrontations with Indian soldiers and policemen. They began to berate Arjun for serving in an army of occupation” (287). When Arjun retorts that he is “here to defend” them, they question whether he is defending them from other Indians or from the colonizers (287). The Burmese students call his battalion “the army of slaves-marching off to catch some slaves for their masters” (288). These scenes perform varied functions
in the novel. First, they counter Arjun’s belief that Indians were divided. As the “assorted group” suggests, the nationalist movement brought together Indians and other colonized subjects across South Asia from diverse local communities and economic backgrounds to unite in their struggle against Empire.

Second, the scene suggests that a number of native subjects resent colonial rule and protest against it. They follow Gandhi’s advice of non-violent protest against Empire. Calling him a slave, they also warn Arjun to question his colonial affiliations. Moreover, as the passage suggests, these subjects represent the anticolonial protestors who question colonialist claims. Uma points out that their opinions echo, “what most people in the country think” to underscore Arjun’s alienation from his native community and his collusion with Empire (288). Ghosh uses these scenes to underscore the history of nationalist protest against Empire but also to suggest that Arjun has considerable opportunities to question his collaboration. But as the narrative suggests, he chooses not to grapple with their condemnation of his collusion with Empire.

These scenes then enable Ghosh to chart the opportunities for self-awareness that confront the protagonist at an early stage in his development as the colonial soldier. As Arjun refuses to effectively use these opportunities to question his affinities and wonder about the history of imperialist violence, he seems destined for self-destruction, suggested by the narrative’s depiction of his participation in the colonizer’s war in the latter half of the novel.

Ghosh depicts imperialist violence in the first part of the narrative. He depicts the Empire’s plundering of Burma’s teak forests, the British annexation of Mandalay and the exile of the Burmese king to India to underscore the violence perpetuated by Empire on
the region’s ecology, socio-cultural practices and traditional communities. Arjun’s collaboration with the British and his training unfold against this backdrop of colonialist plunder as well. The novel suggests that Arjun’s self-conception as a New Indian committed to India’s progress is misguided if we take the violence and economic exploitation of Empire into account. Arjun seems intent to commit violence on others and himself through his refusal to question colonial discourses. At one point, Arjun and Uma confront a protest against Indian recruitment in the Allied forces:

A marcher dropped a pamphlet through the car window. Arjun…glanced down at the front page. There were questions from Mahatma Gandhi and a passage that said: ‘Why should India, in the name of freedom, come to the defense of this Satanic Empire, which is itself the greatest menace to liberty that the world has ever known?’

Arjun was extremely irritated by this time… ‘Idiots’ he said…. (292)

Arjun’s irritation at the protesters betrays his unease about the nationalist protest against Empire. By portraying the marchers, the novel portrays counterdiscourses that challenge Arjun’s imperialist notions of a benevolent Empire that is committed to ensuring the civic liberties of native subjects. Later, Ghosh depicts Arjun as a silent listener of a dialogue between Uma and Dinu about the violence perpetrated by Empire. Uma reminds a skeptical Dinu that all imperialist nations are implicated in the perpetuation of violence in the Second World War. She tells him that the British Empire is as evil as their adversaries, the fascists. She points out that the nationalist protest against the British is premised on the recognition that European imperialists are responsible for the death of “tens of millions of people.” She informs Dinu “we must not be deceived by the idea that imperialism is an enterprise of reform” (294). Yet again in the novel, Uma counters some of the beliefs that Arjun holds about imperialist benevolence and its civilizing mission.
She portrays Empire as both an exploitative regime and a ruthless economic enterprise, which the first half of the narrative has already depicted. Uma asserts that “it is simply mistaken to imagine that colonialists sit down and ponder the rights and wrongs of the societies they want to conquer: that is not why empires are built” (295).

Arjun does not grapple with the implications of the pamphlet’s question about Indian participation in the Second World War, choosing instead to ignore Gandhi’s question about the ethical implications of aiding a colonial power. He ignores Uma’s critique as well by deciding to fight in the Second World War.

Later the narrator portrays Arjun’s reactions to the narratives of native rebellion within the British Indian army to indicate his refusal to wonder about the rising discontent among Indian soldiers. He hears stories about soldiers refusing to participate in the Second World War. The narrator points out that in India, Arjun hears rumors about “undercurrents of unrest within the battalion” in Singapore, where “an Indian soldier had inexplicably shot an officer and committed suicide” (318). At this point, the narrator portrays Arjun and Hardy’s encounters with incidents of anticolonial dissension within the Indian Army:

Certain officers of his battalion had been heard to say that Indians should refuse to participate in this war: that this was a competition for supremacy among nations who believed it to be their shared destiny to enslave other peoples- England, France, Germany… All that was done by way of disciplinary action was to send one of the battalion’s junior officers to India…the officer who was singled out for censure was a Muslim…Muslim soldiers proceeded to lay down their weapons,… The next day many of the battalion’s Hindu soldiers also laid down their weapons… That Hindu and Muslim troops could act together came as a shock to the High Command….A platoon of British soldiers…was sent in to surround the mutinous England.

Kumar concluded the story with an offhand observation: ‘Going overseas has disturbing effects on the troops,’ he said, shrugging his soldiers.
‘Perhaps it won’t happen to us,’ said Hardy hopefully.’ There’s no certainty that we’ll be sent abroad…

Arjun was quick to challenge this.’ And what would that do for us? He said. ‘For you and me? We’ll sit out the war and our careers will be dead on their feet. I think I’d rather take my chances abroad.’ (318-320)

The narrator historicizes anticolonial resistance within the Indian army to counter official histories of colonialist hegemony by foregrounding accounts of dissent among colonized natives. Moreover, he also suggests that by the late 1930s, Indian soldiers were beginning to question their collaboration as they wondered if they were pawns in the contest for power among imperialist nations. Kumar informs the characters about native protests as well as the colonial state’s attempts to quell native rebellion. The narrator suggests that, to the British officials, these rebellions were evocative of the mutiny of 1857. The measures taken to quell the rebellion reflect their anxieties about dissension within the Indian Army. The passage also enables Ghosh to underscore Arjun’s misguided belief that the British army would ensure his personal progress.

As the novel progresses, Arjun alienates himself from native cultural discourses and practices and transforms into an imperialist colluder who is willing to take up arms on behalf of Empire. Despite Kumar’s delineation of the adverse effects of overseas deployment, Arjun wishes to be sent abroad as it will further his career plans. Later, when Hardy informs him of their mobilization orders, Arjun asks Hardy: “Aren’t you glad the waiting’s over? Hardy?” (330). But Ghosh depicts Hardy as full of apprehensions about his participation, thereby undercutting Arjun’s enthusiasm. Indeed, Hardy warns Arjun to wonder about whose interests are served by their participation in the Second World War. Ghosh again represents Arjun’s anxious refusal to grapple with Hardy’s questions. He asks Hardy, “What are you trying to get at?” and later points out to the increasingly
self-critical Hardy that “staying here wouldn’t do much for your career” (330). Arjun sees the war as an opportunity for personal success as an officer.

Ghosh portrays other events as well that serve as opportunities for Arjun and Hardy to question their affiliations with Empire. En route to Malay and Singapore, they face racial discrimination as a British officer calls Hardy a “stinking nigger” Hardy suggests protesting but Arjun tells him to think about the consequences of complaining about a superior British officer (339). Later they encounter further episodes of racial bias in Malaya and Singapore.

These incidents of racial discrimination and observations of colonial oppression perpetuate a crisis in Arjun’s self-perception as a colonial officer. As he grows in experience, he begins to question the discourses of his imperialist educators. Indeed, the narrative portrays how the journey to Malay signifies a turning point in his life and his beliefs. Ghosh portrays the move to Malay as the starting point of Arjun’s personal crisis. At a distance from India, both Arjun and Hardy analyze their country’s poverty as the consequence of years of servitude under the British. The narrator portrays their shock at the poverty of Indians in the Malay plantations:

They were astonished at the difference between the plantations’ ordered greenery and the squalor of their coolie lines. Hardy once remarked on the starkness of the contrast and Arjun responded by pointing out that in India, they would have taken such poverty for granted… This thought made them both cringe in shame. It was as though they were examining their own circumstances for the first time, in retrospect; as though the shock of travel had displaced an indifference that had been inculcated in them since their earliest childhood.

Other shocks awaited. Arjun got into an argument with a shopkeeper and found himself being called Klang- to his puzzlement. Later, enquiring about the meaning of the word, he discovered that it was a derogatory reference to the sound of chains worn by the earliest Indian workers who were brought to Malaya. (346)
Arjun and Hardy realize that their country’s poverty was the cause of colonial exploitation. As they observe the laboring coolies, they are reminded of the Indians who lived under similar circumstances of subservience back home. The narrator implies that the scene makes them aware of their indifference to their poverty and their status as elite men. They realize that they have failed to analyze the connections between their country’s decrepit state and imperial rule. Later, a Malay shopkeeper abuses him. The narrative charts Arjun’s gradual discovery of his own subservient status as a colonized subject.

Ghosh thus links Arjun’s burgeoning self-awareness about his subject position as a colonial officer with his observations and experiences abroad. Other incidents too contribute to Arjun’s self-knowledge and his understanding of his country’s colonized status. In the next few lines, the narrator portrays Kishan Singh asking Arjun about the meaning of “Mercenary” (346). Arjun informs Kishan that the word applies to a soldier who fights in exchange for money. The question troubles Arjun who wonders if the word applies to all soldiers in modern armies. The narrative portrays his inner turmoil and his justifications that the word does not apply to his own job as a soldier. Nonetheless, the narrator points out, “It was Arjun himself who now came to be troubled by the answer he had given his batman.” Arjun wonders, “Why did the word have the sting of an insult?” (347). This scene charts Arjun’s increasing inner turmoil in the form of doubts about his participation in imperialist violence and his role as a soldier. Arjun applies the word to his own position as a soldier in the British Army. Ghosh’s narrator doesn’t specify but it seems that Arjun begins to wonder if he is fighting for an ethical cause or if he is fighting for personal gain.
Indeed, at this point in the novel, Ghosh portrays a shift in Arjun’s self-assessment as varied incidents and experiences undercut his self-confidence as a colonial soldier. He also charts the decline in Arjun’s self-assertive confidence about his career prospects as a soldier in the British Indian Army: “Was it because soldiering was not just a job after all, as he had taught himself to believe? That to kill without conviction violated some deep and unalterable human impulse?” (347). The narrator depicts these doubts to suggest Arjun’s increasing uneasiness about his affiliations with the colonizers and the ethical implications of his professional obligations. Arjun begins to wonder about his role in perpetuating violence over others, something Uma has warned him against.

The representation of Arjun’s inner turmoil enables Ghosh to chart the burgeoning of Arjun’s self-critical awareness about his collaboration. Arjun also reflects about his unquestioning internalization of colonialist discourses, which perpetuated a sense of privilege in him and his peers:

Arjun was embarrassed to think that he’d allowed himself to go off at the deep end. It was as though he were a child who’d taken umbrage at the discovery that he’d spoken prose all his life.

These experiences were so peculiar, so provocative of awkward emotions, that Arjun and the other officers could rarely bring themselves to speak of them. They had always known their country to be poor, yet they had never imagined themselves to be part of that overt: they were the privileged, the elite. The discovery that they were poor too came as a revelation. …a grimy curtain of snobbery had prevented them from seeing what was plainly before their eyes- that although they had never been hungry, they too were impoverished by the circumstances of their country; that such impressions as they’d had of their own wellbeing were delusions, compounded out of the unimaginable extremity of their homeland’s poverty. (348)

The narrator depicts Arjun’s thoughts to suggest his attempts to grapple with his earlier blindness to his country’s poverty. Arjun wonders if he has evaded wondering about the
links between Empire and India’s poverty due to his own relative affluence and comforts. He grapples with the shock of realizing that he shares his country’s miseries as a colonized subject. Ghosh seems to chart the burgeoning of a nationalist consciousness in Arjun. Rather than seeing himself as a solitary subject who will achieve personal success through his participation in the British Indian Army, Arjun begins to wonder if this belief itself suggests a “monumental inwardness” (349).

At one point in the novel, Arjun tells Hardy that he had joined the army because he wanted to be a “sahib” like the British officials, and partake of the power that comes from the cognition by another subject of one’s powerful position (438). It was the belief in his superiority and social distance from the uneducated masses that had allowed him to identify himself as a Sahib, the Indian equivalent of the English figure of the gentleman, and had allowed him to overcome his fear of falling back into his native modes of being. This desire to become an Anglicized native distances him from men like Kishan Singh, his batman, who served the army but had not undergone the stringent pedagogical training of the military academy, and did not desire European modernity as a desired mode of being. They had for that reason preserved some of their indigenous socio-cultural structures of kinship and knowledge. These men possessed links with the Indian culture and their native modes of being in ways that Arjun does not. Arjun grapples with his dehumanization, which Hardy points at as well.

Kishan further unseats Arjun’s colonialist affiliations. Ghosh portrays Kishan as a man who does not wholeheartedly absorb colonial ideologies and complies out of fear for his life. His compliance is also an effect of his economic dependency on the state. Kishan becomes the tool through which Ghosh re-presents colonial violence. Arjun’s beliefs
receive a jolt when Kishan informs him that the British officials had severely punished the rebelling soldiers of the mutiny of 1857.

Kishan points to the ways in which the colonial state “educated” the masses not just through state policies and at educational institutions but also through public spectacles, held in open bazaars and “chawks” where people could gather to view executions and grapple with their significations. Kishan remembers a story told by his grandfather who, along with elders from his village had fought for the British troops in the Mutiny: “When the uprising ended and the British re-entered Delhi it came to be known that a great spectacle was to be held in the city” (429). As the men walked toward the city to be rewarded, they witnessed that the road that led from his village to Delhi, was lined with the bodies of “rebel soldiers whose bodies had been impaled on sharpened stakes” (429). Kishan informs Arjun that the men took this visual spectacle as a warning from the British about the consequences of rebellion against Empire. They convinced themselves that the sight signified the “face of defeat and it shall never be ours.” Kishan informs Arjun that from “that day on, the families of Kotana decided that they would send their sons to the army of the English Sarkar” to evade similar fates (430). Arjun’s faith in Empire receives a blow when Kishan informs him of his ancestors’ fear. Arjun attempts to differentiate himself from this seemingly cowardly mass of men by persuading himself that he has participated out of choice rather than coercion. But nonetheless, Kishan’s story of the Mutiny, a narrative drastically different from the tales of Jat loyalty and bravery he has heard at the IMA, unseats Arjun’s sense of purpose and self-assessment as the “New Indian” who trained at an institution committed to civic values and justice.
Kishan produces discourse that counters Arjun’s beliefs about native involvement in the British Army and casts Empire as a violent and coercive institution rather than a progressive one. Kishan’s narrative also signifies his awareness of his motives for working as a soldier in the British Army. It seems that Kishan and other uneducated soldiers negotiated the terms of their survival by supporting the hegemonic colonial state. His narrative indicates the ways in which particular communities were coerced into passive stances of complicity and economic dependence, but it also preserves the memory of imperialist brutality in the form of a cautionary tale about self-survival. When Kishan narrates the tale to Arjun, he also conveys to Arjun that in their support his people are not motivated by empathy for Empire but by fear. Their support is not a signifier of voluntary collaboration.

Through his characterization of Kishan, Ghosh challenges the colonialist discourse of the effeminate Indian by suggesting that we understand passive compliance as a survival tactic. It does not necessarily suggest cowardice but rather a compromise that ensures self-survival (Nandy 110). Moreover, it does not necessarily signify the absence of defiance on behalf of the native subject (111 Nandy). When we regard Kishan’s focalization of the story of his ancestors’ collaboration within this frame, it points to their shrewd perception that survival could be ensured if at least superficially they supported a regime that was visibly violent, dehumanizing, and hypocritical. Ghosh charts Arjun’s response to foreground his burgeoning unease about his colonial affiliations. As Arjun listens, he wonders if he has lacked this critical knowledge, which his batman possesses about imperialist violence on natives. Arjun wonders “how was it possible that Kishan Singh- uneducated, unconscious of his motives- should be more
aware of the weight of the past than he, Arjun?”(43). Arjun has ignored the histories of colonial oppression of Indians.

Thus Arjun begins to realize that while his colonialist education seemed to have conferred on him the freedom to construct a self-image that mirrored the colonial official, it had in fact congealed his status as a colonized subject who was unaware of his community’s suffering. This knowledge about his servility creates havoc within Arjun about his identity:

…he had never experienced the slightest doubt about his personal sovereignty, never imagined himself to be dealing with anything other than the full range of human choice. But if it were true that his life had somehow been moulded by acts of power of which he was unaware… he had never acted of his own volition; never had a moment of true self-consciousness. Everything he ever assumed about himself was a lie, an illusion. (43)

This scene charts the deepening of Arjun’s personal crisis. He wonders if he has ever been free or if all his actions have been predetermined by the history of colonial rule in India. He wonders if he has been mistaken in both assuming his ability to freely participate in his self-fashioning and denying his communal affiliations. Moreover, upon listening to Kishan’s tale, Arjun wonders if the events of the mid nineteenth century had somehow determined his decisions in the 1930s. Arjun questions if his own desire for colonial modernity is framed by the Indian community’s fear of the colonizer.

But here again, rather than critiquing colonial violence and pondering about Uma’s suggestions, the novel portrays Arjun’s refusal to do so. He regards Kishan’s story as proof of the colonial discourse of native backwardness, weakness, cowardice and effeminacy. Later, Arjun does not defect even when the Japanese occupy Malay and Singapore. Characters inform him of rebelling Indian soldiers and the consolidation of
the nationalist Indian National Army, which sides with the Japanese against the Allied forces, but Arjun refuses to join the mutineers.

These scenes enable Ghosh to historicize how elite imperialist collaborators had held on to misguided ideas about their privileges and modernization under the colonial regime during the Second World War. In addition, they had held to colonialist beliefs about the inferior native community. The colonial state perpetuated these discourses through the suppression of histories of colonial violence over natives as they ensured the support of elite men.

Ghosh suggests that the Second World War nonetheless unseated some of these discourses as native collaborators underwent varied experiences of racial discrimination and grappled with increasing discontentment against Empire. The narrator portrays Arjun’s turmoil deepening as the Second World War progresses. The narrative casts Arjun in the throes of a crisis about his socio-cultural affiliations. In particular, Arjun wonders about his inability to decolonize his mind of colonialist ideologies that he has so assiduously cultivated at the academy. The narrator charts his anxieties in his exchange with Hardy:

> Just look at us, Hardy- just look at us. What are we? We’ve learnt to dance the tango and we know how to eat roast beef with a knife and fork. The truth is that except for the color of our skin, most people in India wouldn’t even recognize us as Indians. When we joined up we didn’t have India in our minds: we wanted to be sahibs and that’s what we’ve become. Do you think we can undo all of that by putting up a new flag? (439)

Arjun repeatedly wonders about his inability to undo the effects of his assimilation of English beliefs and practices. He tells Hardy that they fulfilled their ambition to be Sahibs, or Anglicized Indian officers. He also implies that in adopting English beliefs and
practices they cultivated affiliations with their colonial officials but became alienated from the Indian community. Arjun’s question, “What are we?” suggests his existential angst about undoing the colonialist stances inculcated in him by his colonial education. He has wanted to be an anglicized gentleman and wonders if he can ever be reconciled to his native community.

When Hardy informs Arjun of his decision to join the Indian National Army, Arjun continues to grapple with his doubts about ridding his mind of the beliefs that he has internalized over the years. Ghosh portrays Arjun as wondering whether years of collaboration with the British Empire have rendered him incapable of reconciling with the larger Indian community. He wonders if he can ever undo his sense of loyalty and affinities with the British Empire and his assimilation of colonialist discourses:

Was this how a mutiny was sparked? In a moment of heedlessness, so that one became a stranger to the person one had been a moment before? Or was it the other way round? That this was when one recognized the stranger that one had always been to oneself; that all one’s loyalties and beliefs had been misplaced? But where would his loyalties go now that they were unmoored? He was a military man…who would claim his loyalty now? The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones- they’d been destroyed long ago; the British had built their empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now… with whom was he now to keep his faith? Loyalty, commonality, faith- these things were as essential and as fragile as the muscles of the human heart; easy to destroy, impossible to rebuild. How would one begin the work of re-creating the tissues that bound people to each other? …It was a labour that would last not one year, not ten, not fifty- it was the work of centuries. (441)

Arjun grapples with the possibilities of reordering national affiliations in what he views as a multiethnic and strife-ridden India, which is ruled by the British. Unlike the nationalists, who demand independence from colonial rule, Arjun conceives no hope for India’s future. The scene charts Arjun’s psychic damage as an imperialist subject. He
sees the Indian community as trammeled in colonialist ideologies and wonders if these will divide the national community post independence.

Moreover, Ghosh charts Arjun’s nihilism and skepticism about forging ties of loyalty to India. Arjun perceives himself as a military man, who has been taught to be loyal to the British Empire. In its absence, he cannot contemplate forging socio-cultural affiliations with Indians whom he has regarded through colonialist frames. As Arjun watches Hardy talk about India’s independence, he wonders about the seeming ease with which Hardy changes sides. But Hardy has already told Arjun that he believes that as a nationalist, he is supporting a rightful war against colonial oppression: “To me, it’s a question of right and wrong- what’s worth fighting for and what’s not. That’s all” (439).

The narrator charts Hardy’s support of the nationalist struggle to contrast his burgeoning counterknowledge and criticism of Empire to Arjun’s fraught affiliations with Empire. Where Hardy asserts that he recognizes Empire as an exploitative regime and desires to actively participate in anticolonial resistance, Arjun continues to wonder if it is possible for him to undo the effects of his colonial education.

Thus the novel portrays how Arjun’s crisis of the self emerges from the discovery of a suppressed history of colonial subjugation and violence, which compelled several natives to collude. As a free subject he has forged affiliations with Empire rather than the native community. But as the War progresses, he perceives that he is part of the native community as well. Not only foes he realize his status as a colonized subject, he also learns that he is supporting an unethical regime. This self-awareness and burgeoning understanding about his native community lead him to question his support of a violent Empire, a decision made easier by the threat to empire by other imperialist nations, and
by the nationalist movements across colonies, but also by his discovery of an alternate knowledge of imperial violence.

Hardy contributes to Arjun’s growing unease about his collaboration with Empire as he attempts to convince Arjun that they have been supporting an exploitative regime. Hardy grapples with the implications of his collaboration with Empire by wondering that Indians have been rarely recognized for their efforts in the British Army. He tells Arjun that he has wondered many times about his grandfather and father’s participation in the First World War for which they were not given any recognition. Hardy wonders about an aporia in historical representation of the war as well: “Does anyone ever say- the Indians won this war or that one?” (406). Hardy points out those textual reports of the war, in newspapers, journals and magazines mention the efforts of Australian, British and Canadian soldiers but hardly ever reference the natives from Britain’s colonies. He tells Arjun that he is fighting for someone else who will not credit him for his efforts: “It was strange to be sitting on one side of the battle line, knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn’t really your fight, knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit would be yours” (406). Hardy persuades Arjun that the Indian soldiers were tools in the hands of the British and years of ideological instruction by the British officials had rendered them incapable of realizing the dehumanizing effects of serving the imperial Army. Hardy wonders how to connect “what I do with what I want, in my heart?” and thereby become human again.

Hardy suggests to Arjun that the British had a sophisticated system of subjugating native populations and exploiting their resources, under the pretense of civilizing them. He informs Arjun that the Indian army was an institution that claimed to
modernize and civilize Indians, but in fact it had enslaved them to support Empire. As Hardy tells Arjun: “Arjun- in a way the better the master, the worse the condition of the slave, because it makes him forget what he is…” (438). Like other characters in the novel, Hardy too compares Arjun to a slave. For Arjun, this unsettling revelation about his status as a slave heightens his unease about reclaiming his identity as an Indian who can deploy his resources against his abusers. He feels that for years men like him have had divided loyalties and cannot be expected to serve the cause of a united India. To add to his self-doubt about his power as a “sovereign” colonial subject, Arjun wonders if he has been trained to “kill without conviction” (348). Arjun thus grapples with his dehumanization and regards himself as a colonial subject who has internalized the discourse of British hegemony.

In critical conditions of a real war, Arjun grapples with the fact that the British military enterprise was neither transcendental nor invincible, as the Indian soldiers had been made to believe. Also it was no different than those of the Japanese and the Germans whom they were fighting. He realizes that the seemingly disciplined organization could crumble when faced with a formidable enemy who was engaging in war for the annexation of colonized territories:

Arjun had a sudden aching vision of their battalions headquarters in Sahranpur…He thought of the heavy, gilt-framed paintings that hung on its walls… the assegais, scimitars and feathered spears…from Africa, Mesopotamia and Burma…How was it that this centuries-old structure could break like an egg-shell, at one sharp blow- and that too, in this unlikeliest of battlefields, a forest planted by businessmen? (397)

Arjun seeks to suture his fractured self and to salvage his humanity but when the seemingly invincible British Empire, of which the modern native is an emanation, apparently crumbles, he experiences an intense sense of personal crisis. At this point,
rebellion against the British seems to be the only way out of the self-annihilation suggested by the imminent defeat of the British, which in turn is suggested by his wounded body, the disaffection of native soldiers and the ravaged colonial landscape. Rebellion against the British Empire gives him the chance to reconcile his divided loyalties and safeguard his humanity.

Through his characterization of Arjun as a fraught colonial soldier, Ghosh portrays the psychological damage of the long spell of British rule and indoctrination of imperial ideologies among natives in the colonies, particularly in India where scores of men had trained for centuries at British institutions. By tracing the growth of self-questioning in Arjun and Hardy, Ghosh’s novel also charts counterdiscourses about Empire and questions the colonial discourses that were disseminated at British run educational institutions. Arjun’s development from both a colluder with Empire and a mimic man who internalizes colonial discourses, to an increasingly skeptical and disturbed participant in the colonial project mirrors the conventional discovery motif of the bildungsroman novel, in which a major character acquires awareness about himself and of his cultural context upon confronting a crisis. In the conventional bildungsroman, the protagonist overcomes the crisis and reconciles with his community as a mature and self-aware subject. He grows in both self-understanding and knowledge of the world through his experiences and immersion in different socio-political events. But Ghosh charts Arjun’s continuing doubts about his inability to forge socio-cultural ties with the native community. By doing so Ghosh depicts the adverse effects of colonialist ideologies on Arjun.
Indeed, Ghosh’s representation of Arjun’s development into a colonial officer is framed within the narrative of fraught development rather than successful and untrammeled self-fulfillment. Arjun’s personal growth and self-fulfillment as the New Indian are frustrated by his involvement in the Empire’s war. The war contributes to his feelings of hopelessness. He begins to think that as a mercenary, he can never reconcile with his community and fight for its freedom. Thus Arjun sees no hope of reconciling with his community even as he sees the imperialist regime as increasingly corrupt.

The narrator suggests that Arjun is fraught with self-doubt about his decision to rebel against the colonizers. Even though he joins the Indian National Army, he doubts if he can ever overlook the many social evils he grew up experiencing in India. He continues to see India through colonialist frames. The novel charts the effects of this nihilism, the consequence of his doubts, as a death wish in Arjun. Dinu learns about his death from another character that describes Arjun’s last moments. The first intimations of Arjun’s death wish are given to readers through the description of Arjun’s decision to punish Kishan Singh who deserts the INA:

He thought of another time when Kishan Singh had knelt between his feet, asking for his protection; he thought of his guilelessness and trust and innocence, of how he had been moved by the histories that lay behind them- the goodness and strength he had seen in him; all the qualities that he himself had lost and betrayed-qualities that had never been his to start with, he who had sprung from the potter’s wheel, fully made, deformed. He knew he could not allow Kishan Singh to betray himself, to become something other than he was- to become a creature like himself, grotesque, misshapen. It was this thought that gave him the strength to put his gun to Kishan Singh’s head. (525)

Ghosh portrays Arjun’s thoughts as signifiers of his utter hopelessness about undoing the effects of his colonialist education. Arjun wonders if Empire corrupts Kishan’s innate goodness. To him, Kishan’s seeming corrupted nature echoes his own. Indeed, Arjun’s
thought signifies his fraught psychic state, as he conceives no antidote to colonialist dependency other than self-annihilation. Arjun perceives himself as deformed and grotesque and proceeds to kill Kishan and himself.

The novel frames Arjun’s death in ambiguity as Raymond informs Dinu about Arjun’s desire to die: “‘It was clear,’ he said, ‘that he did not want to live.’” (527). The novel suggests that while he retaliates against the advancing British troops, Arjun commits suicide, as he can imagine no return to India for himself. He believes that Indians like him have internalized colonialist ideologies about native backwardness and racist perceptions in ways that suggest no possibilities for undoing their mental enslavement.

But while Ghosh suggests the adverse effects of colonial education by charting Arjun’s nihilistic thoughts and his decision to die at the hands of the colonials, he portrays Uma and the nationalist movement as emblematic of the history of strategic negotiations among elite subjects with imperialist and Eurocentric discourses for achieving independence from colonial rule. The narrative thus balances Arjun’s nihilism with Uma and Dinu’s cautious mediations with Eurocentric discourses and imperialist ideologies. Ghosh portrays Arjun’s refusal to heed Uma’s advice as one of the leading causes of his unquestioning assimilation of colonialist ideologies. Unlike Hardy and Dinu, who are his contemporaries, Arjun is steeped in colonialist beliefs and believes that the colonizer guarantees his personal progress. But as the novel portrays, Arjun’s notions

---

19 In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson traces the connections between the colonial state and the emerging nationalist state, which was spearheaded by Anglicized “youth” of the colonies. This population was educated in English schools, often went to the metropole for educational and professional training, and was “bilingual” in its ability to speak English and the local languages. But for all its Anglicization, it was barred from the “uppermost peaks of the Raj.” Several of these disaffected youths took up anticolonial resistance against the British (114-5, 93).
about Empire are misplaced. His colonial education and participation in the colonialist project perpetuates his communal alienation and his feelings of nihilism. As he discovers his support of an oppressive regime, he wonders if he can ever undo the ill effects of his education. The novel thus links his self-annihilation to his colonial education.

Thus, by situating Arjun’s story within the plot of fraught development, Ghosh charts the adverse effects of colonial education on the experiences and beliefs of native subjects. His novel portrays how the unquestioning assimilation of colonialist ideologies precipitates communal alienation in collaborating natives whose desire to mimic the colonizer implicates them in colonialist violence and unequal relations of power. Arjun regards himself as superior to other colonized subjects and fails to see himself as part of his native community. The institute furnishes him with a false sense of an empowered self-identity. He imagines himself at par with the seemingly progressive English official. Only when he perceives native suffering and begins to regard himself as part of the Indian community, does he realize that his idea about his freedom and personal development as a colonial official is misplaced. Unable to reconcile with the larger community, Arjun dies as a fraught subject who cannot overcome his colonialist training.

In charting the effects of colonial education on Arjun, Ghosh weaves a narrative of subverted bildungsroman. Colonial education disrupts individual growth. The subject extends his stifled growth as symptomatic of national failure. Because the subject regards himself as a microcosm of his community, he perceives the development of the national community, which is steeped in colonial myths, as retarded as well. Of course, Ghosh doesn’t support Arjun’s views about the failures of the national community, which though divided along differences of class and culture, persists against colonial violence.
After all, as the novel suggests the British colonizers created divisiveness within the Indian community by circulating discourses of martial races, and indelible caste differences among Indians across regional and princely states. Moreover, his narrative portrays how men like Arjun internalized the beliefs that Indians were purportedly incapable of “responsible and democratic government,” and as a consequence needed Empire’s “modern forms of disciplinary power,” which would ensure progress, cohesion and development in India (Chatterjee 16).

As the novel develops, Arjun continues to display belief in this assumption, which he has imbibed during his training at the Academy. He echoes his supervisors’ beliefs that Indians were always “at each other’s throats,” and could not be modernized (283-4).

Elite nationalists like Uma critique imperialist ideologies in the novel. This chapter does not discuss Ghosh’s delineation of the nationalist struggle for independence in detail, as my focus is on delineating the effects of mimicry of the colonial educator on the elite colonized subject. The story of Arjun’s downfall suggests the dangers of internalization of colonial ideologies, which continue to thrive in postindependence South Asia, and overshadows discussions of anticolonial resistance. I suggest that through this narrative, Ghosh foregrounds the dangers for forthcoming generations of unquestioning absorption of Eurocentric discourses of progress and democracy without interrogating the unequal relations of power these perpetuate. His narrative persuades readers to interrogate their own implication in colonialist ideologies and their ignorance of colonialist violence.

Through his characterization of Arjun, Ghosh historicizes native collaboration and charts the adverse effects of colonialist education. In addition, he warns against the
pursuit of individual desires at the cost of the community’s interests. His novel suggests that the welfare of the national community and the condemnation of violence ought to take precedence over personal fulfillment. Uma protests against Empire on behalf of the national community. Ghosh portrays Uma’s condemnation of imperialist violence as a life-affirming alternative to the espousal of violence by Arjun and his peers at the academy.
Chapter 3

The Makings of an English Gentleman: Education and Empire in Julian Barnes’ *Arthur and George*

In the first few pages of Julian Barnes’ *Arthur and George*, the narrator depicts young Arthur fascinated by his Scottish mother’s stories of chivalric knights who fight evil forces and rescue suffering women from unforeseen perils. She tells him stories about heroic men who display honorable conduct, venture out on “quests” and meet challenges with a mixture of humility and bravado (5). The stories teach him “the distinction between right and wrong” (5). In addition, they furnish his mind with romantic notions of setting out on his own journeys to far off lands where he overcomes obstacles and brings back riches to his mother. In addition to these tales, Arthur’s mother imparts moral instruction to him: “At home he learned extra commandments on top of the ten he knew from church. ‘Fearless to the strong; humble to the weak,’ was one, and ‘Chivalry towards women, of high and low degree.’... they demanded practical implementation” (6). The narrator portrays Arthur’s perceptions to chart the effects of his mother’s stories on the young boy’s self-perceptions and ambitions. Arthur vows to serve his mother and make her happy by procuring material comforts for her: “Early on he made a childhood vow and vows, he knew were never to be swerved from: ‘When you’re old, Mammie, you shall have a velvet dress…and sit in comfort by the fire.’ Arthur could see the beginning of the story- where he was now- and its happy end; only the middle was for the moment lacking” (6). His mother’s tales of adventurous and chivalric knights inculcate in him a sense of obligation and service towards her. Her stories enable him to perceive himself as a chivalric knight who will improve his mother’s domestic conditions.
through his quests. Indeed, Barnes’ narrative charts Arthur’s cultivation of a romantic notion of self as savior. As a child, he wishes to translate the depictions he encounters in his mother’s stories into practical lived experience. But more significantly, Barnes’ novel suggests that the literary texts and lore about questing knights, as well as tales of ancestors who led the “Pack’s brigade at Waterloo,” inculcate in him a particular idea of Englishness, one that is associated with valorous and honorable Englishmen setting off on adventurous journeys to distant lands. There they encounter mysterious dangers and overcome obstacles by displaying stances of chivalry and honor towards the “weak” (6). This notion of self-identity as a brave and adventuring Englishman appeals to him despite his Irish and Scottish ancestry and a childhood spent in Scotland.

Education is not its main focus, and yet Barnes’ novel suggests that educational instruction imparted at home and school plays a crucial role in determining the identity, experiences and beliefs of its two protagonists, Arthur and George and their support of the British Empire. Arthur is based on the nineteenth century writer and eminent thinker, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, while George is inspired by the real life George Edalji, a lawyer of English and Indian descent. The novel re-presents George’s travails as a racially mixed subject, in particular his trial for charges of animal mutilation, and Arthur’s defense on his behalf. Barnes’ novel charts their educational experiences as young children. It portrays how along with lessons at home, their common experience of public school education determines both their espousal of Empire, and their experiences and negotiations with their national, ethnic and racial identity as Englishmen. Indeed, Barnes suggests that the identity category of the nineteenth century Englishman is defined within
and through the referential frame of Empire.\textsuperscript{20} Arthur and George historicizes how, in the nineteenth century, children imbibed knowledge about Empire from discourses and values disseminated at home and school, where they encountered popular socio-cultural discourses about Englishness and Empire and read literary accounts of imperialist adventures. Both characters learn to perceive their material reality in particular ways in these spaces and learn conventional discourses of accepted morality, racial identity, class and gender there. These discourses shape their actions and notions of self and others as normative English subjects in adult life, subjects who are also imperialists.\textsuperscript{21}

This chapter examines Julian Barnes’ Arthur and George as a novel of fraught development that traces the effects of English education and childhood lessons on the development and beliefs of its protagonists. Barnes portrays how home and school serve as key sites for the dissemination and cultivation of imperialist ideologies, which adversely affect the experiences, beliefs and interactions of these characters. Indeed, their assimilation implicates them in discourses of native inferiority, English superiority and racial difference. In addition, Barnes suggests that their absorption of imperialist ideologies, which are tied closely to discourses of Englishness and gentility, shape their responses to moments of crises in their lives. Confronted with crisis, both characters develop self-knowledge and an understanding of their larger socio-cultural context, but


\textsuperscript{21} As Pamela Horn has suggested even the cultivation of the virtues of “diligence, obedience, thrift, self-denial, endurance and ‘indomitable pluck’” was to be geared towards the training of children as prospective imperialists.\textsuperscript{21} Their education inculcates in them both stances of loyalty to Empire, which is seen as an extension of the English nation, and an understanding of their unique national identity as Englishmen, which is interwoven with their imperialist identity and obligations. This composite identity, at once local and global, is premised on the perceptions of the English as a racially pure community, with a rich cultural and economic history, which confers on them with the right to rule over other nations.
they do not question its discourses of unequal power relations and racial difference. Indeed, the novel suggests that while they perceive incidents of racial discrimination, they are unable to undo the hold of hegemonic notions of Englishness over their perceptions. The characters at best display fraught affiliations to idealized notions of Englishness, which they internalize as children.

Barnes’ preoccupations with the proximities between Englishness and Empire are implicit in his story about the experiences of George Edalji, and Arthur Conan Doyle, who consolidates his Englishness and gentility through his public school education, medical profession and espousal of Empire. George is the son of Shapurji, a first generation Parsee immigrant from colonized India who travels to England, after being converted to Christianity by Scottish missionaries in India. Barnes traces George’s development from a young boy at the vicarage in The Great Wyrley, a small English village, to a solicitor at a Birmingham firm. A series of incidents of racial discrimination disrupt his happy childhood and his development into a mature, successful and content adult. George regards his development from a studious child to a successful solicitor as signifying his pursuit of a normal English life. Barnes’ novel depicts the Edalji family’s confrontations with incidents of vandalism, racial discrimination and defacement of property. Edaljis receive threatening letters that denounce their presence in the largely white English village. George seems to survive these crises by ignoring the racial discrimination till he is imprisoned on charges of injuring farm animals. Barnes relates this incident to other troubles and to George’s racial difference.

Arthur meanwhile belongs to a struggling family of mixed Scottish and Irish heritage, and grows up under the tutelage of his mother, “mam.” Arthur achieves success
both as a doctor and a writer. As a well-known public figure, Arthur travels to the English colonies in Africa and Australia. For a while it seems that Arthur’s transition from childhood to adulthood is smooth but his affair with Jean Leckie precipitates a personal crisis in his life. Arthur wonders about the discrepancies between his sense of honor and his secretive affair. He participates in the Boer War and defends George in order to distract himself from his compunctions about the affair. The remainder of the novel devotes itself to portraying Arthur’s investigation of George’s case. Arthur conducts interviews with police and state officials, and appeals to the court on George’s behalf. The narrative concludes with the establishment of the criminal appeals court and the pardoning of George. Each character thus overcomes personal crisis in different ways as it attains maturity within the socio-cultural context of late nineteenth century England.

As a novel of development, *Arthur and George* begins by charting the protagonists’ internalization of idealized notions of Englishness in childhood. Barnes’ narrative suggests that as a child, Arthur in particular cultivates a “public school ethos” and an idealized notion of Englishness both at home and school where he encounters particular narratives about adventurous Englishmen in colonial spaces and learns lessons in Victorian moral values. The narrative portrays Arthur listening to his mother’s stories about chivalric heroes:

> For Arthur there was a normal distance between home and church but each place was filled with presences, with stories and instructions… there was God and Jesus Christ….Seven Deadly Sins… He understood that there was the truth but his imagination preferred the different parallel version he was taught at home. His mother’s stories were also about far distant times and also designed to teach him the distance between right and wrong…. ‘And then the knight was held over the pit of writhing snakes...’ …Knights and their ladies then moved about the tiny kitchen; …quests miraculously fulfilled; armour clanked… and honour was always upheld. (5-6)
Here were different kinds of stories, which more resembled school homework, about the ducal house of Brittany… And someone who had led the Pack’s Brigade at Waterloo…And connected to all this were the private lessons in heraldry his mother gave him …he would have to reply, as with multiplication tables: chevrons, mullets… At home he learned extra commandments on top of the ten he knew from church. ‘Fearless to the strong; humble to the weak’ was one, and ‘Chivalry towards women, of high degree and low.’ He felt them to be important…they also demanded practical implementation. (6)

While the church inculcates an understanding about the relation between Englishness and Christian virtues, his mother’s narratives about chivalric knights and adventurous journeys to save the helpless play a crucial role in shaping his imagination, ambitions and self-identity. Indeed, the narrator reveals that while these tales furnish his imagination with images of daring Englishmen, they also enable his mother to impart knowledge about his lineage and instill particular moral values of chivalry, humility and honor in the child.

Arthur assimilates lessons about English history in the form of tales about journeying heroes, questing knights and England’s battles against foreign countries. The lessons about heraldry signify his authority and power. The tales imbue young Arthur with romantic notions of setting out on his own adventures. The poverty of his surroundings contrasts with his mother’s tales, and further stokes his desire to be his mother’s savior:

Arthur did not look beyond his immediate circumstances… ‘When you are old Mammie, you shall have a velvet dress.’ Arthur could see the beginning of the story- where he was now- and its happy end; only the middle was lacking.

He searched for clues in his favorite author, Captain Mayne Reid. He looked in the Rifle Rangers: or Adventures of an Officer in Southern Mexico. He read the Young Voyagers and the War Trail and the Headless Horseman. Buffaloes and Red Indians were now mixing in his head with chain-mailed knights and the infantrymen of Pack’s Brigade. His favorite Mayne Reid of all was the Scalp Hunters: or Romantic Adventures in Southern Mexico. Arthur did not yet know
how the gold glasses and velvet dress were to be obtained; but he suspected it might involve a hazardous journey to Mexico. (6-7)

The narrative represents the home as a crucial site where the young child assimilates lessons about duties and his obligations to ensure his family’s happiness. Arthur identifies with the questing heroes. Like them, he wishes to set off on journeys and bring back material rewards. He searches for clues in other fictional texts about how to alleviate his mother’s troubles. Barnes suggests that Arthur’s search culminates in texts that portray English colonials and their violent exploits in the American colonies. Arthur imagines that he can procure a comfortable life for her by setting out on adventures to fight imagined opponents. In his imagined scenario he also identifies with his ancestors who vanquished Napoleon’s Army.

The Mayne Reid novels in particular influence his self-conception as a questing hero. In them he encounters colonizers who vanquish the native population in far-flung colonies of the New World, and bring back bounties as evidence. Thus the narrator portrays young Arthur consolidating his self-identity, ambitions, and desires through his encounters with Englishmen in roles of colonizers, conquistadores and explorers. Barnes’ narrative foregrounds the irony implicit in Arthur’s identification with the heroes of the texts. As the titles of Reid’s books suggest, the English heroes overpower “red Indians” and scalp hunters on these imprestalist ventures. Indeed, the narrative suggests that these depictions introduce him to the imagined world of swashbuckling colonial heroes who transcend national boundaries, cross the seas in pursuit of adventures, and fight real or imagined evildoers. The texts romanticize violence against the purportedly weaker other subject.
The narrator links Arthur’s desires for personal profit to his reading of these quests where Englishmen procure individual and national wealth. Like them, Arthur’s motive for the quests and hazardous journeys is the procurement of personal gain, even profit and fame. The battles will equip him with “a velvet dress” for his mother. But because these men also represent national heroes, who inspire English boys to undertake similar quests, they suggest to Arthur his obligations as an Englishman. As the passage suggests, it introduces him to “areas of history and geography that placed him at the top of the racial ladder and at the helm of all the world” as an authoritarian and idealized Englishman (Bristow 21). Barnes’ description of the child’s reading and internalizing of the text’s imperialist description elaborates Said’s claim in *Culture and Imperialism*, that English cultural texts were heavily involved in perpetuating “intellectual and aesthetic investments in overseas domination” (21).

Barnes’ brief yet telling description of Reid’s works undercuts Arthur’s notions of self as a chivalric knight. Barnes’ narrator foregrounds Arthur’s identification with the morally dubious characters of Reid’s novels. The narrator links Arthur’s cultivation of a self-identity and future ambitions to his reading of texts that introduce him to tales of imperialist conquest and violence. Indeed, Barnes suggests early on that Arthur consolidates his self-identity as a chivalric Englishman within imperialist frames. He perceives himself as an imperialist who will undertake the journeys of conquest of other spaces.

The novel portrays the effects of these lessons of adventuring Englishmen on his experiences in adulthood. Years later, we see Arthur set out to Africa to fight the Boer War. But more significantly, the novel suggests that in addition to consolidating in him a
desire to participate in imperialist conquest, Arthur’s reading enables him to construct a particular identity of an Englishman as the archetypal savior of mankind.

While Barnes represents the home as fashioning his identity, he also points to the role played by the school in determining Arthur’s self-conception and development as an ideal Englishman. School equips him with a public school education, a love of sports and a respect for strict discipline and order. At the Jesuit school, Arthur learns “elements, figures, grammar…poetry, rhetoric” but also “the usual public school routine of Euclid, algebra, and the classics, whose truths were endorsed by emphatic beatings”(13). The school uses violence as a means of disciplining its students. The instrument deployed is a “piece of India rubber the size and thickness of a boot sole” which ‘had also come over from Holland, and was known as the Tolley” (13). The rigors of learning math and English lessons through the strict enforcement of rules and regulations aid Arthur’s development into “a large, boisterous youth, who found consolation in the school library and happiness on the cricket field” (13). The Jesuits are depicted as strict enforcers of disciplinary mechanisms as they believe in the inherent sinfulness of man. But interestingly, Barnes points out Arthur agrees with their methods and beliefs:

The Jesuits were not bad fellows, in his assessment. They considered human nature to be essentially weak, and their mistrust seemed justified to Arthur… They also understood that sinfulness began early. Boys were never permitted to be alone together… Constant surveillance might undermine self-respect and self-help; but the immorality and beastliness rife at other schools was kept to a minimum. (17)

School develops his understanding of normative moral values and accepted sexual behavior and shapes his belief that the use of strict disciplinary mechanisms is justified. Indeed, Barnes suggests that observations of distrustful authorities at school play a crucial role in shaping Arthur’s understanding of discipline and his espousal of
surveillance over others. It also shapes his perceptions about fellow students in general. To him, schoolboys are naturally prone to sinfulness, which can be controlled through constant surveillance. The narrative suggests that, to Arthur, the Jesuits are modern day knights who safeguard the weak against their own deviancies. Thus Barnes portrays school as transforming Arthur into a boisterous yet self-disciplining boy. But more significantly, he suggests that the lessons at home and the public school shape his identity as an Englishman:

Irish by ancestry, Scottish by birth, instructed in the faith of Rome by Dutch Jesuits, Arthur became English. English history inspired him; English freedoms made him proud; English cricket made him patriotic. And the greatest epoch in English history—with many to choose from—was the fourteenth century: a time when the English archer commanded the field, and when both the French and Scottish kings were held prisoner in London…. For Arthur the root of Englishness lay in the long-gone, long remembered, long invented world of chivalry… the Christian virtues could be practiced by everyone, from the humble to the high born. But chivalry was the prerogative of the powerful. A knight protected his lady; the strong aided the weak, honor was a living thing for which you should be prepared to die. In this modern world of Birmingham factories and billycock hats the notion of chivalry often seems declined into one of mere sportsmanship. But Arthur practiced the code wherever possible. He was a man of his word; he succored the poor; he kept his guard against baser emotions; he treated women respectfully... (28)

The passage suggests that his mother’s lessons about chivalry and his authority as a knight figure, as well as the activities in school consolidate his perception that as a high born Englishman, he was a powerful subject who served others less fortunate than himself. Arthur learns that to be English is to be chivalric and serve the weaker. It is to embark on quests where one can display honorable conduct.

Indeed, the novel’s description of Arthur’s gradual transformation into an Englishman foregrounds how different performances, lessons and activities inch him closer to consolidating his patriotic feelings and obligations to England. History lessons
about English wars inculcate feelings of patriotism and service in the child. Most stories are about English victories over others, including the Scottish. They inspire him to consolidate his self-identity as a patriotic and honorable Englishman. Cricket and football are no longer games, but symbolic signifiers of his national identity as an Englishman.

The narrator also portrays young Arthur as a little more than impatient about implementing his lessons in real life. He perceives himself to be a chivalric leader of the “humble” subjects, and desires “practical implementation” of his ambitions. The narrator thus charts Arthur’s consolidation of an English identity to foreground the crucial effects of his education on his ambitions, beliefs and self-perceptions.

The narrative charts how equipped with his newly constructed identity of an Englishman, Arthur goes to medical school and later becomes a writer. Barnes suggests that the writings offer him the chance to imagine himself in the role of serving others who lack his intellectual acumen. In his personal relations as well, Arthur assumes the position of the savior, who sets out to aid the seemingly weaker subject. Barnes portrays Arthur as an English youth who constructs strict hierarchies and unequal relations of power between himself and others. This is implicit in his relationship to his wife, Touie, his perceptions of women and his public life. Used to idealizing women, Arthur assumes the role of the authority figure with most women, variously becoming “large brother, substitute father, dominant husband, prescribing doctor, generous writer of blank checks and Father Christmas” (201).

Barnes’ Arthur believes that in order to consolidate his authoritarian domestic and social position, he needs to display chivalry in the larger socio-cultural context rather than at home alone: “If life was chivalric quest, then he had rescued the fair Touie, he had
conquered the city, and been rewarded with the gold. But there were years to go before he was prepared to accept a role as wise elder to the tribe” (69). The narrator portrays Arthur’s desire for romantic and adventurous exploits, which his domestic life does not fulfill: “What did a knight errant do when he came home to a wife and two children…He protected them, behaved honourably… He might depart on further quests… There would be plenty of challenges in his writing, in society, travel, politics….And yet” (69-70).

Arthur sees himself as a knight who applies his mother’s lessons in his daily interactions and in his public life yet he desires more.

Barnes traces Arthur’s personal development as an English gentleman of influence to suggest that Arthur fulfills the ambitions of the young schoolboy who had imagined himself as a knight: “All the time, Arthur’s fame increases. He is a clubman, a diner out, a public figure…his opinion is sought” (227). But soon the novel charts obstructions in his personal journey and quest for personal honor. Arthur falls in love with Jean while he is still married to Touie. The narrative suggests that Arthur’s sense of self as an honorable man receives a blow at the realization that though he loves Jean, he must keep his affair a secret to preserve the family’s name (213). The novel depicts him as desirous of publishing his affair yet not doing do for fear of public shame. Arthur castigates himself for the hypocrisy entailed in his secrecy, which undercuts his self-image as an honorable man. Barnes charts his inner turmoil as a consequence of contradictory desires and feelings: “He wants to take a cab straight to Jean’s flat, lead her out on the pavement, put her arm through his, and walk her past Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. And with him still in his cricket clothes” (214). Arthur desires to publicly acknowledge his affair, yet knows that he
cannot do so as it will tarnish his public image. The narrative suggests that Arthur realizes that it is harder to maintain chivalric behavior in real life. Along with these fraught realizations about the complexities entailed in the maintenance of his self-image as an ideal Englishman, his interest in Spiritualism and doubts about rationalist thinking further unseat his self-identity.

Indeed, Barnes represents these events as significant moments of crisis that suggest to Arthur his deviation from the lessons of his childhood. Barnes’ Arthur attempts to overcome this challenge by undertaking a journey on behalf of the English nation. He attempts to overcome his personal guilt by undertaking a public role that entails a dangerous journey to England’s colonies. Barnes depicts Arthur as embarking on a journey to South Africa to participate in the Boer war to assuage his guilt and consolidate his self-identity as an honorable Englishman.

In the novel, the Boer war signifies Arthur’s continuing progress as a public figure. The Boer war affords him opportunities to set out on adventurous journeys to vanquish England’s enemies and bring back laurels for the country. A passage in the novel describes Arthur’s experiences and perceptions:

When the South African War breaks out, Arthur volunteers as a medical officer. The Mam does everything to dissuade him… she judges the war nothing but a dishonourable scramble for gold. Arthur disagrees. It is his duty to go; he is acknowledged to have the strongest influence over young men- especially young sporting men- of anyone in England bar Kipling. He also thinks that this war is worth a white lie or two: the nation is getting into a fight, which is a rightful one…. He leaves Tilbury on the Oriental… ‘I wish Jean had come,’ he says, a small boy in a hulking suit. (227)

On the voyage out, his mood slowly lifts, as he begins to understand more fully why he has come. As a duty and example of course, but also for selfish reasons. He has become pampered and rewarded fellow, who nee some cleansing of the spirit. He has been among women too long, and too confusingly, and yearns for the world of men. … Arthur watches the game [cricket match]… with joy in his
heart. There are rules for pleasure and rules for work. Rules, orders given and received, and a clear purpose. This is what he has come for. (228)

The novel devotes considerable space to the description of Arthur’s perceptions about the Boer war. Barnes also charts Arthur’s experiences in the Boer war as emblematic of his attempts to fulfill his childhood ambitions. The war enables him to overcome his personal crisis. Arthur eagerly wants to consolidate his sense of self as a morally upright, chivalric and patriotic Englishman. Yet, the narrator portrays him as a “small boy in a hulking suit” as he waves farewell to his family. Setting out to tussle against foreign enemies, Arthur appears to be a childlike figure who harbors grand ambitions in this description. Yet, while the narrator undercuts his sense of bravado, Arthur believes that as an official Englishman, he represents “young sporting men” in the country who desire to compete and joust in the sports field and the battlefield. Barnes displays how discourses of manliness, physical strength and competitive spirit inform Arthur’s understanding of the identity of an ideal Englishman. As a sporting Englishman himself, Arthur feels it his duty to fight in the war, which his mother warns him against. Mam’s reservations are based on the understanding that the war is morally and ethically questionable. She regards it as a strife that displays the greed of competing European nations. By portraying her thoughts, Barnes historicizes the popular debate about the ethical costs of the “scramble for gold” in Africa. He also portrays the irony that accompanies the ease with which the honorable Arthur brushes aside her denunciations. He has always seen himself as both a preserver of honor and fighting for the honor of the weak. Now, the narrator suggests ironically, he is willing to sacrifice honor and lie in the service of the nation.

The passage represents Arthur as espousing the British Empire. Arthur is committed to fulfilling his public obligations, and preserving his national image as an
official Englishman. Indeed, Barnes suggests that at this juncture, Arthur’s desire to consolidate his public image overtakes his understanding of honor, moral judgment and justice. Where he has earlier held Mam on a pedestal, he ignores her moral judgment about the nation’s exploitative venture. Indeed, he replaces her with the English nation, and more particularly, with Empire.

Interestingly then Barnes charts Arthur’s development and maturity both in terms of his individual development as a subject who upholds certain moral values and his increasing affiliations with the larger national community, which sees him as its representative. But while Arthur sees himself as progressing by upholding national honor, readers begin to doubt his personal development as he fails to question the ethical implications of fighting in the Boer war. Barnes portrays how instead of questioning the ethical costs of colonial rule, Arthur consolidates his national identity through his participation in the Boer war.

As he proceeds on his journey to South Africa, where English colonizers fight Dutch Boer communities for the ownership of Basuto land, Arthur regards the war as affording him with a range of experiences that will consolidate his sense of manliness and unquestioned authority as an Englishman. The narrator portrays how Arthur believes that the experience of fighting and of travelling to the distant colony will reinstate him in the “world of men.” It is a reprieve from the domestic tensions that have threatened his equanimity and self-image. Arthur’s claims about fighting a rightful fight as a sporting man are undercut by his perceptions that the war provides him the opportunities to escape his chaotic domestic life. The narrative depicts the questing knight as escaping from reality to an imagined world of romance and unknown dangers. Arthur also believes that
the war will lead to a “cleansing of the spirit.” He hopes that it will assuage guilt about his affair with Jean and his betrayal of Touie’s trust. Barnes seems to juxtapose Arthur’s participation in the Boer War with his approval of the Tolley and the strict disciplinary mechanisms of the Jesuits. Arthur will be his own patrolling Jesuit by participating in England’s imperialist war.

Barnes’ portrayal of Arthur’s experiences and observations in South Africa further foregrounds his support of the British Empire:

He sees much death; though more men are lost to enteric than to the Boer bullet….his party is stopped by a Basuto on a shaggy mount, who tells them of a British soldier lying wounded some two hours’ distance. They buy the fellow as a guide for a florin. There is a long ride through maize fields then out across the veldt. The wounded Englishman turns out to be a dead Australian: short, muscular, with a yellow waxen face. No. 410, New South Wales…now dismounted, his horse and his rifle gone. He has bled to death from a stomach wound. He lies with his pocket watch setup before him… Beside him stands his empty water bottle, with a red ivory chessman balanced on top of it. The other chessmen- more likely to be loot from a Boer farmstead than a soldier’s pastime-are in his haversack. They gather his effects: a bandolier…a silk handkerchief, a clasp-knife…in a frayed purse. The sticky body is slung over Arthur’s horse, and a swarm of flies attends them…

Arthur has seen all kinds of death in South Africa, but this is the one he will always remember. A fair fight, open air, and a great cause- he can imagine no better death.

On his return, his patriotic accounts of the war bring approval from the highest ranks of society… a knighthood is on offer in the Coronation Honors List if Dr. Conan Doyle would care to accept it. (228-9)

Barnes’ seemingly objective re-presentation of the Boer war situates Arthur within imperialist registers to underscore how influential Englishmen viewed the colonies as testing grounds where their ideas of romance, bravado and adventure could undertake material forms. Arthur’s involvement in the Boer War is indicative of his identification with the supporters of England’s Empire. The war enables him to use his military and
medical skills, but also leads him to experience, first hand, the life of adventure and
dangerous exploits, which he encountered in Reid’s works as a schoolboy.\footnote{In *Empire Boys*, Joseph Bistrow suggests that around the 1870s, fictional narratives that “absorbed the adventurous militarism of the new and rising imperial ideology” entered the comparatively unrestricted world of leisure time, “a world that belonged to the individual boy and the school he went to.” He points out that by the end of the Victorian period, these adventures got included into the school curriculum. (27).}

But the narrative suggests that there are several discrepancies between the
romanticized textual descriptions of imperialist wars, inscribed in texts such as Reid’s
novels, and the actual struggles. Barnes portrays the Boer war as a chaotic battle that is
rife with confusion rather than clarity. As Arthur observes, more Englishmen die from
enteric rather than in struggles with Boer soldiers. The narrator depicts looting of Boer
homesteads and fighting in cornfields rather than jousting knights and heroic soldiers.
Indeed, the narrator underscores the discrepancies between Arthur’s earlier expectations
of rules and clarity, and the uncertainties of the actual war.

Indeed, the scene underscores the discrepancies both between Arthur’s
expectations and the reality, and between the romantic notions that frame his education
and his experiences. More significantly, Barnes’ portrayal draws our attention to the
constructedness of the discourses of the idealized Englishman in colonialist accounts of
imperialist expansion. He focuses our attention on the ironic distance between these
narratives and the reality. Arthur’s “patriotic accounts of the war” are undercut by the
narrator’s description of the chaos that dominates the battlefields (239). Barnes suggests
that Arthur regards the death of an Australian soldier as being emblematic of the Boer
war, of a “fair fight,” and a “great cause.” Arthur believes that this is a death he will
always remember. Here too, Barnes’ narrative foregrounds the discrepancy between
Arthur’s interpretation of his experience, and the actual event. The narrator’s account
suggests that the Australian had looted a Boer farmstead and dies defending his loot from robbers. While the narrative points to the quotidian belongings of the soldier who has apparently indulged in plundering and looting a domestic establishment, Arthur thinks that no death can be nobler than this. His estimation clashes with the narrator’s description of the confusion, looting, and the disruption of mundane farm life, that are caused by the war.

The narrator also underscores that Arthur, and his company, are dependent on the native other. A native “Basuto” guides them to the man in return for a mere florin (228). A minor but telling detail embedded in the narrative, it allows Barnes to historicize the dependency among native subjects on English colonials, who had ironically promised protection to the Basutos from Dutch colonization in South Africa, in lieu of expansion rights. The narrator points out that Arthur’s regiment “buy the fellow” as a guide. Rather than safeguarding the interests of the weak, Arthur reifies the native other into a commodity that will facilitate another action necessary for victory in the war.

While Barnes does not historicize the Boer War in detail, his description motivates readers to investigate and question the hypocrisies underlying the discourse of honor and chivalry that frame the colonial endeavor. We begin to wonder if Arthur has indeed developed into an honorable Englishman who displays chivalric behavior towards the weak or if he is an imperialist who perpetuates violence over the weak. Ironically, the narrative does not portray Arthur as serving the Basuto. In turn, it is the Basuto who serves the British army for a reward.  23

23 The narrative also confounds what it means to be English, for it seems that white men from settler colonies of Empire, who were fighting on behalf of Britain in the Boer War, could be mistaken for being English. Yet, though they were part of Empire, they were not Englishmen.
The novel thus portrays the war as testing ground for Arthur’s imperialist English identity, which he first cultivated as a young boy at school and home. Barnes suggests that Arthur’s expeditions to Boer war, which consolidate his public image as an idealized and emblematic Englishman, also implicate him in imperialist expansion. His patriotic accounts suggest that Arthur is unaware of the ironies implicit in the chaotic and petty realities that frame the war. He imbues a symbolic value to the war, which, the narrator suggests, it does not possess in reality. Indeed, Barnes’ portrayal ironizes Arthur’s anxious attempts to both consolidate his image as a patriotic Englishman and convince himself and others that the “nation is getting into a fight which is a rightful one” (229).

Barnes thus charts how Arthur’s education cultivates in him an understanding of the self as an idealized and unimpeachable subject who is superior to other, “weaker” people. It implicates Arthur in the espousal of unequal relations of power between genteel Englishman like himself, and other subjects who variously belong to different classes, gender and races. The novel suggests that Arthur’s affair and his participation in the Boer war offer him opportunities to question and critique the discourses of idealized Englishman, England’s transcendental power and its civilizing mission, but it does not chart him as questioning these beliefs.

Barnes’ narrative portrays Arthur’s defense of George Edalji as another event that enables Arthur to consolidate his national image as an emblematic Englishman. The defense provides Arthur the opportunity to serve a man who is in need of his protection. Barnes portrays Arthur as setting out on his quest yet again, this time to solve the Edalji case.
George’s development as an Englishman is equally fraught as Arthur’s. The novel charts his development from a young boy to a bourgeois English gentleman in chapters titled George. The narrative of George’s assimilation of discourses about Englishness enables Barnes to chart the adverse effects of his education on his experiences and perceptions. The novel casts George in a narrative of fraught development in which he confronts a series of crises that impede his personal progress. Barnes also suggests that education plays a crucial role in shaping George’s ambitions, sense of Englishness and perceptions about England. Barnes portrays the crises in his life as incidents that challenge George’s idealized notions of Englishness and offer him opportunities for self-assessment and questioning of the racism of his accusers.

Early on, the narrator depicts a scene of education in which George’s father catechizes him. The narrator precedes the scene with a discussion of George’s life in the vicarage and his parents stories about their arrival in Great Wyerly. Indeed, we learn that George is given a particular story about his father’s ascension to the position of Vicar in the English village: “After Great – uncle’s departure for Heaven, Father took his place. One year he married Mother, the next he obtained his parish, and the next George was born. This is the story he has been told, and it is clear and true and happy, as everything ought to be…this is George’s world and he knows it well” (7). As a child, George is given a particular version about his parents’ arrival in the village and he has little cause to doubt it. He seems to accept its happy ending unquestioningly because to him it is how “everything ought to be”. Barnes suggests that early in his life, George develops the understanding that “everything” in life ought to have clarity. Indeed, only as the narrative unfolds, we realize that George’s parents do not tell him the complete story, which is
neither clear nor wholly true. Instead, they tell him a selected, palatable and carefully plotted version of the events that frame their lives. Barnes portrays George as unquestioningly adhering to his father’s version because it firmly and unambiguously establishes him within his English social context. This is the narrative that congeals his sense of rightful belonging to the English village.

Barnes further describes the life in the vicarage, where “you do not shout, you do not soil yourself” (7). The rules about self-discipline echo Barnes’ earlier descriptions of Arthur’s experience at the Jesuit school. Like Arthur, George unquestioningly accepts these regulations, including his parents’ decision to put George and Horace in separate bedrooms to avoid any sexual deviancies. George is taught to believe in the scriptures and incorporate Christian values into his daily actions. The narrator charts an interesting portrayal of the Vicarage and his parents: “George and his father pray together… As he falls asleep, George sometimes thinks of the floor, and how his soul must be scrubbed just as the boards are scrubbed” (20). George perceives his father as an authoritarian figure who will set him on the path to a morally upright life. Barnes portrays George’s assimilation of his father’s lessons:

George, where do you live?
The Vicarage, Great Wyrley.
And where is that?
Staffordshire, Father
And where is that?
The centre of England.
And what is England, George?
England is the beating heart of the Empire, father.
Good. And what is the blood that flows through the arteries and veins of the Empire to reach even its farthest shore?
The Church of England.

He lies there thinking of arteries and veins making red lines on the map of the world, linking Britain to all the places coloured pink: Australia and India and
Canada and islands dotted everywhere. He thinks of tubes being laid along the bed of the ocean like telegraph cables. He thinks of blood bubbling through these tubes and emerging in Sydney, Bombay, Cape Town. Bloodlines, that is a word he has heard somewhere. (21)

Barnes’ portrayal of the catechism suggests that Shapurji imparts lessons about national belonging and English identity to the young boy. The question, “where do you live”, metonymically substitutes larger questions about national and cultural affiliations. George’s responses suggest that Shapurji’s catechism weaves connections between rural and metropolitan England, and between England and its imperial colonies. The answers enable George to consolidate his identity as an English subject in the metropolitan and imperialist context. George begins by locating himself in the local, rural village, and proceeds to situate himself in the center of Empire as an English subject. Indeed, George’s father instills in him a sense of self as an imperialist subject. The passage thus indicates that the father-son exchange, conducted through a set of questions and answers is a ritualistic avowal of an imperialist English identity.

The novel charts the effects of this catechism on the boy by portraying his thoughts about his central position vis a vis the colonies. Among other things, he conjures a cartographic image of the British Empire in which the colonies are dependent on England for their sustenance. Barnes depicts how Shapurji’s instruction allows George to imagine the geographical expanse of the Empire and to see England as a hegemonic global power: “He lies there thinking of arteries and veins making red lines on the map of the world, linking Britain to all the places coloured pink: Australia and India and Canada and islands dotted everywhere” (21). Not only does George internalize his father’s catechism as the signifier of his identity as an English subject, he conjures a cartographic image of the British Empire in which the colonies are dependent on England
for their sustenance: “He thinks of tubes being laid along the bed of the ocean like telegraph cables. He thinks of blood bubbling through these tubes and emerging in Sydney, Bombay, Cape Town” (21).

This education imparted by the father through the metaphor of the human body aids George to vividly imagine himself at the center of the British Empire, which seems to be necessary for the sustenance of the colonies. He visualizes the colonies in stances of dependency on England. The novel depicts how George imagines England as the imperial center in this imagined map of the Empire. England as heart of Empire is connected to the peripheral colonies through skeins that signify the flow of discourses from the metropolitan center to the margins.  

Barnes depicts how the exchange between father and son, part of a nightly ritual of identity consolidation and affirmation of loyalty to the nation is an exercise that produces George as a loyal citizen of the English nation, and by extension, of Empire. It is premised on George’s memorization of his imperialist role. The memorization and consolidation of his identity as an English supported of Empire are accomplished through the nightly repetition of his father’s lesson. It also instills in George an understanding about England’s political power over its colonies.

From henceforth, every reference to his Englishness will implicate him in his espousal of Empire and racial discourses. His father’s metaphorical reference to England’s imperialist sway and political hegemony furnish the boy with a sense of power and self-assuredness, and most important of all, with a sense of being English, which he consolidates through repetition and recitation of the answers to the questions, a

---

24 For discussions of lessons about imperial geographies in elementary educational discourses see Pamela Horn’s “English Elementary Education” in *Benefits Bestowed*? (39-56).
performance which has the rigors of an exercise. The format of the catechism, the logical move from question to answer, appears to form his preference for logic and rational discourse, an inclination that later translates into his love for legal discourse. The metaphor of the heart and the arteries further establishes the relations between the colonies and England and suggests that without English protection, the colonies will surely perish. It also suggests to the child that England’s political influence spans across remote regions of the world and can only be admired.

But where Barnes portrays George burgeoning sense of security and self-importance as an imperial subject, he also situates George within a narrative of fraught development. Indeed, from the very beginning, varied incidents challenge George’s attempts to consolidate his English identity. The novel portrays George as a protagonist who confronts crisis early on in his life, which threatens his development as an English gentleman. The novel depicts the school as a space where children display their knowledge of racial difference by using gestures that imply George’s otherness: “Wallie Sharp tells him ‘you’re not a right sort’” (11). Another classmate too makes implicit references to his racial heritage: “Henshaw makes monkey faces, pulling at the sides of his mouth with his little fingers while using his thumbs to flap his ears forward” (10). But George merely responds with the greeting, “‘How do you do, my name’s George’” to these abuses. The narrator reveals that “This is what he’s been instructed to say” (10). The narrator thus reveals that George’s father and mother have taught him to ignore racial discrimination and the challenges to his claims about his Englishness. He is to affect his ignorance of their racist implications. Perhaps the novel suggests that George believes that he can ensure that everything will be clear and happy by ignoring racial
discrimination. The stance of ignoring ensures his survival as an English subject of mixed racial heritage in the largely white village. But Barnes undercuts this notion by suggesting that George’s attempts to ignore the racial abuse do not stem it: “But Henshaw carries on making gurgling noises…”(10).

Indeed, as the novel depicts George’s experiences at school, it portrays him as refraining from assertively challenging English subjects who inflict racial abuse on him. Instead of direct confrontation with his hecklers, “George barely notices” the racial abuse for he thinks that “Sid Henshaw is just a stupid farm boy who smells of cows and probably cannot even spell the word”(14). Thus, Barnes repeatedly indicates that George tends to ignore these incidents. Barnes’ portrayal of George’s responses to the racism is troubling as it foregrounds George’s passivity when confronted with blatant racial abuse. Indeed, his silence seems to encourage his abusers.

George’s refusal to acknowledge the derision of his classmates suggests his unwillingness to grapple with his mixed racial identity and the exclusionary discourses of Englishness. Barnes suggests that in fact George differentiates himself from the farm boys who seem to signify to him illiteracy and poverty and thereby identifies with the image of the bourgeois Englishman. But Barnes also portrays George’s fear of the boys. It manifests as repeated incidents in which George soils himself. George contemplates complaining about the boys but he is unsure if this is in keeping with his moral lessons: “He is frightened of Wallie Sharp and Sid Henshaw and some others, but this would be telling on them” (12). But Barnes complicates our perception of George’s moral compunctions by portraying George’s realization that in reality he is afraid of failing at
school: “Eventually he says. ‘I’m frightened of being stupid’”(12). George’s fear is aligned to his anxieties about consolidating his identity as an educated English boy.

Indeed, the novel portrays George’s anxieties about failing to successfully assimilate the lessons taught at school. George learns math and English skills at the village school, where he is beaten till he is able to perform well in his math class. George’s classroom seems to replicate the hierarchical structure of the English society at large. This manifests in the seating arrangement and organization of the student body.

Each student is positioned according to his intellectual capacities and desire to learn:

His mother has taught him his letters, his father simple sums. For the first week he finds himself at the rear of the classroom. On Friday they will be tested and rearranged by intelligence: clever boys will sit at the front, stupid boys at the back; the reward for progress being to find yourself closer to the master, to the seat of instruction, to knowledge, to truth. This is Mr. Bostock who wears a tweed jacket, a woolen waistcoat, a shirt-collars whose points are pulled in behind his tie by a gold pin. (10)

Barnes’s narrative portrays Mr. Bostock’s seating arrangement as a microcosm of the larger socio-cultural context of English society. In this society, the educated and disciplined subjects, such as Mr. Bostock, seem to occupy authoritarian positions of unquestioned power while the lesser educated lower classes occupy the social margins.

Bostock’s classroom arrangements suggest that boys like George can inch closer to the authoritarian figure of the master by assimilating academic instruction.

Barnes portrays George’s perceptions of Mr. Bostock through a description of his anxieties about failing at school. Eager to impress the master with his reading and math skills, George takes his tests diligently. But he performs badly and is told to sit at the rear of the classroom with “farm boys and mine boys who don’t care where they sit, and indeed think it an advantage to be farther away from Mr. Bostock so they can
misbehave”(11). To him, the new seating arrangement suggests his failure to imbibe the lessons of gentility but more significantly, “George feels as if he is being slowly banished from the way, the truth, the life” (11).

Barnes suggests that school teaches George to desire “the way, the truth, the life”, represented by Mr. Bostock. Bostock, “the master” represents transcendental knowledge in George’s mind. By charting his fears of failure, Barnes depicts George’s desire for the life of a bourgeois Englishman. The novel indicates that to George, Bostock signifies the idealized Englishman and fans his desire for an authoritarian position that can be acquired through the pursuit of knowledge.

Barnes historicizes the dissemination of ideologies about class mobility, literacy and gentility at nineteenth century English schools both through his representation of George’s experiences and observations at school and his depiction of Mr. Bostock’s seating arrangement. His narrative underscores the role of schools and instructors in perpetuating the ideologies that gentility could be acquired through education and that English education at public schools could ensure personal success and middle class gentility for young, aspiring men.

As George matures from a young schoolboy to an adolescent, he cultivates a desire for the pursuit of “the way, the truth, the life” signified by Mr. Bostock. A brief passage suggests this:

At sixteen… George has no interest in skating or sledding or building of snowmen. He has already embarked on his future career. He has left Rugeley and is studying law at Mason College… He sees himself at a desk, a set of bound law books and a suit with a fob chain slung between his waistcoat pockets… He imagines himself being respected… (30)
Barnes illustrates George’s gradual progress towards the fulfillment of his personal desire for respectability and middle class gentility. George becomes a clerk at a respectable law firm and later rises to the rank of a solicitor at law. As a lawyer, he undertakes a career conventionally considered as emblematic of English gentility and commitment to justice. George “feels confident and happy with the law” (81). He further consolidates his Englishness by publishing his legal treatise, “Railway Law” as an advisory text to railway commuters in Birmingham. Barnes suggests that the publication of his railway manual and the acquiring of external trappings of a gentleman, such as a “respectable mustache, a briefcase, a modest fob chain” as well as an “umbrella,” signify to him his English identity and gentility (92). But Barnes reminds readers that these accouterments do not merely suggest his middle class status and his education; they also confer on him the authority to arbitrate on global political affairs. Barnes underscores this point by portraying George’s perusal of English newspapers. George is depicted as keen to form opinions on colonial matters:

On the train he reads the newspaper and tries to develop views on what is happening in the world. Last month there was an important speech at the new Birmingham Town Hall by Mr. Chamberlaine about the colonies and preferential tariffs. George’s position—though as yet no one has asked for his opinion on the matter—is one of cautious endorsement. (92)

Barnes reminds readers that George’s understanding of his Englishness is closely tied to his support and knowledge of Empire. The reading of an English newspaper, a signifier of gentlemanly deportment allows George to cultivate global and imperialist perspectives. Through his reading of the papers, George learns about colonial matters and forms opinions on matters of national significance to the English Empire. The narrator ironically reveals “no one has asked for his opinion on the matter.” Indeed, Barnes hints
at George’s voluntary identification with English officials and statesmen and his espousal of colonial rule. The passage also underscores George’s confidence in his Englishness. Moreover, it suggests that George does not wonder about how his father came years ago from the same region that is the topic of debate in the papers. For contemporary readers, the passage is a revealing reminder of George’s assimilation of his father’s catechism. He has learnt his lessons well as he imagines himself in the role of the imperialist statesmen.

Worse still, as George reads about the “speech at the new Birmingham Town Hall by Mr. Chamberlain about the colonies and preferential tariffs”, he prefers “cautious endorsement” of the policy thus espousing discourses of imperialist expansion and trade (92). He also learns about the felicitations accorded by English town representatives to colonial officials who had forcefully overthrown native rulers: “Next month Lord Roberts of Kandahar is due to receive the freedom of the city, an honour with which no reasonable man could possibly quarrel” (92). Indeed, the narrative portrays that George believes that as a “reasonable” Englishman he must endorse England’s imperialist projects and commercial practices in the colonies. Barnes suggests that for George, support of Empire is indicative of his reasonable mindset. He believes that the English government is justified in honoring Lord Roberts whose attack on Kandahar’s native ruler aided the British state in securing its rule over Afghanistan in 1880. Indeed, he believes that only an unreasonable man would challenge the ideologies of colonialist statesmen. It seems that George thinks that to question the siege is to challenge one’s Englishness while support consolidates national affiliations to imperialist England. Through this minute but telling detail Barnes underscores how George regards his reading of the newspaper and his deliberations on imperial matters as an affirmation of
his Englishness. By portraying George’s opinions, Barnes’ work establishes the links between his childhood assimilation of imperialist discourses and his identification with Empire as a colonizing English subject. The passage illustrates that for George there are no ambiguities about his Englishness given his political and public affiliations.

As we encounter these clues to George’s self-identity, we begin to understand why he refrains from challenging his hecklers. As an adult, George wishes to consolidate his English identity. To acknowledge both reservations about Empire and the challenges to his Englishness would raise the ghost of his mixed racial identity and cultural ties to colonial India.

The narrative depicts how George’s development is undermined by a series of events that challenge his sense of self as a respectable Englishman. George’s family receives anonymous letters, which accuse them of varied crimes. These letters underscore the Edalji’s racial difference and mixed racial heritage. George realizes that “people start writing sinful things about his parents” (27). Barnes suggests that George’s family does not discuss their racial heritage with him. Thus when the police call him for questioning, George does not understand why Sergeant Upton calls him a “clever monkey” and spells out the word solicitor to George. He tells George that it is a “big word for a mongrel like you” and spits at him. Barnes portrays George as being ashamed: “George bursts into tears” (37). He informs his parents that he is unable to understand why he is persecuted: “… they must suspect me for some reason I do not understand” (37). It seems that George cannot grapple with their insinuations about his racial difference as he has internalized the discourse of his Englishness.
Barnes’ narrative portrays other incidents of racial discrimination that haunt his personal progress. At his workplace, colleagues call him “Manchoo” (72). In a dialogue evocative of his father’s catechism they ask him “Where do you come from?” (72). George’s response “The Great Wyerly” is met with “No, Where do you really come from?” (72). Barnes’ portrayal of these challenges to George’s self-identity as an Englishman, a subject position that he had consolidated in the earlier scene of catechism, foregrounds the constant challenges to his development. This scene is evocative of the earlier scene in which Shapurji catechizes George. In it his friends ask him the same questions, but Barnes portrays them as mocking George’s attempts to claim an English identity and home. The narrative indicates that he does not react assertively to challenge his hecklers. Indeed, George does not deploy the moments of crisis to either challenge racist abuse or to reformulate his ideas about the English community and his own identity. Nor does he grapple with the implications of his own racial heritage. In other words, Barnes does not chart George as acquiring self-knowledge through his experiences with personal challenges. Moreover, George does not question his childhood lessons, which developed in him certitude about his untrammeled English identity.

The narrative portrays George’s evasive responses to racism to underscore the effects of his formative education. Confident in his respectable profession and legal knowledge, he ignores racialist slurs: “Mostly he ignores such words, though if a young rough chooses to be especially offensive, George might be obliged to remind him who he is dealing with” (94). The narrator informs us that while is not physically brave, at such times “he feels surprisingly calm.” The narrator portrays his confidence as an educated lawyer: “He knows the laws of England, and knows he can count on their support” (94).
Barnes suggests that George trusts the English legal institutions for their commitment to justice, truth and equality and bears with the racism for he believes that the laws can protect him. In other words, George sees himself as an intrinsic part of the larger national community.

Despite the family’s troubles “George attempts to continue his life as normal: this is after all, his right as a freeborn Englishman.” But the incidents nonetheless undercut his earlier sense of security: “But it is difficult when you feel yourself spied upon; when dark figures trespass the Vicarage grounds at night…” (113). Thus the novel underscores that several characters, representing the English community as large, frustrate his attempts to function as a normal Englishman and threaten his attempts at socializing into the nation.

Barnes’ narrative repeatedly charts the ironies implicit in George’s unquestioning faith in English law. By plunging George in a deeper crisis, Barnes portrays how the upholders of English justice refuse to perceive George as a respectable gentleman but associate his racial identity with criminal behavior. In their eyes, he does not belong to the nation. When the police incarcerate George on the charge of animal mutilation, they cite his Parsee heritage as the cause of his criminal propensities. But George refuses to grapple with their implications. Indeed, Barnes portrays the police as sharing the hecklers’ racialist discourses, which foreground George’s racial difference and seeming inferiority, and use these to justify their arrest. At a later point in the novel, we encounter a conversation between Chief Constable Anson and Arthur in which they discuss George’s motivations for committing the crime. Anson wonders if George was motivated by an “urge from centuries back, brought to the surface by this sudden and deplorable
miscegenation” (339). Anson calls George a “goggling half-caste” who does not indulge in the “great manly English games” and other activities that are the trademarks of a normative English identity. The narrator underscores Anson believes, that George’s inherent shyness and seeming effeminacy variously signified his otherness, his inability to assimilate in England, and further implicated him as a criminal.

The narrator’s portrayal of Anson’s prejudices allow him to undermine George’s notions of a liberal English state, which is free of racial prejudices and committed to protecting its citizens. Moreover, through his portrayal of Anson’s assumptions, Barnes undercuts the notion of a just English state. Anson’s beliefs are presented to us towards the end of the narrative, but it is clear that his assumptions have determined George’s fate. Anson refuses to perceive George as English. To him, George is a subject of mixed racial heritage, prone to actions that signify his barbaric nature and his affiliations with India.

Barnes’ characterization of George’s hecklers exposes the racist attitudes harbored by a wide spectrum of the English society. Moreover, these incidents enable Barnes to suggest that George displays a naïve trust in the English state and an abstruseness that renders him unwilling to analyze his persecution. Barnes’ novel portrays how, years later, when Arthur undertakes his defense, George again asserts his trust in English justice. Even when the crisis and the state’s refusal to exonerate him engender George’s skepticism about his earlier understanding of his untrammeled English identity, he espouses his faith in law. The narrative portrays how this stubborn, almost blind faith compounds George’s crisis. Indeed, Barnes casts George as unwilling to reexamine his beliefs about English justice even when faced with incarceration and
ignominy. In fact George emphatically asserts his faith in English legal institutions and
Englishness, even when other characters remind him that racial prejudice plays a
significant role in his suffering. A dialogue between Arthur and George illustrates
George’s response to charges of racism:

‘As I think the laws of England are the best guide for how a society in general
may live a true and honourable life together. But then my…my ordeals began. At
first I viewed it all as an unfortunate example of maladministration of the law.
The police made mistake, but it would be corrected by the Quarter Sessions… It
will, I hope still be corrected by the Home Office. It is a matter of great pain and,
to say the least, inconvenience, that this has happened, but the process of the law
will in the end deliver justice. That is what I believed, and what I still believe.

However, it has been more complicated than I first realized…. My father lived his
whole life within the Christian religion. So for him my ordeal must be
comprehensible in those terms…It is an embarrassment for me to say the words,
but he imagines me a martyr….My incarceration did not strengthen my faith.
Quite the contrary. It has, I think destroyed it. My suffering has been quite
purposeless, either for me or as any kind of example to others…

My father, you must understand, believes that this new century will bring in a
more harmonious comingling of races than in the past- that this is God’s purpose,
and I am intended to serve as some kind of messenger. Or victim. Or both.’
‘Without in any way criticizing your father,’ says Arthur carefully, ‘I would have
thought that if such had been God’s intention, it would have been better served by
making sure you had a gloriously successful career as solicitor, and thus set an
example to others for the comingling of the races.’

‘You think as I do’ replies George… ‘It is simply that Arthur’s words have
confirmed what he has already thought. (263)

In the next scene we encounter this exchange between Arthur and George:

“You had enemies in Great Wyerly?”
“Evidently. But unseen ones. I had few acquaintances there, whether friends of
foe. We did not go out into the local society.”
‘Why not?’
‘I have only recently begun to understand why not. At the time, as a child, I
assumed it to be normal. The truth is, my parents had very little money, and what
they had, they spent on their children’s education…”
“Yes.” This seems less than the full answer. “But, I presume, given your father’s
origins…”
“Sir Arthur, I should like to make one thing quite clear. I do not believe that race prejudice has anything to do with my case.”
“I understand your desire not to play the martyr…”
“No, it is not that…I have thought a great deal about this matter. I was brought up an Englishman. I went to school, I studied the law, I did my articles, I became a solicitor. Did anyone try to hold me back from this progress? My schoolmasters encouraged me… On the contrary…. No clients refused my advice at Newhall on the grounds of my origins. (263-265)

Barnes portrays George as reiterating his faith in English law. George informs Arthur that his father consoled him after his ordeals began by describing his suffering in symbolic terms. George focalizes his father’s response to his crisis. Shapurji informs George about his belief in the comingling of races, a phenomenon suggested by his own personal life, and regards George as a martyr. Shapurji, the narrative suggests, informs George about the Parsee community’s contributions to England only when the family confronts repeated abuse. But despite Shapurji’s attempts to suture the gaps in George’s knowledge about his Parsee heritage, George challenges his ideas. George’s dialogue reveals his awareness that his father’s consolation springs from his anxieties about English perceptions of Parsees as inferior natives and outcasts. Not only does he consider his suffering as purposeless but he also believes that given his English identity, these anxieties are baseless in so far as they apply to him. He does not believe himself to be a martyr simply because he is an Englishman. He does not see himself as a racially mixed subject and an outcast.

Moreover, Barnes’ George does not believe that his persecution is a consequence of racial prejudice. George asserts that he is aware that “some people look at me differently” (265). George informs Arthur that he has no evidence of racism on the behalf of the English community at large: “What evidence do I have that anyone has acted
against me because of race prejudice?” (265). George uses legal discourse and rational logic to assert his Englishness and faith in the English. His logical research suggests that the English are not racist abusers. His claims are undercut by the myriad incidents of racism that dot the narrative.

Barnes portrays Arthur’s attempts at convincing George about his racial discrimination and again charts George’s stubborn refusal. Arthur argues that George should try “occasionally not to think like a lawyer” as the “fact that no evidence of a phenomenon can be adduced does not mean that it does not exist” (266). Arthur’s persistent reminders of his family’s persecution force George to admit that there are other reasons for his refusal to acknowledge that racial difference plays a role in his suffering. George reminds Arthur that thinking about race will not prove “useful” to him:

But it is also a question of what is useful. It is not useful to me as a general principal of life to assume that those with whom I have dealings have a secret dislike of me. And at the present juncture, it is no use imagining that if only the Home Secretary were to become convinced that race prejudice lies at the heart of the race, then I shall have my pardon and compensation to which you allude. Or perhaps, Sir Arthur, you believe Mr. Gladstone himself to be afflicted with that prejudice? (266)

Barnes portrays George’s assimilation of nineteenth century legal discourses. He has a deductive mind. In addition, he also prefers to accept theories and explanations that will facilitate his survival. His adherence to these ideas is reminiscent of his earlier beliefs in the stories about his parents’ arrival at the Great Wyrley. The comment that thinking about race is not useful to him “as a general principle of life” suggests George’s fears that this may indeed have caused his suffering. Indeed, the line betrays his anxiety about his racial identity and survival in England. The narrator charts his convictions in ways that suggest that George adapts this stance of ignoring race as a strategy for surviving in
England. To him, it is simply not useful to grapple with racial hatred. As if to convince Arthur of the fallibility of his suggestions, George claims that he cannot believe that the claim of racial prejudice will convince the legal authorities to overturn the case. In addition, he asks Arthur if he suspects that the highest authorities in the English state harbor racial prejudices. The narrator suggests that George understands that as a loyal Englishman, Arthur will be forced to reject the notion that the English state is racist. Indeed, the narrator charts George’s persistent recourse to legal discourses to evade and reject questions of racial prejudice.

Even when events force an increasingly troubled George to wonder if race indeed plays a role in his case, he is incapable of comfortably espousing this belief. Indeed, Barnes suggests that these negotiations with his racial difference and its implications for his self-conception as an Englishman incite memories of childhood in George. In particular, George thinks of his father’s lessons, which consolidated his English identity:

Sir Arthur, when my… troubles began, my father would sometimes take me into his study, and instruct me about the achievements of famous Parsees. How this one became a successful businessman, that one a Member of Parliament….And I am unable to pretend to be something I am not. My father brought me up as an Englishman, and he cannot, when things become difficult, attempt to console me with matters he has never previously stressed. (268)

By repeatedly charting George’s explanations about his unwillingness to countenance racism, Barnes suggests that George suffers impediments in his personal progress because he is stubborn in his refusal to see racial difference as the cause of his suffering. He insists on adhering to an idealized notion of England. Indeed, Barnes suggests that the repeated assertions of his Englishness in childhood and adulthood render George
incapable or at least unwilling to acknowledge his racial difference and his
marginalization at the hands of the larger national community.

George asserts that he is not a Parsee but an Englishman. Moreover, he points out
that his father never brought up references to their Parsee background while he was
growing up as a child. George has assimilated his father’s lessons in ways that render him
incapable of negotiating multiple socio-cultural affiliations. This scene foregrounds his
unwillingness and discomfort with the notion that his racial difference marks him as an
outsider in eyes of the English public at large. It also renders him as uncritical of his
nation’s ills.

Thus, throughout his persecution George clings to his belief in his Englishness,
failing to either question or critique the racial discourses that inform it. He does not
question the ways in which race might be intrinsic to national discourses of Englishness
that he espouses. Nor does he question the relations between English discourses of legal
justice and imperialism. The remarks of George’s hecklers underscore Gikandi’s claims
in Maps of Englishness, that “Britons defined themselves against a real or imaginary
Other” who was often represented as possessing undesirable moral and intellectual
qualities in comparison to the morally superior and civilized English subjects (24). In
espousing an English identity for himself, George seems to be complicit in this project of
othering.

Indeed, none of the two protagonists questions the discourse of the ideal
Englishman and its accompanying notion of the just English nation. Barnes does not
portray George as a strident protestor who explicitly questions racism or reassesses his
father’s silence. Though the novel explicitly portrays racist slurs to chart George’s
suffering and oppression, it portrays his responses as inadequate in condemning racism. And yet, even as Barnes portrays George’s desire for a quiet English life, he depicts George as resenting the lack of public sympathy and attention to his case.

The question of whether George acquires self-knowledge and a nuanced understanding about England’s tenuous claims to justice and truth occupies a central place in Barnes’ novel. Barnes novel suggests that this knowledge can enable him to effectively condemn his nation’s discourses of racial difference from the position of a solicitor and a writer. But even towards the end of the novel, George does not incriminate the English in perpetuating injustices as he receives pardon from the English state and resumes his legal practice.

While George fails to condemn the English, the narrator implicates the English state and the community at large in perpetuating George’s violence. Thus while the character seems to lack any self-knowledge, Barnes uses him as a narratorial device for critiquing the racist attitude of the English and the oppressive practices of the English state. As George wonders about his experiences, he unwittingly exposes the tendency among the English to suppress seemingly contradictory events that expose the nation’s ills:

His case had led to the setting up of the Court of Criminal appeal, whose decisions over the last two decades had elaborated the common law of crime to an extent widely recognized as revolutionary. George was proud of his association. But who was aware of it? A few people would respond to his name…but most nowadays had never heard of him.

At times he resented this, and felt ashamed of his resentment… The Chaplain at Lewes had asked him what he missed, and he had replied that he missed his life. Now he had it back; he had work, enough money, people to nod to… But he was occasionally nudged by the thought that he deserved more; that his ordeal should have led to more reward. From villain to martyr to nobody very much- was this
not unfair? His supporters had assured him that his case was as significant as that of Dreyfus, that it revealed as much about England, as the Frenchman’s did about France, and just as there had been Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards so there were those for and against Edalji. (411)

By portraying George’s thoughts about the similarities between his case and the Dreyfus Affair, Barnes’ novel charts parallels between the persecutions of Alfred Dreyfuss, a soldier in the French Army in the late nineteenth century, who was charged with treason against the French government, and George Edalji. The Dreyfus case divided French officials and popular opinion as many accused Dreyfus, while others supported him and regarded him as a victim of anti-Semitic sentiment. The novel recasts George as wondering if the English would learn about their seemingly divided national community from the discussions of his case. George wonders if England was split between subjects who questioned racial discrimination and those who supported it. His thoughts suggest that he wants his case to circulate as a narrative about the tensions inherent in the seemingly homogenous national community and its racialist assumptions.

Indeed, though the narrative repeatedly portrays George as attempting to evade self-scrutiny and critique of English injustices in his struggles to live a normal life, it hints at George’s self-contradicting realization that his case offered valuable insights about England’s discourses of racial difference and intolerance. Barnes’ George wonders as to why his case was relegated to the margins of the nation’s collective memory and forgotten. It did not engender debates about English justice and perceptions of racial others. Barnes’ narrative charts George’s contradictory thoughts and forces readers to think about these questions as well. Indeed, the novel’s story compels readers to take up George’s train of thought about the irony implicit in the nation’s self-image as a just place and the perpetual experiences of racial discrimination among its citizens.
George is emblematic of the fraught English subject who understands the English to be both principled yet violent. His education offers him the opportunities to consolidate his English identity but his larger community frustrates these attempts. Indeed, George’s experiences challenge his idealized notions of self and nation that he cultivated in childhood.

By portraying George’s thoughts, Barnes provokes contemporary readers to think about the gaps in official histories that celebrate an idealized Englishness:

…he suspected that his obscurity was something to do with England itself… England was a quieter place, just as principled, but less keen on making a fuss about its principles; a place where the common law was trusted more than government statute, where people got on with their business and did not seek to interfere with that of others; where great public eruptions took place from time to time, eruptions of feeling which might even tip over into violence and injustice, but which soon faded in the memory, and were rarely built into the history of the country… This has happened, now let us forget about it and carry on as before…let us pretend that nothing much was wrong in the first place…This was England, and George could understand England’s point of view, because George was English himself (411-12)

Barnes portrays George in the horns of a dilemma. He depicts George’s continuous assertion of his Englishness but also charts his increasing confusion about English commitment to justice. The narrator points that George believes that his desire for obscurity is emblematic of the national community’s reticence. This scene in which the narrator describes George’s thoughts about England serves as a platform for Barnes to critique discourses of idealized English identity and expose the discrepancies in the national community’s commitment to liberal values, which are maintained at the cost of analyzing past injustices.

As this scene suggests, George becomes the mouthpiece for Barnes’ critique of idealized notions of English identity that elide histories of violent exploitation and
racism. In fact George becomes emblematic of the national community’s capacity to carry on despite its violent history. The novel portrays George as perceiving himself as a microcosm of the English nation, an idea he assimilated as a child. Like the nation, George too goes back to pretending that nothing was wrong by choosing to be silent about his case and continuing his practice. Indeed, Barnes embeds his own critique of the English tendency to avoid the analysis of its impeprilaist discourses: “Let us pretend that nothing was wrong in the first place.”

Thus Barnes’ portrayal of both George’s thoughts and Arthur’s participation in the Boer war serve as platforms for his scathing critique of the unwillingness of the English to investigate their participation in exploitative practices. The novel charts the racialist assumptions of Englishmen from varied classes to foreground the injustices to which George refers. George’s thoughts suggest that the English overcome qualms about these histories of violence by ignoring to analyze the ethical and moral implications of these incidents even as they socialize future generations in the project of English imperialism.

Barnes does not portray George as espousing a Parsee identity or as claiming affiliations to India. On the contrary, the novel charts how George regards racist incidents as “normality” and fails to effectively use his experiences to draw public attention to racism. The conclusion of the novel portrays him in London where he continues to lead a quiet life, with the belief that “People generally left you alone, either from courtesy or indifference, and George was grateful for either” (416). The novel depicts his acceptance of people’s racialist remarks:

It was true that inaccurate assumptions were habitually made: that he and his sister had recently arrived in the country; that he was a Hindoo…Naturally there
were the kind of humorous allusions that Greenway and Stentson went in for—though few to Bechuana land—but he regarded this as some inevitable normality, like rain or fog. And there were even some people who, on learning that you came from Birmingham, expressed disappointment, because they had been hoping for some news from distant lands, which you were quite unable to supply. (417)

The novel portrays George’s belief that episodes of racial othering are inevitable and form an intrinsic part of the English social fabric. It ironizes his failure to critique his larger community and take umbrage at these incidents of persistent marginalization of racially mixed subjects like him and Maud.

Where George fails to question racial prejudice, the novel re-presents his case and the racist comments to compel readers to wonder if the adherence to palatable stories about English identity and national past furthers violence and the passive acceptance of racial intolerance. Both characters assimilate empowering conceptualizations of Englishness in their childhoods that affect their experiences as adults. Neither protagonist wonders about the discrepancies between idealized notions of Englishness and England’s exclusionary discourses and imperialist rule. George in particular cannot transcend these formative influences and replace them with a more nuanced understanding of a fallible English nation that is open to critique.

Thus Barnes’ narrative portrays both characters in the throes of crises that threaten their development. These moments also offer the characters possibilities of developing counter knowledge, or alternative discourses about England, Empire and idealized Englishness. Arthur’s defense of George signifies his opposition to the English state and his magnanimity. But Barnes suggests that Arthur’s motivations to help George are closely tied to his authoritarian self-conception as a chivalric hero who must serve the weak. By inserting excerpts from Arthur’s biography, Memories and Adventures, the
novel complicates our impressions of Arthur’s magnanimous defense. We see the biography through George’s eyes. Barnes portrays George’s thought about Arthur’s description:

‘Perhaps some Catholic-minded patron wished to demonstrate the universality of the Anglican Church. The experiment will not, I hope, be repeated, for though the Vicar was an amiable and devoted man, the appearance of a coloured clergyman with a half-caste son in a rude, unrefined parish was bound to cause some regrettable situation.’ George found this unfair; it practically blamed his mother’s family, in whose gift the parish had been, for the events that occurred. Nor did he like being characterized as a ‘half-caste son.’ It was doubtless true in a technical sense… Was there not a better way of putting it? Perhaps his father, who believed that the world’s future depended upon the harmonious comingling of the races, could have come up with a better expression.

“What aroused my indignation and gave me the driving force to carry the thing through was the utter helplessness of this forlorn little group of people, he coloured clergyman…” Utter helplessness? You would not think his father had published his own analysis of the case before Sir Arthur had even appeared on the scene; nor that mother and Maud were occasionally writing letters… It seemed to George that Sir Arthur, while deserving of much credit and thanks, was rather too determined to annex for himself the whole credit and thanks. He certainly diminished the whole campaign by Mr. Voules of Truth, not to mention Mr. Yelverton, and the memorials… No, George thought, this was ungracious of him.

(415)

The scene charts George’s thoughts as he reads Arthur’s description of the Edalji case in the late writer’s memoir. Barnes interweaves excerpts from the actual text in the novel. By having the fictional George respond to the work, Barnes both foregrounds and undermines Arthur’s self-conception as a chivalric hero. He also portrays how Arthur views the Edalji family as weak and ineffectual. Arthur’s description evokes colonial justifications for annexing the colonies in order to civilize purportedly weaker native subjects.

Further, as George reads Arthur’s biography, he encounters Arthur’s references to him as a “half-caste”, which the magnanimous Englishman rescued. Through George’s
reading, we gain insight into Arthur’s Reid like, imperialist description, in which he saves the native subject from disgrace. George refrains from critiquing Arthur’s self-important stance, and instead thinks that Arthur allocates importance to himself because he has told this story over and over again and has embellished it with each retelling. George takes umbrage to being called “half caste” but also to Arthur’s suggestions that his father should not have been appointed as a Vicar in an English village. The narrator does not portray George as reading about Arthur’s denunciations of the racist abuses and the racialist attitudes. One wonders if his memoirs explicitly denounce racial discrimination. Instead, Arthur’s description suggests that he expects racist slurs from the “unrefined and rude” villagers. The passage reveals Arthur’s snobbery and sense of superiority as an emblematic Englishman. It also portrays his racial beliefs. Like the villagers, he does not commend the appointing of mixed racial subjects on positions of power.

Indeed this scene complicates our understanding of Arthur. Does Arthur aid George out of a conviction about his racial discrimination, or does he take up the case because it serves his personal needs and his notions of chivalry? Does he espouse racialized notions of Englishness and native inferiority? The narrative does not offer any conclusive answers, forcing readers to ponder about the confusing impulses that characterize these subjects.

Despite the ambiguities that frame the narrative’s depiction of its characters’ questioning of hegemonic discourses of Englishness, Barnes’s work compels his readers to confront England’s history of racial abuse. Not only does Barnes draw our attention to the links between Englishness and imperialist conquest, but he also forces readers to remember forgotten histories of imperialist violence. It seems that his narrative exhorts the
English to critique the racialist discourses, which frame the notions of idealized Englishness. Moreover, the novel reveals how the discourse of idealized Englishness is disseminated at the English school and at home where children assimilate romanticized notions of Englishness in literary texts and popular lore.

Through the representation of George’s turmoil, Barnes charts histories of racial violence and the fraught development of the subject of mixed race who is a victim of racial abuse. But despite its depictions of George’s suffering, in the end, the novel remains caught between condemning George for both refusing to grapple with racist abuse and his naïve assumption about his Englishness, and empathizing with George and critiquing the racist intolerance of the English who fail to accept him as a naturally born Englishman. It depicts Arthur in equally ambiguous terms. The novel portrays him both as a savior who defends George and places implicit faith in his innocence, and an imperialist who participates in the consolidation of the English Empire. It casts the characters as fraught subjects who possess the potential for self-interrogation and critique of the nation’s injustices but do not accomplish these tasks.

By portraying the characters’ failure to critique imperialist violence and the discourses of racial difference that frame their idealized notions of England and Englishness, Barnes compels readers to investigate the role of English education in sustaining these beliefs about England’s transcendental authority and power and the racial superiority of the English over others. Indeed, Barnes’ novel draws attention to its scenes of education by depicting how discourses disseminated at the school and home cultivate an imperialist self-identity in both subjects, who fail to explicitly condemn racism and socio-cultural injustice despite their moral values and commitment to justice.
The concluding scene of the novel in which George attends Arthur’s memorial service and reflects on what he has learned from his persecution too reminds readers of the educational function of the novel, which exhorts them to grapple with England’s racial discourses. Barnes manages it by directing a set of questions about George’s ability to “see” and grapple with the implications of his experiences and their impact on his notions of Englishness at the reader: “What does he see? What did he see? What will he see?” (441). Does he “see” for instance that racial prejudice, harbored by a variegated group of people has caused his prosecution and suffering? Barnes mentions in the “Afterword,” that the real Edalji refused to consider racial discrimination as the primary cause of his incarceration. But where George cannot see, the narrator seems to exhort his readers to analyze their own notions of racial identity and English supremacy. It seems then that these questions are also directed at contemporary readers by the author who asks us if we have learnt to explore the relations between racism, imperialist exploitation and Englishness. These questions suggest the novel’s preoccupation with the idea of education of England’s subjects about Englishness and race.
Chapter 4

Spirit Thievery and Colonial Education in Erna Brodber’s *Myal*

Erna Brodber’s *Myal*, published in 1988, is emblematic of those Anglophone novels that explore the legacies of colonial education among the colonized. The novel charts the effects of colonial education on the experiences of its main protagonist, Ella O’Grady, a mixed racial subject of Irish-African descent who lives in Grove Town, a small Jamaica village in the early twentieth century. In the novel, Ella, recites Rudyard Kipling’s “Big Steamers” before her schoolmates, members of local churches and colonial officials. She concludes her recitation with the first stanza of Kipling’s “the White Man’s Burden”, which depicts the colonized as “sullen peoples” and as “Half devil and half child” (6). In the next scene, the narrator informs us that Ella encounters images of Peter Pan, and Dairymaid, in her school textbooks, and fantasizes about traveling to England with them. The narrator then proceeds to charts the effects of Ella’s education on her experiences. Some years later, a more mature and experienced Ella returns to the colonial school. But this time, Ella occupies the position of the schoolteacher who teaches the children a tale about an imperialist master and his dependents. Ella realizes that this is a “negative lesson” which cultivates stances of “unquestioning complicity” with Empire in her listeners.

Through this depiction of the colonial classroom in the concluding chapters of *Myal*, Brodber refocuses our attention on the seemingly quotidian scene described in chapter two in which Ella assimilates instruction at school and displays her learning through recitation. The concluding chapters of the work chart how colonial schooling interpellates colonized schoolchildren in the imperialist project, compelling us to
reexamine the earlier depictions of colonial education. This chapter argues that through this depiction of colonial schooling, the novel delineates the adverse effects of the internalization of colonialist discourses on the colonized. Myal suggests that Ella’s recitation and imagined identification with the textual images of English figures embroil her in the exploitative hegemonic culture of the colonizer. The novel represents how Ella encounters descriptions of the colonized as child like, uncivilized and inimical to European civility in these texts. But more significantly, the chapter examines how by tracing Ella’s development from an unquestioning student to a questioning colonial subject, Myal reimagines the complying subject as an agent of change who challenges colonialist discourses.

Myal begins with a scene in which Mass Cyrus cures Ella through a ritualistic healing that incorporates the use of herbs, ritualistic chants and Afrocentric myalist practices. The narrator portrays the events that have led to this healing ceremony before proceeding to chart the aftermath of the cure. The novel takes us back in time to the colonial school setting where a younger Ella recites Rudyard Kipling’s poems before a large audience. Chapter Two introduces us to the poem “Big Steamers” first and then to the voice of the narrator who informs us that Ella, aged thirteen, recites these lines: “The words were the words of Kipling but the voice was that of Ella O’Grady ages 13”(5). Ella also recites “the White Man’s Burden” (6). Gradually the novel gives us an insight into the racial dynamics at work in the school. As one of her listeners, Reverend Simpson, responds to her recitation, he wonders about her mixed racial heritage. He wonders if Ella’s lighter skin color has secured her the role of the reciter. His thoughts become the frame through which readers interpret and encounter the scene. As Simpson murmurs the
first stanza of “the White Man’s Burden”, he recasts Ella as the white man’s burden thinking to himself, “and whose burden is this half black, half white child?”

Simpson’s focalization becomes the platform on which the narrator builds her description of Ella’s parentage and mixed racial heritage. Simpson’s thoughts also reveal the functions that Ella’s recitation performs in the school: “‘Holness has scored with Getfield’ Reverend Simpson thought, as his eyes caught the smiling face of the Anglican parson who was sitting in the visitor’s chair… ‘Nice choice of poem what with the war about to begin and all that. And well executed too.’” (5) Simpson’s thoughts enable Brodber to contextualize the narrative and Ella’s recitation. Ella recites just before the First World War is about to begin. He wonders about how the Kipling poems are a good choice before the colonial government’s representative, Getfield, who would be happy to hear a colonized subject reciting a revered English poet. Getfield’s approval suggests the success of the event. Simpson proceeds to wonder about her racial heritage and the school’s decision to choose her as the reciter:

“And whose burden is this half black, half white child? These people certainly know how to make trouble.” He looked around the school and continued with his conversation with himself: “No one else with that colour and that hair. You mean Holness couldn’t have found another just as good? Seems we of this hue just cannot win!” He could not have found another. There was no one else in the school as sensitive as Ell O’Grady. No one else had reason to be. (6)

By charting Simpson’s thoughts, the novel suggests that in his belief, Ella’s color has played a significant function in her role as a reciter. We also learn that there are no students who share her skin color at school. Simpson regards Holness’ decision as a signifier that the other students do not have a chance of being chosen for these occasions given their color. He wonders if the school is stirring up trouble. As if to address Simpson’s questions, Brodber informs readers that Ella’s sensitive nature makes her the
perfect choice for the role of the reciter. But why is Ella sensitive? The narrator does not immediately address this question leaving the reader to piece together the causes from the descriptions of events that follow. The novel’s descriptions of Ella’s half Irish and half African descent and her community’s marginalization explain Ella’s sensitive nature.

Indeed, the narrator portrays Ella as a victim of alienation at school where her peers perceive her mixed racial heritage as a cause for cruel jokes. Her teachers on the other hand choose to ignore her as they feel that her lighter color will ensure her economic development. Indeed, as Simpson’s thoughts indicate, many Grove Town inhabitants feel that Ella’s lighter color affords her certain opportunities that black children do not have.

The community’s marginalization makes Ella sensitive. But the narrator suggests that it also seems to make her susceptible to assimilating the descriptions in her colonial texts. A scene in the novel describes Ella’s response to the other literary texts and the poems that she encounters at school:

They didn’t bother to ask her anything in class. She found a way to learn though. Her mother used to tell her that the angels would keep her and teach her many things and perhaps that’s what happened… teacher would talk about OSMOSIS… Ella would put up her hand but never be called on. Once more unrecognized, Ella would stare through the windows and guess what? She would see the thin liquid struggling to pull the thick one and all of this within the membrane of a little leaf. Like an object lesson. And so every time. When they brought out the maps and showed Europe, it rose from the paper in three dimensions and grew big, came right down to her seat and allowed her to walk on it, feel its snow, invited her to look deep down its fjords… She met people who looked like her. She met Peter Pan and she met the dairy maid who could pass for her sister-same two long plaits and brownish. She met the fellow with the strange name who put his finger down the dyke and stopped the town from flooding.

So when teacher brought his poem about Steamers, he wasn’t bringing any new idea to Ella except for the part about getting up and reciting before the whole school. She had been to England many times, and Scotland too. … Peter had taken her into a coal mine and up through a chimney and she had come out looking more like her mother. She remembered that trip very well for it was the first time she felt real but then they had walked along the streets and people had
teased them and said “look at the little blackamoors” and she didn’t like it because she didn’t think a person’s colour was anything to make a joke about…

Often they had gone down to Cardiff, the place where there were so many ships and she and Peter, and Lucy Gray who was now part of their party had spoken to the ships and asked them the very same questions that were in the teacher’s poems. …they had taken them with them and they had seen Quebec and Vancouver and all those places and could see the channel.. and the cargo the ships were taking on. It was nothing, nothing at all. All she as doing at teacher’s rehearsals was to open her mouth and let what was already in her heart and head come out. (11-12)

These long passages describe Ella’s experiences at school. They link her recitation with her assimilation of her lessons about European spaces and literary figures. Ella identifies with Peter Pan and Dairymaid and imagines herself as traveling with them. The scene depicts Ella’s internalization of the lessons in terms of an embodiment. She collapses the distance between the textual and the real, literary and the outer world of her classroom. The references to the lessons about Osmosis become occasions for the narrator to compare Ella to a leaf that absorbs liquid. The image suggests her assimilation of the instruction in the classroom. Ella’s identification with the English figures and her imagined scenarios of travel to England contribute to her impassioned recitation. She feels at ease when reciting the poems, as she is familiar with the descriptions of the English ports.

The scene charts Ella’s assimilation of English discourses of imperialist trade at school. It suggests that Ella assumes an Anglicized identity and forges friendships with the imagined English subjects. But the scene also suggests that despite her absorption of Eurocentric discourses, Ella desires identification with her mother. The narrator’s description of her imagined transformation into a soot-covered girl depicts her anxieties about her racial and color difference. Ella desires to overcome the alienating effects of
her peers’ marginalization. She imagines herself as resembling her mother as it makes her feel “real”. The texts then empower her not just by allowing her to imagine herself as a traveling colonial subject but also as a black subject who can suture the severed links between herself and the Afrocentric community represented by Mary, her mother. The narrator doesn’t dwell on the implication of this identification, swiftly moving instead to delineating the scene of Ella’s identification with Peter Pan, Lucy Gray and Dairy Maid. She identifies with them, as they resemble her. Ella internalizes the images represented in the literary texts and the maps. The narrator points out that she has taken these images of her colonial texts to “heart” and regards the recitation as a mere mouthing of what she already knows. The maps have introduced her to Cardiff and English ports; she has seen first hand the ports, which were of commercial significance to empire.25

But, as the novel depicts, in addition to reciting “Big Steamers” before her peers and school officials, Ella also recites Kipling’s “the White Man’s Burden.” Simpson recites the first verse of “the White Man’s Burden” alongside Ella:

Take up the whiteman’s burden
Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind you sons to exile
To serve the captive’s need
To wait in heavy hearness
On filtered folk and wild
Your new caught sullen peoples
Half devil and half child. (6)

25 See Clive Whitehead’s analysis of the modernizing role of colonial education in the context of colonies like India in Colonial Educators: The British Indian and Colonial Education Service 1858-1983. Also see Helen Tiffin’s “Cold hearts and (foreign) tongues: recitation and the reclamation of the female body in the works of Erna Brodber and Jamaica Kincaid” Callaloo (16.4 Fall 1993) 205. Tiffin points out that “Recitation not only disciplines the bodies of performers; it also disciplines those of the audience whose appropriate (English) response is invoked by the recitation ritual which combined a peculiar blend of exaggerated peripheral gestures with a formal stance and an Anglo-Victorian appearance of modesty.”
Indeed the novel presents Simpson’s perceptions of her recitation as an invitation to the readers for understanding and investigating the process of assimilation at work in the colonial classroom.\textsuperscript{26} Through her representation of Simpson’s thoughts, Brodber compels us to wonder whether Ella identifies herself as the white man’s burden. Ella identifies with Peter Pan, but she deliberately overlooks the poem’s depiction of the colonized as sullen peoples and as half devil and half child.

But while the young Ella does not grapple with the deeper meanings of “the White Man’s Burden”, Simpson foregrounds the ironies implicit in her recitation of the verse. To him, her recitation is both an affirmation on her part of her dependency on the colonizer and an indication that she does not fit the poem’s images of the colonized subject.

Thus, through her representation of the colonial school, Brodber depicts the internalization of colonial ideologies among the colonized. In addition, she also suggests that such recitals were public performances that performed a range of social, cultural and economic roles in the colonies. Brodber represents the varied responses from the audience to Ella’s recitation. Teacher Holness responds with “gladness and stale

\textsuperscript{26} This scene of Ella’s repetition of the colonizer’s discourse in the spatial confines of the colonial classroom points to one of the key processes of cultural imperialism and actions through which colonized subjects imbibed imperialist ideologies and ways of seeing in schools, a place that is conventionally associated with their modernization and disciplining in general. Indeed, Ella is the primary character that serves as a vehicle through which Brodber represents the effects of colonial education and the internalization of colonial ideologies among colonized subjects. In \textit{Neither Led Nor Driven}, Brian L Moore and Michele A. Johnson suggest that the dissemination of colonial education in nineteenth century Jamaica was part of the imperialist mission to provide the lower classes “with the ideological tenets to become civilized, loyal British subjects, and to equip them with basic skills of literacy and numeracy to function at the bottom of the society in their presumed role of dependent agricultural laborers”\textsuperscript{(205)}. The first stanza of “the White Man’s Burden articulates the civilizing mission of the colonizer, envisaging the colonized as childlike and passive. As Helen Tiffin points out, the recitation “interpellates” both Ella and her audience, the communal “local” body, which is “erased by both script and performance,” as well as by the “necessary assumption on the part of both audience and performer that speakers and listeners were themselves ‘English’” in the imperialist project \textsuperscript{(909)}. Her recitation signifies her unquestioning espousal of the colonizer’s discourse.
amazement” (12). Reverend Simpson thinks that Holness had “scored with Getfield” with his choice, and the Anglican parson in turn displays a “smiling face”, as if approving of her charged performance (12). Indeed, Simpson’s focalization and the listeners’ responses enable Brodber to suggest that the recitation is an attempt to appease the colonial officials. A “good” performance seems to signify the teachers’ success in dissemination English discourses to the students. It signifies the students’ absorption of civilizing traits and the transformation of their “inferior” status. In addition, it ensures economic security for the school. The colonial state guarantees the financing of schools that have successfully adopted the English curriculum.

Recitation-as-public-performance determines the fate of the Grove Town School as well. It is proof that the colonial text has been well taught to the students who can repeat the instruction in tones that suggest their support for the imperialist institution. Simpson thinks that her recitation is a success, as it impresses Getfield who will determine if the colonial state can invest further in the school or promote the schoolmaster for his successful attempts at acculturating his students with colonial discourses. Moreover, he finds it a “nice choice of poem what with the war about to begin” (5). The poem’s recitation, especially the manner in which it is recited, also determines the emotions that will be evoked from the audience. Holness has deliberately chosen the poem to illustrate his loyalty to Empire and to elicit similar responses from his audience.

This complex multilayered scene of Ella’s recitation and education in the colonial classroom, with its shifting perspectives and multiple focalizers, enables Brodber to chart the effects of colonial education on colonized subjects. Through its re-presentation of
Kipling’s poems, the novel appropriates the English text within a postcolonial text, and re-presents it as a part of colonial curriculum.

But what functions do these poems perform in the novel? Among other things, their appearance enables the novel to historicize colonial education and depict the possible responses to it. Among these responses are the colonized subjects’ articulation and assimilation of colonialist images of the colonized other. If Ella absorbs “Big Steamers”, the reader can assume that she also assimilates the racial implications and unequal power relations suggested by the “sullen peoples” of “the White Man’s Burden”. Perhaps, she assimilates the notion that the white man is obliged to civilize and reform the half devil half child subject of the colonies. Simpson has memorized the verse and recites it to wonder about the advantages Ella seems to have over other dark skinned students in her school. Perhaps, her lighter skin color does afford her certain privileges among the schoolchildren. The novel complicates our understanding about her marginalization by suggesting that the darker children are justified in their resentment given the preferential treatment given to lighter skinned subjects by colonial officials. While the narrative compels us to wonder about these possibilities, it does not let us hold on to a single assumption about Ella’s assimilation.

Indeed, our understanding of Ella’s wholehearted and untrammeled absorption is complicated by the narrator’s suggestion that Ella imagines herself as a blackamoor and condemns the colonizer’s racist comments. She seems to desire identification with both white and black subjects, a consequence of her racial heritage. Thus the narrative both hints at possibilities of assimilation of colonialist ideologies by the colonized subject and undermines the notion that this is a smooth untrammeled process of identification and
absorption of colonial discourse. Yet despite its suggestion that Ella is the embodiment of colonized subjects who struggles against complete identification with the colonial texts, the novel forces readers to think about how “children are invited into complicity” through their reading of English texts at the colonial school.

Brodber suggests that Ella’s complicity and passive assimilation of colonialist discourses are also linked to her mother’s belief that the adoption of Eurocentric discourses will ensure their socio-economic survival and progress. In *Perceptions about Caribbean Women* Brodber suggests that in the early twentieth century, Jamaican women, who were broadly divided by their racial heritage and skin color into, black, white and colored, were compelled to internalize hegemonic beliefs in order to be economically secure in the “master culture” (34). Brodber depicts this internalization in *Myal*.

In *Myal*, Mary, Amy and Maydene appear to be of the opinion that a Eurocentric education, which entails the cultivation of modern technical skills and vocational training, can provide Ella reprieve from physical labor and ensure her economic development. Accordingly, Maydene, the wife of the Methodist minister, William, exhorts Ella’s mother, Mary and Miss Amy Holness to allow Ella to live with her and complete her education as it will ensure her economic success in the future. Both Mary and Miss Amy Holness, the schoolteacher’s wife acquiesce for they know that Maydene has the capital to invest in a “typist’s course” for Ella (26). Amy regards the

---

27 Thus the narrative charts how education entails the circulation, dissemination and imbibing of certain discourses that guarantee the advancement of the individual. Brodber’s narrative suggests that colonial discourses were aimed at variously civilizing inferior native subjects, producing a class of middle class, English speakers in the colonies, and training a group of intermediaries who would through their adoption of Eurocentric discourses, “modern” enough to participate in the colonial state’s working.
recitation to be indicative of Ella’s intelligence but knows that it alone would not suffice in ensuring her success in the future:

So many girls were dying for a place where they could learn a couple of skills with which to make a living. ...Two more years in school. She wasn’t bright... More, people still didn’t know what to do with her. The recitation was just chance. She had done very well and brought honour to herself and Jacob. But how many more inspection days were there left for her to recite? Two more. Thirteen and still in fourth book. ... There was really nothing for her to do in this district and to tell the truth she really didn't look good carrying a basket on her head... (26)

A slew of thoughts go through Amy’s mind as she considers Maydene’s offer to adopt the lighter skinned Ella and educate her at home. She is concerned for Ella’s economic well being and thinks that recitation, while impressive and successful in soliciting financial aid for the school from the colonial government, has few uses in everyday life, especially in ensuring economic survival. Her color seems to pre-dispose her for better opportunities than her darker counterparts who despite their training could be easily slighted by employers on virtue of their color.

The narrator portrays Amy’s thoughts as crucial in determining Maydene’s adoption of Ella. At Maydene’s house, Ella supplements her literary education with the knowledge of Victorian domestic traits and vocational training. Under Maydene’s wings, Ella pursues a respectable, middle-class lifestyle in Jamaica. Maydene finds support from Mary who wonders about her daughter’s lack of interest in housekeeping: “Ella was not bush mout pickney”, especially given her lighter color (51).

Thus several characters believe that the absorption of Eurocentric discourses at school and home will facilitate women’s access to middle class professions and “respectable” jobs.28 The recitation is a necessary step towards the consolidation of an

---

28 Ketu Katrak points out, “in general female education, governed by Victorian ideology and Christian missionary zeal, was aimed at producing women as good wives and mothers” (171). But as Brodber
economically secure future, but as Amy points out, it alone does not guarantee a job. Accordingly, Brodber depicts Ella’s arrival at Maydene’s house where she furthers her colonial education. Once Ella arrives at Maydene’s house as a dependent, she enters the domestic and social sphere of the colonizer. Her training secures her a position as a companion to Mrs. Burns and later to Mrs. Shards. At Maydene’s she becomes intimate with her family but retains her subservient social position. She is both an apprentice and an equal, and in this liminal position she acquires it further understanding about the need to collaborate with the colonizer while suppressing her Afrocentric cultural affiliations.

Brodber charts the gradual progression of Ella from a complying child to a passive young woman, who unquestioningly accepts the dominant subject’s beliefs. Years later, in her marriage to Selwyn, Ella continues to perform the role of a compliant girl. The narrator describes Ella as displaying a “Methodist soul” with its subservient, “just-me-come” attitude that she has acquired at Maydene’s house (43). As his wife, she deploys the behavioral traits she that she developed at the Brassingtons to please him and fulfill his commands. Under Selwyn’s guidance, Ella even adopts a different identity:

There was the powdering and the plucking of eyebrows, the straightening of the hair… The creator loved his creature. He mightn’t Selwyn thought to himself be able to make prophylactics, but he could make a story live. Ella played well. She had a lifetime of practice and her little just-me-come Methodist soul told her there was no harm in it. Just one teeny lie: her parents had come from Ireland, had succumbed to a tropical disease and she had been left by them to be brought up by a Methodist parson and his wife. The truth could hardly appear and embarrass anyone…. He loved her life story, and there she was because of it, the happiest little married lady on earth. And if he wanted her to be full Irish girl, well what of it? (43)

suggests in Perceptions, Caribbean women supplemented Victorian traits of domesticity with some kind of vocational training that would guarantee their economic survival in a colonial context marked by socio-economic uncertainty and political unrest. Lighter skinned women especially seemed to have greater chances of being employed in “respectable” jobs in the colonial administration.
Indeed, it seems that under Maydene’s wings, Ella congeals her training in Victorian domesticity. As Selwyn’s wife, Ella, “the creature” changes her physical appearance. The narrator points out that Ella convinces herself that there is little harm in doing so. Brodber suggests that Selwyn’s love for her is based on his observations of her compliance. He loves her willingness to transform as well as her narrative about her past. Ella seemingly lies about her parentage and informs Selwyn that she is an orphan who was brought up by the Brassingtons. Ella passes off for a white subject. Again Brodber complicates how we view Ella’s lying. It is not clear in the narrative whether Ella purposefully tells him the story about her Irish heritage or if he forces her to adopt it. Brodber hints that Ella might be the narrator and creator of this fabricated story about her Irish parents. In doing so, Brodber foregrounds Ella’s Ella complete suppression of her Afrocentric lineage. She seems to sever all familial and cultural ties to Jamaica. Where school precipitates her assimilation of colonialist discourses and English ways of being, the initial years of her marriage to Selwyn lead her to complete identification with the white colonial subject.

Brodber suggests that while Ella continues to identify with the dominant white subject, she denies her Afrocentric affiliations. Brodber charts Ella’s self-conscious complicity by portraying her description of her encounter with Ole African, a character who symbolizes Afro Caribbean traditions and beliefs in the story. Ella informs Selwyn that she denied any knowledge of Ole African to Maydene Brassington:

What happened was that Mrs. Brassington had gone around to see Mrs. Amy Holness and had stayed too late…when she and Ella were hurrying across the pasture near to the cane-piece and when they saw the scarecrow high in the air walking as if on two roots of sugar cane. “My God, this is really possible?” Mrs. Brassington said aloud. She had heard of Africa’s stiltsmen and Ole African had been all about her ears recently. Here he was before her very eyes….
-Do you know him child? - Mrs. Brassington had asked Ella. No child in Grove Town needed to see Ole African to know him. They had been hearing about him for centuries. He was the arch punisher. Mrs. Brassington might not have known that and might truly have meant to ask Ella, “Have you seen him before?” but Ella knew the right question and the right answer and deliberately chose to respond to Mrs. Brassington literally: - No, I do not know him. -… It was her answer—“No, I don’t not know him”—which shocked her then and now, But Ella had not as yet reached this truth and Selwyn couldn’t help her. He saw her shudder and saw behind that the horrible sight of Ole African. What delightful theatre! (55)

In this scene, Ella describes how she suppressed her knowledge of Afrocentric discourses. The narrator suggests that as one of the village children, Ella has heard stories about Ole African since she was a child, yet she chooses to suppress these narratives before Maydene. Ella performs her complicity by pretending to be unaware of the “arch punisher.” Ella knows that Mrs. Brassington has asked if Ella knows about Ole African. Brodber complicates our perceptions of Ella again by suggesting that Maydene might have meant if Ella had seen Ole African. But Brodber’s narrative suggests that Ella already knows that Maydene wants to know if Ella possesses any knowledge about Ole African, and that her correct response should be yes. Brodber suggests that she still feels shocked by her lie, which signifies her self-conscious decision to disavow her cultural knowledge of Afrocentric traditions and her guilt about her denial. Through her denial Ella severs communal ties with other members of her Afrocentric community.

The narrative underscores Ella’s growing compliance with hegemonic discourses and practices in these scenes. Brodber also suggests that as Ella matures she continues to deny her Afrocentric affiliations. The narrator represents both denial and compliance through the metaphor of gauze, which covers Ella’s brain: “For years there had been something like gauze in her head where she supposed her mind to be. It stretched flat across her head, separating one section of her mind from the other- the top of the head
from the bottom” (80). Brodber depicts how the gauze compartmentalizes the knowledge she has stored in her head: “In there were Peter Pan and Lucy Gray and Dairy Maid and at one time Selwyn- the top section. At the bottom were Mammy Mary and them Grove Town people” (80). She suggests that while English images and references dominate Ella’s thinking all memories of Grove Town are marginalized. Indeed, the narrative portrays how Ella congeals the suppression of her past and her Afrocentric knowledge when she agrees to pass off as an Irish immigrant from the colonies.

At this juncture, the novel portrays Ella’s retrieval of her memories of Grove Town after Selwyn coaxes her for stories about the Caribbean. The marriage to Selwyn seems a boon in this regard for Ella retrieves the memories of her Afrocentric affiliations and even desires sexual consummation of her marriage. Brodber suggests that for a while it seems Selwyn enables her to overcome the alienating effects of her colonial education and reestablish links with her Caribbean community. Selwyn’s exhortations for tales about the Caribbean, lead to a “melting” of the barrier such that she can access and share the suppressed memories of Grove Town:

After a couple of months of marriage there was no gauze at all and Ella seemed to be draining perpetually. Selwyn had indeed propelled himself through the gauze partition and into Ella’s carnate past…. Ella could after a time see not only Mammy Mary and them people clearly but she could see the things around them…. She could show him the star-apple tree… Bananas, he felt close to. He had lately seen them in the shops and he knew his wife to have come up on a banana boat. (81)

Brodber suggests that it is Ella who fabricates the story of her migration from Ireland and her arrival at the Methodist household. Selwyn believes the story his wife told him about having arrived on the banana boat. But as he previously embellished her physical appearance, he reframes her story into the exoticist play.
Brodber’s narrative delineates how, to Ella, her sharing suggests her access to a suppressed cultural memory. Indeed, for a while it seems that the protagonist succeeds in retrieving her Afrocentric knowledge despite her earlier denial of her cultural affiliations with the black community. But Brodber portrays the moment of Ella’s cultural retrieval as a crisis and a turning point in her marriage with Selwyn, her unquestioning compliance and in her self-knowledge. Selwyn recasts her stories as an exoticist play, *Caribbean Days and Nights*. Ella watches the play and realizes that Selwyn adapts her stories without heeding to the nuances inherent in her descriptions. Lacking firsthand knowledge, Selwyn embellishes her narratives:

> They were all there. Everyone of the Grove Twon people…Like an old army boot, they were polished, wet…black of their skins shone on stage, relieved only by the white of their eyes and the white of the chalk around their mouths. …everybody’s clothes were the strips of cloth she had told him Ole African wore. Ella groaned. Where was mammy Mary’s cool tan-tuddy-potato skin? The major character was a white Skinned girl. Ella was the star. He had given her flowing blonde hair. Our heroine was chase by black hands grabbing at her… “It didn’t go so,” she said under her breath. And these were the last words that escaped her lips for sometime. But long conversations between her selves took place in her head. Mostly accusations. (83-4)

Brodber describes Selwyn’s play through Ella’s eyes. Ella realizes that Selwyn’s representation of Grove Town casts it as a place where the seasons never changed, and everyone looked alike, with “hairs in plaits” and “strips of cloth she had told him Ole African wore” (83). Ella observes his recourse to stereotypical images of black subjects; she realizes that people whom she has known intimately are reduced to stock characters. Worse still, Ella notices that Selwyn fails to depict the complex cultural and racial dynamics of the Caribbean. He fails to see the gradations of skin color, socio-economic hierarchies and the differences of class and gender.
Brodber has the reader perceive Selwyn’s play through Ella’s eyes. Through her description, readers chart the proximities between Selwyn and the colonial ethnographer who describes the colonized “other” as the barbaric, dark counterpart of the white subject. Selwyn’s descriptions of Grove Town are reminiscent of orientalist colonial texts. Blackness becomes synonymous with barbarity, danger and evil in his representation, which recasts the colonialist narrative of the dangers of the black body to the white female subject.

The novel casts this scene of cultural retrieval. It is also the moment when Ella cultivates an insight into her compliance and Selwyn’s exploitation of her cultural knowledge. Moreover, it is the moment when Ella realizes that not only does Selwyn misappropriate her knowledge, but he also casts her community in derogatory and essentialist terms. In addition, the scene portrays Ella’s crisis in terms of her realization that she does not receive anything in return. Brodber casts Ella as expectant of conceiving a child with Selwyn, who ignores her sexual and maternal desires. Brodber underscores the sense of loss that pervades Ella, whose attempts to forge broken links with her Caribbean community are frustrated by the exploitative Selwyn. Ella recriminates herself. The narrative portrays her inner turmoil in terms of a shocking realization that she did not realize that she has possessed valuable cultural knowledge.

Brodber depicts the scene as a turning point in Ella’s life. The crisis contributes to the cultivation of a counter discourse in Ella as she begins to question her submission to Selwyn’s dictates and realizes that her cultural knowledge is an intrinsic part of her identity. This confrontation with the misappropriation of her hitherto submerged cultural memory becomes an occasion for Ella to question her compliance with the dominant
culture. She realizes that the white male subject promises her domestic security but in turn misrepresents her socio-cultural experiences as reaffirmations of the Caribbean community’s purported backwardness. Not only does Ella feel cheated that the tale “‘didn’t go so’,” she also castigates herself for allowing Selwyn to appropriate her cultural knowledge: “He took everything I had away. Made what he wanted of it and gave me back nothing…. Then the child who had been taught: ‘ Speak the truth and speak it ever/ Cost it what it will/ He who hides the wrong he did/ Does the wrong thing still”, turned on her…” (84). Brodber portrays Ella as using her colonial lessons and learning to grapple with the ethical implications of consenting to Selwyn’s misrepresentation of Grove Town. By doing so she suggests that Ella uses her knowledge of both Afrocentric and Eurocentric discourses to question Selwyn’s exploitation and misrepresentation. Ella targets her consternation both at her silence and complicity in the production of Selwyn’s play, and her unquestioning assimilation of colonial discourses at school.

This episode charts Ella’s burgeoning awareness about the composite knowledge she possesses, which is an amalgamation of Afrocentric and colonial discourses. She has only recently begun retrieving her Afrocentric cultural past, and takes herself to task for not recognizing it value. To her, her memories of the Caribbean are all the material property she has. Regarding her narratives as valuable private property and a cultural legacy, Ella challenges Selwyn’s usurpation and her own complicity. The scene unfolds as a dialogue between her two selves; the ethically aware self calls her a “mule” and uses a poem, imbibed during her school days perhaps, to castigate the passive Ella to obey Selwyn’s orders unquestioningly. Ella replies, “I didn’t even know when I was giving it
that it was mine and everything.” Ella concludes she has “been bad from the very beginning” and prays for a “cleansing” (84). Ella perceives her body as a site of cultural violence and exploitation. She also desires to be cured of her naïve dependency on the dominant subject.

Her marriage to Selwyn thus becomes emblematic of the dominant culture’s exploitative usurpation of the colonized subject’s cultural knowledge. Selwyn takes from her without giving anything in return. Brodber portrays Ella as a maddened girl who craves to fulfill her desires for a child. Ella must be healed of the exploitative practices of the dominant subject. Brodber portrays Ella’s shock and exploitation in terms of a physical sickness that afflicts her. She suggests that Ella receives nothing in return except for a bloated belly. Ella goes back to Grove Town where Mass Cyrus heals her, a scene that occurs in the first chapter of the novel. Thus, while the novel frames the episode of Selwyn’s misappropriation as representative of the manipulation of Afrocentric cultural beliefs by the hegemonic colonial culture, it also casts it as the opportunity for Ella to be cured of the ill effects of her complicity and to question colonialist discourses. This scene takes readers back to the beginning of the novel where Mass Cyrus cures Ella.

Once Ella is healed, she serves her community as a school-teacher in the colonial school. The novel recasts the school as a site where children are taught stances of complicity and interpellated into the dominant culture of the colonizer. But this time round, the novel recasts Ella, the teacher, as an interventionist who grapples with the implications of the “negative lesson” imparted by the colonial texts. Accordingly, Ella resolves to change the lessons. Transformed through the healing powers of Mass Cyrus, and by her own experiences in America, the adult Ella is more thoughtful than the
younger Ella whose staring had been a consequence of her fanciful forays into the literary world of Peter Pan and English landscapes. Ella has since has garnered experience, which produces thoughtful cogitation about her experiences and observations: “She had studied. She had gone to far places. She had something to give” (96). Brodber invests Ella with the responsibility of contributing to the community’s empowerment.

Brodber depicts Ella’s cultivation of counter-knowledge through a scene in which Ella teaches a story “Mr. Joe’s Farm” to her students. The story of Joe’s farm animals is inscribed in a colonial text. As Ella reads the story, she realizes that in it, Master Willie, Percy and a group of the other animals live uncomplainingly on Master Joe’s farm, complying with his orders even though they resent him for profiting from their labor. The animals protest and leave but return to Mr. Joe. As Ella teaches the story, she observes that the children repeat “M-a-s-t-e-r...Master Willie had a roll in the mud” after her. Brodber foregrounds the similarities between the children’s recitation and Ella’s recital of “the White Man’s Burden.” The novel portrays this as another episode of recitation where children absorb negative depictions of their community.

But this time, the mature and experienced Ella too realizes that the story bears similarities to Grove Town’s socio-cultural dependency on the colonial masters. Where earlier she had accepted Kipling’s depictions, this time she wonders about the schoolchildren’s passive absorption of colonizer’s discourses, especially the text’s depictions of the animals. Ella visits Reverend Simpson and asks him if he has read the story, and informs him that she didn’t like the way Percy and Master Willie, two of the workers on Joe’s farm, were treated by the other animals:

‘They treat them as sub-normals who have no hope of growth, Reverend
- And that bothers you? - The Reverend asked.
- Yes. But don’t ask me why because I don’t know-
- Yet he added for her.
- Yesterday a certain message was being sent around in the farm from mouth to mouth and from ear to ear with the injunction “Don’t tell Percy and Master Willie for they are bad, bad, bad.” …These little children whom I teach, who’ve never been to school before, all know what the message is. Along with everyone else on Mr. Joe’s farm, these children know. They know to besides that they should not tell Percy and Master Willie for they are bad, bad, bad. - She stared. He waited.
- The children are invited into complicity- she continued. (97)

Brodber charts Ella’s attempts at questioning the colonial text in the form of a dialogue between her and Reverend Simpson, whose awareness of the effects of colonial education is implicit in the beginning of the novel. Simpson critiques the colonizer’s violence in other scenes as well. He and his colleagues, Ole African and Mass Cyrus discuss the misappropriation of Afrocentric discourses in colonialist texts as Dan, Willie and Percy. They also discuss the colonizer’s replacement of native cultural beliefs with Eurocentric discourses in colonial texts, such as the one with the story of Mr. Joe’s Farm.

Accordingly, Simpson guides Ella towards an awareness of the role of colonial education in engendering assimilation of colonialist discourses among the colonized.

Ella points out that the colonial text portrays the farm animals as “sub-normals who have no hope for growth.” She objects to the negative representations of the subservient animals. Moreover, she points out that while the message’s content is not revealed, the children as well as other members of Joe’s farm know the message is that Master Willie and Percy are bad. She understands that their repetition produces assimilation of the dominant subject’s ideologies and compliance. She realizes, moreover, that through their repetition and involvement in the master’s secretive scheme, the “children are invited into complicity.” They tacitly perpetuate the alienation of other
members of their community. Simpson urges her to think about it. The process of repeating that Percy and Willie are bad draws the children into complicity as they learn to associate these coworkers with immoral behavior and perceive them as Joe depicts them.

On the extranarrative level, the story mirrors Ella’s subservient dependence on the colonial state as the story’s description of the subservient animals and Mr. Joe mirror the relations of unequal power between the colonizer and the colonized and her own dependency on the colonial state. As the first half of the novel has charted, through her recitation at the colonial school, Ell herself developed stances of complicity. The story recasts this process of Ella’s assimilation of colonialist stances. But at this point Ella does not understand the message of the story as readers do. Her realization emerges gradually in the narrative, as she proceeds to read the story before teaching it to the students. As she reads, Ella gradually realizes that the story depicts the farm animals as laboring subjects who realized that Mr. Joe enjoyed the fruits of their labor without either acknowledging their efforts or asking their consent. Ella reads that while some of the animals realize that there are alternatives, they lack any comprehensive knowledge about changing their state of dependency on Mr. Joe. Even the animals, who depart from the farm, return back as they are not aware of alternative modes of existence.

Brodber casts Ella’s shock and anger at the narrative’s description of the farm animals: “Ella was seething. ‘The effrontery’, she said…” (101). But while Ella is angry, others around her fail to understand her annoyance with the story:

In no time, life was back on the farm to what it had always been, and no one seemed to remember that there had been an exodus except Ella to whom they gave their depression. The boys were worried that she would sink into a time they did not want to remember. Her reaction as frighteningly inappropriate…They could not see what there was in that story to put her into a depression. (103)
Ella reads about the strike on the farm by some workers who feel that they are coerced to work, and others consume what they produce. The women initiate the protest, while Percy and Dan continue with their clowning as they “couldn’t see what else there was for them to do” (100). They have vague ideas about “protecting” and “watching” something but they don’t seem to know its precise nature. The animals nonetheless leave, only to return again as Joe has predicted, because, as the story reveals, they have not learnt to fend for themselves after years of dependency. The tale portrays them as divided among themselves. While some animals fool around, others watch the depression that overtakes those who resolve to return. The divisive community silently returns to the farm as it offers protection and guarantees food as well as a familiar way of life. They have not been taught how to be independent and self-sufficient and lapse into their former state of dependency. Indeed, as the narrative indicates, they forget about their rebellion.

Brodber’s narrative suggests that both Maydene’s boys and Reverend Brassington too fail to remember that the farm animals desert Mr. Joe and are full of resentment against his exploitative practices. Though Brassington realizes that Ella teaches “a negative lesson,” Ella alone seems to realize that the farm animals display a subversive spirit and resist the dominant subject despite their return. Reverend William Brassington focalizes Ella’s burgeoning realization that the colonial textbook suppresses the narratives of oppositional resistance of colonized subjects and instead portrays them as dependent and weak: “It is a negative lesson. She has picked up that. I see that May. And now like her, I wouldn’t want to teach that lesson” (103). The story portrays the animals as returning to the master, but worse, it depicts their continued dependency as they forget about their resistance. William Brassington realizes that Ella has questioned the lesson of
complicity in the colonialist text and is rebelling against its implications. Her reservations about teaching the story suggest her desire to stem the perpetuation of colonialist ideologies that exclusively serve the dominant community’s interests.

This scene charts Ella’s anger and unease with the scene of imperialist dependency in the colonial text. Brodber suggests that unlike the animals in the story, Grove Town’s people realize that they must cooperate with each other to resolve the crisis in Ella’s life and redress the ill effects of the negative lesson. Indeed, the narrator portrays Maydene and William’s resolve to cooperate with the leaders of the Afrocentric community in helping Ella revise the story and thereby change its negative lesson about complicity and dependency.

The novel portrays Ella’s development from a passive student to a questioning colonial subject by charting the opinions of other characters. By representing the colonial classroom, Brodber’s narrative follows a circuitous path and foregrounds the novel’s preoccupation with education and the need for questioning the discourses disseminated at the colonial school. While the earlier scene introduced us to Ella as a lonely figure, here, other characters aid her understanding about how colonial education is akin to “spirit thievery” and zombification. The use of a term associated with the practitioners of black magic allows Brodber to underscore the relations between colonial education, spiritual death, colonial violence and subservience of the colonized.

Dan, Percy and Willie, the Afrocentric leaders of Grove Town believe that Ella’s questions signify her attempts to undo the harmful effects of her colonial education. Simpson informs his partners that Ella, who is ironically the storyteller, the teacher who must recite the story to her students, is “thinking” about the ways in which instruction in
the colonial classroom cultivates compliance with colonialist assumptions and racialist discourses. Her thoughtful cogitation is a crucial step towards challenging the content of the instruction:

... Has she not seen two things in one? The first two principles of spirit thievery-let them feel that there is nowhere for them to grow to. Stunt them. Percy and Master Willie are stunted. Let them see their brightest ones as the dumbest ever. Alienate them. Percy and Master Willie must be separated, be made to play....

- The coon, buffoon- Percy came in… And where is that little cat choked on foreign?

... The antidote, the antidote, White Hen has made a chick chick chick. (98)

Other characters too grapple with the message of the story and regard Ella as an antidote to the complicity produced by colonial education. Dan suggests that the lesson about the seemingly intrinsic inferiority and dependency of the colonized subject teaches colonized subjects to perceive their socio-cultural context as devoid of any empowering opportunities. It teaches them to see themselves through the frame of colonialist representation, which portrays them as inferior. Indeed, Dan foregrounds how textual recitation becomes a key mode through which imperialist imageries are repeatedly circulated for consumption and assimilation. Simpson’s colleagues, eager to subvert colonial authority, wonder if Ella can be reconceived as an “antidote” to the passive assimilation of colonial discourses. Thus, in Myal, varied characters collapse the boundaries between the textual farm and Grove Town, and between Brodber’s imagined Jamaica and colonial Caribbean. The intercourse among the men foregrounds how colonial instruction in the classroom and in other spaces furthers both self-alienation among colonial subjects and intracommunal divisions among the varied communities.

Brodber’s story points out that colonial education is conducted both inside and outside the classroom and that community members need to interject and expose the
processes of self-compliance at work in these spaces, and to question authority’s images and discourse. The cycle of compliance can be broken only when subjects start questioning colonial proceedings and the discourse of native dependency.

The novel charts this realization take shape in Ella’s mind as she converses with Reverend Simpson about the negative lesson. Ella consolidates her knowledge about the effects of the negative lesson on children through her conversation with Simpson who points out to her that “there are alternatives” (105). The narrative links Ella’s assimilation in childhood, her exploitation by Selwyn and her anger as a mature teacher at the children’s absorption of Joe’s story through Simpson’s focalization: “He knew her story, was acquainted with her grief. Her quarrel was also with a specific writer, a man called Selwyn Langley” (106). Simpson’s thoughts conflates Selwyn the writer with Rudyard Kipling, the poet, who in turn collapses into the writer of “Mr. Joe’s Farm” in the novel. Ella and Simpson discuss how the writer has “dismissed the existence within them of the in born guiding light”, “left them to run like half wits”, “gives them no mind”, “has zombified them” and “left them duppies, capable of receiving orders from someone else” (106). Simpson engenders the understanding in Ella that she herself is a victim of mental miscegenation and passive assimilation at the colonial school: “Have you been zombified” (107). Ella’s response suggests her reticence in acknowledging her compliance with colonial discourses: “I suppose at some time…when I was ill, - But he wasn’t talking about that time…” (107). Indeed, Simpson coaxes her to realize that his assessment of the farm animals illuminate her own experiences as a student.

Simpson asks Ella to teach the colonial text with the critical awareness that its lessons perpetuate colonial dependency and epistemic violence: “–You have a quarrel
with the writer. He wrote, you think without an awareness of certain things. But does he force you to teach without this awareness? Need your voice say what his says?” (107).

Simpson advocates both critical questioning and revisioning of the colonizer’s texts. Indeed, he serves as Brodber’s mouthpiece for advocating the resistance of passive absorption of colonial discourses.

The novel does not represent Ella’s attempts at revising the negative lesson. We do not see the alternative lesson in the novel. Brodber remains content to chart the development of a critical awareness in her. Instead of representing the mature, self-aware Ella back in the classroom, the novel concludes with the discussion among the community’s guardians about giving Ella a platform to critique the spirit thievery at work in colonial texts, and to question the role performed by colonial school in interpellating schoolchildren.

More significantly, through its representation of the spirit of cooperation between Simpson and Reverend Brassington, the novel charts the collaboration between colonized and colonizer as they ponder about undoing the ill effects of colonial education. The two examine the proximities between the effects of zombification and colonial education. Brodber’s novel portrays the necessity of the collaboration between the colonizers and colonized for critiquing the colonial school’s discourses of dependency. Brassington charts Ella’s development in his conversation with Simpson:

My daughter – and he felt he needed to correct or explain, Ella. She’s been thinking. She’s been to places some of us have never been you know. I mean in her mind. Intellectually. I think she has been left much richer. But that is beyond the point. Ella was thinking out a matter. I think that was what she was grappling with. That concept. Zombification. I must have read of it somewhere… I think it would do her good to pursue the point. I was thinking of some seminars. Give her a wider audience that can question her and by questioning bring her ideas closer to the fore, if you see what I mean. (108)
Brodber portrays Simpson’s acceptance of Brassington’s proposal to foreground the necessity for ties between the Afrocentric community and the dominant colonial state for overcoming the adverse effects of colonial rule. She also portrays Brassington’s realization that they need to provide Ella the opportunities to develop her understanding of the processes that lead to complicity and unquestioned assimilation of colonialist beliefs at school. He accepts that the colonial textbook perpetuates zombification among school children by replacing their previously held beliefs with Eurocentric assumptions that perpetuate their subservience. He points out that Ella herself has undergone this experience, both at home and abroad. He also points out that her negative experiences have contributed to her development and her decision to expose the colonialist discourses of the schoolbooks.

Brodber thus portrays Ella as a colonial subject whose seeming development as a child is in fact a form of self-regression till she learns to question colonialist representations. At school, Maydene’s house, and in America, Ella develops her stances of complicity and absorbs colonialist beliefs that ultimately hamper her development into an empowered subject. Only once she is healed by Mass Cyrus’ Afrocentric herb cure does Ella begin to question colonialist assumptions in the school’s textbooks. This point marks the beginning of her development into an empowered subject who becomes reconciled to her Afro Caribbean community.

Brodber's narrative portrays Ella as the educated teacher who is “familiar with the print and the language of the print” (110). Simpson points out to Maydene that “Our people are now beginning to see how it and they themselves, have been used against us” (110). In the light of the earlier descriptions of Ella’s realizations, we may take his
discussion to be about Ella’s critical understanding of the assimilationist functions of colonial texts. Brodber concludes the novel on an optimistic note by having Simpson declare that “now, we have people who can and are willing to correct images from the inside, destroy what should be destroyed, replace it with what should be replaced and put us back together, give us back ourselves with which to chart our course to go where we want to go” (110). Simpson points out that with the cooperation of the Brassingtons, Ella and the Afrocentric community leaders can revise colonialist discourses and represent suppressed histories of Afrocentric anticolonial resistance in the schoolbooks and literary texts.

The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the novel’s references to zombification to discuss the adverse effects of colonial education. Reverend Simpson points out to Ella that she might have been a victim of zombification at the colonial school where she assimilated the images of Peter Pan and recited Kipling’s poems. Other characters, like Reverend Brassington also refer to zombification interchangeably with spirit thievery to foreground Ella’s victimization. As Jeanne Armstrong and others have suggested, “spirit thievery” emerges as the novel’s central metaphor for suggesting the adverse effects of colonial education, which replaces previously held cultural knowledge and social affiliations and replaces these with western ideologies. Like zombification, in which the evil practitioner robs people’s spirits and turns them into slaves, colonial education makes people “shadows” of their former selves, or, as in Ella’s case, it renders them unreal. Brodber applies the metaphor of spirit thievery to colonial education to suggest that the internalization of colonial ideologies at school and other spaces produces effects that mirror the ill effects of voodoo practices on the victims’ bodies. One of the ill
effects is their zombification. Victims of evil and black magic practices are popularly believed to lose a sense of self as well as the freedom to initiate actions. They become subordinates of the Voodoo practitioners and submit to their commands. Spirit thievery, or zombification, as it is commonly known in the Caribbean, robs its victims of original and instinctual thinking, leaving them to exist as “living dead.” In “Myalism and the African Religious Tradition in Jamaica”, Monica Schuler suggests that the most common rationale behind spirit thievery on behalf of the victimizer and practitioner is the possession of another’s spirit for personal profit (65-66). By applying the metaphor to the colonial educator and his discourses, Brodber suggests that while the colonizer is the spirit thief, his discourses are the mechanisms through which colonized are gradually robbed of previously held socio-cultural knowledge. The “thievery” of these discourses renders them vulnerable to the oppressive ideologies of the colonial state, which exercises its hegemonic control over the victims.

In Myal, Maydene forges the connections between the adverse effects of voodoo and the internalization of colonial ideologies by the colonized. She perceives that Ella’s recitation at school creates a split, in ways that render her unreal. Ella ceases to be real in the school as she inhabits an imaginary world of literary fiction and remains isolated in the crowded schoolroom, unable to forge relationships with her peers. Rather than fostering community, the school’s administration and its colonial affiliations ensure her severance from the others. Ella echoes the colonizer’s discourse of native inferiority. Maydene sees in Ella “a passion so innocent and strong that it could separate body from soul” and concludes that she appears to be “flying”, “separated from the platform and the people around her”, distanced from her classmates as she tours the imagined lands of
the colonizer (17). It is Ella’s apparent disembodiment as she appears to be “swimming in the sky” in an “ethereal fashion over all below” that allows Maydene to conclude that Ella is “not happy” as she “wants to be real” (17). Maydene detects that Ella wants to be reunited with the black community and that the recitation has little connections to her everyday reality. Determined to help Ella, she assumes responsibility for her upbringing because she seems to detect that colonial education at school distances Ella from her own community.

Maydene’s understanding of real and unreal is crucial to the discussion of the adverse effects of colonial education. By allowing Maydene to focalize Ella’s alienation from her community, Brodber suggests that historically colonizers and white slave owners had circulated their ideologies and ways of life among the colonized, robbing them of their cultural identities. She also suggests that this suppression of native cultural practices and discourses was conducted at varied sites, such as the church, where the colonizer disseminated Euorcentric discourses. Maydene accuses William of indulging in replacing people’s cultural values and social practices in ways that render them mere shadows of their former selves. She holds William and the Methodist church responsible for imposing uniformity and conformity among his parishioners:

In church after church, the colorful clothes have gone, replaced by colour-less white and those felt hats which people buy… ‘William’ I have asked, ‘Have you got what to give people instead when you take away what they’ve got?’… ‘you are a spirit thief. You keep taking away these people’s spirit….’ (18)

Brodber compares William Brassington to the colonial educator who commits spirit thievery. William acknowledges his task is to “exorcise and replace” people’s beliefs. He becomes emblematic of the link between the colonial school and the Methodist church. Maydene too likens his church to a school setting when she conjures the images of old
men “sitting empty in church, unable to read the responses, just waiting for the word that comes out of William’s mouth” (18). In her opinion he undertakes the role of the powerful schoolmaster, having “reduced them to children” (19). Maydene thus applies the metaphor of “spirit thievery” to William as well. She wonders how William, a “rational man” regards Grove Town as beyond his jurisdiction for “it would take a sledge hammer to move Grove Town”, and educate them in civilizational norms. She points out that his ministry, based on rationalist behavior, is at odds with the Baptist Church headed by Simpson (15). William is a mixed racial subject, who grew up with an anonymous benefactor who financed his education. To Maydene, his childhood bears certain similarities to Ella’s: “William was of the same mixture as this girl” (15). Maydene reflects on her father’s discovery of the boy as he sermonized as a student in Cambridge. She concludes that William too has been a victim of spirit thievery as, under her father’s influence, he has been keen to suppress his racial ties to the Afrocentric community, and concludes that this has caused a split in his subjectivity. To Maydene, his absorption of colonial discourses and denial of his roots are mirrored in Ella’s behavior.

The metaphor of spirit thievery frames the recitation and the schoolroom scenarios of the novel’s beginning as well. Brodber, rather non-chronologically, unravels spirit thievery at work gradually through the novel, it occurs in the earlier chapters but Brodber identifying it as such only later.

While the novel traces Ella’s burgeoning critical awareness as an antidote to zombification’s ill-effects, it also portrays Afrocentric discourses and rituals as combating the ill-effects of zombification. Indeed, Mass Cyrus’ healing and Miss Gatha’s tabernacle effectively undo the harmful effects of spirit thievery. Mass Cyrus and
Miss Gatha signify the productive and healing energies of Afrocentric practices in the Caribbean, many of which were historically interpreted by colonizers as “the frustrated expressions of marginal or oppressed people, emphasizing their psychological rather than socio-political functions.”

Using practices culled from Myal, Miss Gatha cures Anita who becomes a victim of Mass Levi’s voodoo. A landowner and small time businessman, Levi attempts to control Anita’s body. Brodber illustrates the scene of Anita’s healing in detail emphasizing the ways in which Afrocentric rituals and performances save Anita from succumbing to Levi’s voodoo. Miss Gatha appears to be a “coconut tree in a private hurricane” coming down the road (73). She has the power to draw an audience to her healing ritual through modulating her speech. Through her exhortations, the “strangers to the area” come together with a “parcel and a drum” in a spirit of communal harmony. In the novel, Maydene focalizes this scene of communal healing, which restores spiritual health and physical well being to Anita. This ritual of spiritual healing is opposed to the violence and spirit thievery perpetuated by the colonizer. As Maydene witnesses it, she remembers the depictions of the drums and the ritual in her father’s books: “They looked very much like ‘magic drums’, ‘speaking drums’, ‘talking drums’…” (76-7). The sight convinces Maydene that she must collaborate with the Afrocentric community on equal terms to ensure communal welfare.

Like Mass Cyrus’ herb cure, Gatha’s healing ritual is an instance of an Afrocentric performance that has the powers to save life. It is an instance of a positive cultural knowledge that reconstitutes the Afrocentric community’s belief in the efficacy and healing potential of their own practices. Ella, the narrative suggests, has willfully

---

suppressed this knowledge. Brodber portrays Maydene’s curiosity about the healing powers of the myalist practices. She desires knowledge about Afrocentric traditions. As Reverend Simpson watches Maydene’s burgeoning friendship with Miss Gatha, he proclaims approvingly that the knowledge about the rituals is as necessary for survival as the colonial education and vocational training imparted by the school: “‘Yes. Knowledge is power’” (78). He decides that people “need that power” and are “ready” to retrieve their affirmative cultural practices (78). Brodber makes Simpson her spokesperson for underscoring the significance of retrieving knowledge of Afrocentric rituals. He believes that it is crucial process that aids in the construction of self-identity and communal understanding among Caribbean subjects who are forced to view their reality through colonial eyes. The narrator wonders what would have happened if Ella had been in Miss Gatha’s tabernacle and witnessed the myalist rituals. Her purported reason is to wonder if Ella would have told Selwyn about the scene had she witnessed it. But, the narrator informs us, “As it was, Ella heard nothing. She had not seen even one of the people with the drum and parcel pass” (79). The narrator believes that Ella’s ignorance meant that she did not have any affective response to the scene: “Eye no see, heart no leap” (79). Indeed, the novel portrays Ella’s lack of awareness about Miss Gatha’s tabernacle as precipitating her personal crisis. Ella does not witness Anita’s healing and is unable to perceive Afrocentric rituals as life giving till Mass Cyrus heals her.

Both healing processes seem to involve supernatural, even irrational mechanisms of healing. According to Paul Gilroy in the *Black Atlantic*, music and performative arts practiced by black Atlantic diasporic subjects like Ole African and Miss Gatha resist rational discourse and rationalist means of restoring the human body as rationality has
been found complicit in the practice of racial terror which sustained slavery and its violence in the Caribbean and the Americas (39). Miss Gatha’s “tabernacle” includes drums and ritualistic chants to cure the effects of voodoo on Anita; Miss Gatha cooperates with Maydene whose praying functions in conjunction with the myalists in driving the evil spirits away from Anita’s body and invoking the healing spirits through music, dance and chanting. Gatha embodies the efficacy of faith in the face of dehumanizing colonial practices.

In the novel, Reverend Simpson or Dan, and Ole African or Willie, depict a brief history of the empire’s attempt to suppress the oppositional potential of myalism and Afrocentric religious practices. Indeed, using African and Christian references, such as allusions to “Joseph” and “Egypt”(66), to describe the imperialists and their collaborators as traitors, they reveal that the colonial officials used collaborating subjects, the practitioners of black magic who “sold their own soul” to the colonizers, to alienate and instill fear in people. The characters use both Eurocentric and Afrocentric referential frames to castigate their oppressors.\(^\text{30}\) The colonizers used references to these subjects to divide the colonized community and misrepresented black and Afrocentric spiritual healers, including the myalists and Baptist preachers who advocated anticolonial resistance, as conjure men, “voodoo men, wizards and priests” (66). In addition, they misrepresented myalists as practitioners of black magic using them to warn the African community against the seemingly unsavory and irrational elements of their own cultural heritage. Dan and Percy discuss how the colonizers “sold out our sound” as their “tacky ships have dropped their sails and turned to steam; have dropped their ships and turned to

\(^{30}\) In *Demythologizing the Romance of Conquest*, Jeanne Armstrong suggests that several of Brodber’s characters are metonymic extensions of the Caliban figure in their attempts to castigate the Prospero-colonizer figure by using his frames of reference and discursive tools (52-3).
books” (67). The narrator portrays their discussion to foreground how ancient stories have been replaced by colonial knowledge, which perpetuates alienation among the community members. This alienation caused a “split” that divided the community from its spiritual and oppositional representatives, turning people into “walking zombies” (67). But Brodber indicates that these Afrocentric leaders do not consider spurning colonial education as a mode of resistance. Rather, as Willie suggests they must get “in their books and know their truth” (67). Thus the Afrocentric leaders repeatedly reiterate that the colonized need to equip themselves with the master’s discourses. Indeed, these characters emphasize the need to revise colonialist discourses through careful examination of textual representations of the colonized.

As this chapter has examined, while Brodber underscores the counterdiscursive potential of the healing rituals, which challenge representations of the colonized as passive and their cultural practices as devoid of empowering effects, she also suggests that printed texts and narratives perform a crucial role in formulating ideas about self-identity, class and race. In the novel, texts have the potential to mold the readers’ opinions. Brodber portrays these discussions repeatedly throughout the novel. Both at the conclusion and in the middle of the novel, these characters suggest that the negotiations and the strategic appropriation of colonial discourses are a relevant step to overthrowing and challenging the colonizer. Simpson describes himself as one of those colonized subjects who “must learn the colonizers’ ways,” and pass it on, “but just enough for an antidote” to oppression (67). He has knowingly absorbed colonizer’s discourses to resist and question his oppression and to overturn the numbing effects of “spirit thievery” that was precipitated by Empire. Simpson is like “smallpox,” the “teacher” who learns the
“outer’s ways” and whose task is to “dish it out in little bits, an antidote man, against total absorption” (68). He is to “see their plans clearly” and “change those books” (68) such that they can “take those ships” and “go.” Simpson and other teachers are to stick “with the learning and build who feels they want to be built” (68).

Simpson personifies the appropriation of colonial discourses for the charting of anticolonial resistance. Simpson’s sermon disseminates an alternative lesson to the one disseminated by the Kipling poems. It doubles as a history lesson and a warning; indeed it functions as an instruction that fills the gaps in colonial education and reverses the message signified by the Kipling poems. Instead of benevolence, Simpson suggests that the European and English colonizers have perpetuated wide scale plundering of the colonies. His sermon is a warning against its perpetuation in the present:

I have seen them take gold from the bowels of the earth to lock it in their museums.... How much did Napoleon take? How much did Drake and Hawkins take? How do you measure men? ...How much to sweeten your tea? ...‘People strung together in a chain.’... ‘Separating people from themselves, separating man from his labour.’... spirit thieves. (37)

Simspon calls the colonizers spirit thieves who exploited colonized subjects and enslaved Afrocentric communities. Where Kipling’s ships exhorted the English people to support the Empire as it furnished them with domestic necessities, Simpson reminds his listeners that the sugar trade depended on human misery. Using metaphors, rhetorical questions and allusions, he describes histories of servitude in colonial sugar plantations, the plundering across colonies by European “adventurers” and explorers, and transatlantic slavery.

On one level, this is the education the novel imparts to its readers, countering both the elisions in colonial representations of the Caribbean for contemporary readers, and
exhorting them to resist unequal relations of power, especially among laboring and bourgeois subjects of colonized and colonizing spaces. On another level, the novel suggests that, historically, men like Simpson attempted to subvert and warn against the discourses that drew allegiance to colonial projects and ignored histories of exploitation of African slaves. In addition, by charting Simpson’s sermon, the novel historicizes imperial conquest and its consequences by depicting empire as an economic enterprise that robbed people of their very spirits but more significantly, by pointing out that “steamers and schoolbooks alike are part of the imperial system that shaped the West Indies” (Kortenaar 136).

Brodber represents Simpson as Ella’s guide. By depicting Ella’s development as a complying subject, Brodber charts the ill effects of colonial education, which perpetuates her personal crisis and alienates her from the Afrocentric community. Only when Ella begins questioning her compliance and resolve to change the lesson is she able to reestablish her ties with her Grove Town community as an empowered and self-aware subject.

As this chapter has analyzed, Simpson exhorts Ella to critique colonialist representation by engaging her in a dialogue about her own experience with zombification. Simpson’s exhortations aid Ella in overcoming the ill effects of her compliance. Thus *Myal* charts both the adverse effects of the unquestioned assimilation of colonial discourses and the counterstrategies that will enable their critical assessment. It advocates communal harmony and foregrounds the healing potential of Afrocentric rituals. It suggests that only the collective efforts of the colonizer and the colonized, and the representatives of the hegemonic institutions and the marginalized, can lead to the
effective challenging of colonialist discourses. The novel’s story charts how unquestioned, these discourses perpetuate stances of colonial dependency and exploitation.
Conclusion

As this dissertation has suggested, the examination of colonial education is imperative for understanding the links between the internalization of colonialist discourses among colonized subjects and their espousal of imperialist rule. The aim of this project has been to illustrate how the contemporary postcolonial novel examines the adverse effects of colonial education on colonized subjects by depicting the fraught development of protagonists who assimilate colonial discourses at school and home. The novel portrays their tacit collaboration and complicity with imperialist violence and their internalization of discourses of racial difference. Such depictions enable the novel to historicize the role of colonial education in the perpetuation of exploitative imperial rule in the colonies. In particular, the novels chart the adverse effects of the characters’ assimilation of discourses of native inferiority at the colonial school.

In addition, the dissertation has examined the postcolonial novel’s representation of colonial subjects who variously question and negotiate colonialist discourses to protest against colonial violence. But while the novel about colonial education represents anticolonial resistance to empire, its central concern is the colonized subject who absorbs colonialist discourses. The postcolonial novel links the colonized subject’s assimilation of colonial education with varied crises that frustrate its attempts to forge communal affiliations and fulfill personal ambitions. It suggests that the internalization of colonialist discourses alienates the characters from their native communities and implicates them in the oppressive practices of the colonizer. Thus the mimicking subject can neither experience self-fulfillment nor reconcile with the larger national community. The novel casts its self-alienation as one of the adverse effects of colonial education. The mimicking subject’s unquestioned absorption of colonial discourses renders it incapable
of forging productive social relations and experiencing personal satisfaction. As the subject accrues awareness about its colonial mimicry it attempts to undo its colonialis-derived affiliations. The novel portrays the subject’s attempts to undo the adverse effects of its colonial mimicry, but it also suggests that this process of undoing years of colonial dependency is far from smooth and untrammeled. At the same time, the novel foregrounds the need for challenging unquestioned assimilation of colonial discourses at school and home by depicting the harmful effects of this internalization among colonized subjects. Other characters also undertake the task of advising the protagonists against colonial mimicry. Indeed, by depicting the burgeoning self-awareness in these subjects, the novel advocates the investigation of the colonized subject’s complicity in colonial violence. The novel charts self-awareness in terms of the growing understanding about colonial exploitation.

All novels under discussion here chart the spread of colonial education in the colonies, and at least one novel, Barnes’ *Arthur and George*, links English education in England, with Empire, the consolidation of an English identity and imperialist violence. In fact, it interweaves the consolidation of middle class English respectability with imperialist violence, and with racial and class anxieties among the English middle classes of the late nineteenth century. In varied ways, the novels under discussion here suggest that English texts introduce children to imperialist ideologies and imagery, as well as Victorian bourgeois values and conceptions of racial, class and gender difference. I use Louis Althousser’s term “interpellation” to suggest that the novels indicate how the English school interpellates colonized subjects in the imperialist project of European colonizers by conceiving of them as beneficiaries of the Empire’s civilizing mission and
humanist charitable instinct, while at the same time perpetuating violence on them by disseminating racist discourses.\(^{31}\) In particular, I rely on Jose Medina’s discussion of Althousser’s concept as a process of subjugation and subjectification of the individual to the dominant ideology and the hegemonic state (168). I also indicate that the novels suggest that for the most part only the elite section of the colonized community imbibed colonial education at school. However, they do not suggest that the “subaltern” groups were unaffected by colonial discourses. Instead, as Ghosh and Brodber indicate, marginalized and lower class subjects absorbed colonialist discourses at others spaces as well, such as the church, public meeting places and even on the road. In other words, in any place where the colonizer could make a public display of his ideologies in certain embodied forms. The novels focus not only on the intentions of the colonizers in establishing educational institutions and disseminating Eurocentric discourses to the natives and disseminating Victorian discourses about morality, work ethic and self-discipline that aim at policing native bodies, but also on the effects of colonial education on native subjects by charting the varied ways in which internalized colonialist discourses affect the material realities, desires and self-perceptions of the educated subjects. I also indicate that the novels delineate the effects of colonial education from the point of view of the colonized subject, who receives colonialist ideologies. Even Barnes’ narrator embodies the view of the colonized by depicting the Scottish-Irish Englishman Arthur in the role of the receiving colonized subject, who has little choice but to receive English discourses about Empire as a child. Such representation casts subjects who are

---

\(^{31}\) According to Althousser in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Ideology, which is “the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence”, has a material existence as it always exists in an apparatus, and its practice and relations of power. “Ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (96-100).
conventionally conceived as imperialists as equal victims as the native subjects who suffered from imperial rule.

The novels under discussion have also illustrated how absorption of colonial ideologies should neither be seen as merely the passive absorption of imperialist ideologies, nor apprehended exclusively as eliciting support for Empire, but should also be seen as a strategic, specific and self-conscious mediation with colonial discourses, even at certain times, what Bill Ashcroft and Helen Tiffin call the “appropriation and abrogation” of the colonizer’s ways of seeing and knowing to chart frameworks for anticolonial resistance and self-assertion among the colonized. In addition, the novels also link the subject’s assimilation to colonialist ideologies to its resolve to survive under the colonizer’s rule.

In highlighting the novels’ representation of colonial education, I suggest that these historicizations suggest the continuities between contemporary discourses of racial, sexual and class identities and state governance, and colonial discourses in the former colonies as well as in England. Indeed, some of the policies that govern the legal, military and political institutions of contemporary societies in the national polities in these spaces are the consequences of the unquestioned assimilation of colonialist discourses by the elite subjects of post-independent nation states. And as the novels suggest, the assimilation is not just restricted to the state but also extends to the common people it governs, many of who absorb and transmit discourses of racial difference and Eurocentric assumptions of middle-class respectability, morality and individual profit to future generations. The novelists are cognizant of this and call for a continued interrogation of unequal relations of power in extant socio-political discourses.
Bibliography


