

# Resistance and Complicity in David Dabydeen's "The Intended"

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ON HIS LAST DAY in his grandparents' village in Guyana, the narrator of David Dabydeen's *The Intended* is given money and a farewell kiss by Auntie Clarice, who calls out "a final riddle: 'you is we, remember, you is we'" (40). This is the riddle the novel sets out to solve; it is concerned both with the act of memory itself and with how the highly educated narrator of such a novel can remember properly someone like Auntie Clarice, who is "as old as the village and . . . as black as the trench water in which every day of her life she dipped her bucket and took to the house to wash pans, scrub floors, bathe children" (39). Dabydeen sets the problem out from the perspective of a fiction writer living in Britain:

The pressure now is also towards mimicry. Either you drop the epithet "black" and think of yourself as a "writer" (a few of us foolishly embrace this position, desirous of the status of "writing" and knowing that "black" is blighted)—that is, you cease dwelling on the nigger/tribal/nationalistic theme, you cease *folking* up the literature, and you become "universal"—or else you perish in the backwater of small presses, you don't get published by the "quality" presses, and you don't receive the corresponding patronage of media-hype.

("On Not Being Milton" 12-13)

The process of forgetting, in other words, is aided not only by distance, education, and time, but also by the way the British literary institution works, by what it publishes, what it valorizes. To remember Auntie Clarice is to risk literary obscurity.

David Dabydeen's family left Guyana in the late 1960s when he was twelve. In England he grew up "in the care of the local authorities, because my parents were divorced" (Interview 70);

he remarks of this period in his life that "if you don't have a measure of self-discipline you are finished. It is as bleak as that" (71). His novel, clearly autobiographical, focusses on a struggling group of young immigrants whose lives were "messy," whose "families [were] scattered across the West," who "lived from hand to mouth, hustling or thieving or working nightshifts and sleeping daytime . . . ashamed of our past, frightened of the present and not daring to think about the future" (168). The narrator's father abandons his family in Guyana, but later asks that his son be sent to join him in London; shortly, the father turns his son over to welfare. Desperately, the son studies to succeed, to follow the route traced out for him by Auntie Clarice: "But you must tek education . . . you hear . . . and pass plenty exam and work hard and get good job" (38).

The narrator's main aspiration is to write, despite the anxiety of influence he suffers as he studies Milton and Blake for his examinations. His first poem is an epitaph "published" on the gravestone of his landlord's sister, recently arrived from Pakistan. In the scene where he reads a draft of the epitaph aloud, the narrator knows "it was all wrong" and starts declaiming "Lycidas" to "drown the banality of what I had written" (146).

The novel itself is similar, its form analogous to the collage documentary that Joseph, a friend of the narrator's, proposes to make on the condition of England with his stolen video camera. The novel is both messy and under the erasure of the vast weight and privilege of the canon as well as the narrator's tendency to lose faith in books and in words that provide "only the illusion of truth" (197). Nonetheless, its form is not easily labelled post-modern.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, the surface of the novel is quite realist and it can be read without necessarily grappling with the narrative structure, held together as it is by fairly traditionally developed character, theme, image, and *Bildungsroman* plot. Further, its structural peculiarities derive not from an international style or theory, but from a profound although tortured identification with blackness and from the tense/aspect system of the creole "Nation language" of Guyana. This structure ultimately helps to ground not only the novel's considerable narrative irony, but also the constantly uncertain and shifting loyalties of the young nar-

rator in a way that reveals the implied author's allegiance to a Guyanese and West Indian black identity. The explicit focus of the novel is on the young narrator's desire to assimilate, to succeed in British terms by going to Oxford, becoming a famous writer, and marrying an upper-class white woman. This theme is undercut mainly by irony and structural disjunctions in a way that problematizes this desire by revealing it as the construct of racist discourse and racist institutions that permit only a token few members of racial minorities to succeed. The boy's struggle to jettison his shameful past is retroactively reconstructed by his older self in a way that re-visions his past, both in Guyana and in the slums of Balham, as valuable, as worth memorializing. The novel situates itself as postcolonial text rather than as aspirant to the British canon by "folking" up the novel form. Its narrative gradually turns the reader's attention away from the hero's struggle to become white to his subsequent struggle to become black, a move that transforms the novel into an allegory of the postcolonial immigrant's rejection of imperial norms, a rejection informed by education, in this case at Oxford, one of the empire's central institutions. As Stephen Slemon puts it in his "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History," by "foregrounding the fact that history is not a set of immovable past achievements but a discourse, open, as are all discursive practices, to reinterpretation, post-colonial allegorical narratives show that allegorical transformation can also be an effective means of subverting imperial myths" (164). Thus what can be read as a self-punishing recollection of cultural betrayal should also be read as a liberatory account of resistance in desperate circumstances.

Like many other such portraits of the artist as a young man, *The Intended* is marked by the irony of the speaker who has spent years of "solitary hours in Oxford University library" (195), a narrator who is no longer a "complete virgin" admiring his friend's "erudition" (3) about sex. This ironic doubling implicit in an older narrator's account of a younger self is commonplace in first-person fictionalized autobiography. But in postcolonial novels doubling is more widespread than this. Frequently, such texts "write back" to the imperial canon, revising, resisting, recoding (see Ashcroft). Dabydeen puts it like this: "You had to take what

was defined as English high culture and try to find yourself in there . . . to insert your blackness there" (Interview 72). Further, texts written by postcolonial writers who are immigrants to the centre and yet, as the result of racial difference, are doomed to what Arnold Itwaru calls "multiple" and "permanent outsiderships" (202) also frequently "write back" home, to the former colony. Thus the desire to disappear into an international (that is, imperial) style is complicated by the narrator's inability to forget Auntie Clarice in Guyana, or his East Indian schoolmates like Patel, who speaks for the Balham "Asian community": "It's us lot who have given you everything, and don't you forget that" (231). Not only must the exiled postcolonial writer produce strong rewritings of (or strong resistance to) the British canonical greats, but he must also produce work that might be read by Patel's children or Auntie Clarice's grandchildren, and that might do justice to the Caribbean theoretical and literary tradition of George Lamming and Wilson Harris as well.

The difficulty of writing to Auntie Clarice is complicated further: Auntie Clarice is descended from African slaves while the narrator is descended from Indian indentured labourers; the two groups have traditionally been opposed in Guyana, with the Indo-Guyanans, although slightly more than half the population, the disadvantaged group. The narrator's mother is negative about the Afro-Caribbeans: "Coolie people had no future in Guyana, she was convinced . . . the black people were so tribal. . . . Slavery dirty up their mind" (238). When he asks his grandmother "Ma, is true all black people ignorant?" (127), however, she scolds him and makes him wash his mouth out. His rural grandmother lives with her black neighbours in harmony; his mother feels more threatened, living as she does in a town during the troubles between the two groups in the 1960s. Leonard B. Glick outlines the complexity of Indo-Guyanans and Afro-Guyanans relations and comments that the choice for the former to identify as black is "essentially a political statement" (245). He continues:

Many progressive Blacks in Trinidad and Guyana especially would undoubtedly welcome East Indians who . . . opted . . . for Black identity as affirmation of a political stance. But, for reasons that I have

outlined here, that does not seem to be in the offing for the majority of East Indians. . . . For despite all attempts to integrate East Indians into the story of Caribbean colonialism, the fact remains that they were latecomers to the scene, possessed of a distinctive culture of their own, and that they were oppressed and despised by both Whites and Blacks. (246)

Dervla Murphy notes that in Britain "if you are 'politically aware' . . . everyone who is not White is Black," regardless of cultural background or skin colour. She feels that this terminology can obscure important differences, and notes that "most Asians" in Britain "resent being described as 'Blacks'" (13). She has to admit, however, that the identification "Asian" also obscures important differences, particularly for Indo-West Indians. In both situations, Guyanan and British, for someone of Indian ancestry to identify as black is not only a political decision, but also a decision fraught with tension, since it may not be welcomed by blacks and may be seen by Asians as a betrayal.

Patel's situation in *The Intended* is at least as complicated as the narrator's; although the narrator has serious disagreements with him, Patel claims the narrator as part of the Balham Asian community, just as Auntie Clarice claims him for Albion village. Patel's family was forced out of Uganda by General Amin in the early 1970s. The Indians in Uganda were brought in by the British before Independence to provide a "buffer zone" between whites and blacks. Not surprisingly, they were likely to share the anti-black sentiment of the colonialists which secured their monopoly as small shopkeepers, traders, and businessmen against black competition. After Independence the widespread control of small business by Indians aroused a nationalist resentment fuelled by racism. Patel, however bigoted against whites he may be, is far less likely to ally himself with blacks than is the narrator, an "Indian West-Indian Guyanese" (5). Deployed as cogs in the machine of imperial trade and commerce, the peoples represented by the narrator's various friends come to Britain bearing the internal scars of their forced moves. They are certainly marked, as are their white oppressors, by a pervasive discourse of racism, although their resistance to it in the case of their own

communities has the potential to cause them to realize its wider oppressive function.

The narrator has been shifted through so many different cross-racial situations and discourses that he is, paradoxically, at an advantage in seeing race as a discursive construct. He has himself moved from being a potential victim of black violence in urban Guyana, through close community connections with Auntie Clarice and other blacks in rural Guyana, to a Britain where Asians, however marginalized, are higher on the British-constructed racial hierarchy than blacks. His Asian friends all see British society through the lens of the discourses of race that marked their different pasts, discourses that sometimes accord with, and at other times conflict with, those the narrator brings with him from the West Indies or learns at school. At the intersections of these discourses, the narrator is caught in what Wilson Harris calls the "fabric of the imagination" where one has access to "revisionary potential within texts of reality" and where one can situate resistance to the "concepts of invariant identity [that] function in the modern world as a block imperative at the heart of cultural politics" (18).

The novel certainly problematizes racial and cultural identification. The narrator's school friends, Nasim, Shaz, and Patel are described as "the regrouping of the Asian diaspora in a South London schoolyard" (5). Somewhat like a school essay answering a request for a discussion of similarities and difference, the novel, having briefly brought these fragments of the diaspora together, proceeds to demonstrate how different they all are. Nasim is Muslim and speaks Urdu; Shaz speaks only English and although of Muslim background "had never seen the interior of a mosque" (5); Patel speaks Gujarati and is of Hindu background. The narrator's great-great-grandfather "converted to Presbyterianism" and "each Friday, to the disgust of Hindu and Muslim alike, he slaughtered a cow and a pig" (6g), defying equally the two major religious traditions of his ancestral homeland. The narrator speaks standard English and an almost-forgotten Creole, and feels guilty about not attending church. The story of each boy's background, appearance, habits, skills, failures, and fate makes it clear how limited any view of racial/

cultural groups as uniform must finally be. It is hardly surprising that the narrator almost despairs of making sense of his life:

I never really knew any of them anyway, time moved so quickly and I was never in one secure place long enough to form perfect conclusions. . . . All I want is to escape from this dirt and shame called Balham, this coon condition, this ignorance that prevents me from knowing anything, not even who we are, who they are. (230)

What he certainly has learned by this point is that whatever the historical complexities of his own cultural situation, to the majority of British people he is simply Other, part of a mass of inferior and exploitable flesh.

Although the young narrator often ignores or misinterprets the significance of what is happening around him to save himself from despair, the older narrator reveals the pernicious effects of racial hierarchy in both Guyana and England. The young boy swings from internal emotional alliances with Indianness and against it; both moves reveal how he has internalized the discourses of British racism. Faced with Nasim who has been hospitalized after a beating by whites and who is surrounded by his weeping and horrified family, he can only identify with the whites in the ward, echoing even their slang ("right sight"): "No doubt [Nasim's family] presented a right sight to the white patients and guests who kept eyeing them" (15). He continues:

I knew then that I was not an Asian but that these people were yet my kin and my embarrassment. I wished that I were invisible. It was the same feeling of shame that all of us, whether Indo-West Indians or real Indians, felt at the sight of our own people. (15)

Later, however, on a bus filled with young blacks coming from discos and parties, he allies himself with his Indian heritage:

No wonder they're treated like animals, I heard myself thinking, distancing myself from all this noisy West Indian-ness, and feeling sympathy for the outnumbered whites. They should send them back home. All they do is dance and breed. Not one 'O' level between a bus-load of them and yet they complain they've got no jobs, no proper housing, no future. If they stayed home and studied, they'd get somewhere. (177)

Again he uses phrases typical of the white discourse of racism against those with which he might be identified. He continues: "I

hope the whites can . . . separate me from that lot. I'm an Indian really, deep down I'm decent and quietly spoken and hard-working and I respect good manners, books, art, philosophy. I'm like the whites, we both have civilization" (178). When one of the black West Indian boys on the bus offers him a cigarette, however, he feels "deeply ashamed of himself": "Everything was so complicated, all this sudden hate and sudden companionship" (179). When he feels his Indian heritage held in contempt, he wants to be invisible; when he feels his West Indian heritage, a predominantly black cultural tradition, under similar pressure, he wants to be Asian. Black is at the bottom of the social hierarchy and he cannot see any way of identifying with it that does not threaten his fragile enterprise of self-construction.

Despite their differences, however, Shaz, Patel, Joseph, and the narrator are all types of Caliban, aiming to steal Prospero's books to get his power. Shaz chooses porn magazines as his books, pimps for Monica, a white girl, and concludes: "Everything in this country is about money. . . . You don't want to be a Paki all your life" (179). Shaz's "new fluency" in sexual explicitness and metaphor is "a complete transformation from his previous stumbling over the English language as represented in our Chaucer and Conrad examination texts" (172). He and Patel both choose to challenge the system through crime, exploiting the weaknesses of whites for sex, pornography, and drugs. Patel says: "All they have over us is money. . . . Soon we'll have more than them, and England will be one tribe of Patels" (245-46). He has the relation between power, money, and eventual respectability clear: "English people will have names like Lucinda Patel and Egbert Smyth-Patel" (236). After all, nineteenth-century British aristocrats happily married off their impoverished sons to the American daughters of early capitalist robber barons. Patel speculates that money, as much as education, will admit hitherto despised immigrants into the circles of aristocratic privilege, represented by the names "Lucinda," "Egbert," and "Smythe." Thus he has chosen a particular kind of book to steal, "the real kind of book, nowadays":

His business plan banished all wildness, removed the animal claw and fang, replaced them with colourless, neutral integers, yet I knew



instinctively that the latter were more dangerous, that the sums and figures were more threatening, that they could lock you away in prison for the rest of your life, or give you the power to crush heads, obtain whatever or whoever you wanted or willed, the most beautiful and inaccessible of women falling greedily upon your lap, the gold in their teeth flashing as they opened their mouths. (201)

Both Shaz and Patel, refused entry into mainstream commerce, take the approach of fighting back, of turning the materialist drive of the culture that refuses them status against that culture.

The narrator and Joseph are more idealistic. Joseph "had become Rastafari and all he wanted to do was to learn black history and spread love and feelings to everybody," even though he knows this will not save him from arrest: "If you talk peace, they think you only smoking weed" (87). The narrator has already been infected with a belief in the power of literacy and education in Guyana. He must become an educated professional to succeed in the eyes of his family and his Guyanan community. Money alone is not enough.

Although Joseph and the narrator prefer a less materialistic approach than Shaz or Patel, they aim at getting what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic power" in the form of intellectual or artistic skills. Both want to change the white world by their art and get recognition for it; to do so they must enter the white cultural marketplace. The narrator and Joseph are alike in their desires; they both want to "be somebody" (113). Both easily slump into self-hatred, into seeing themselves as "useless," as "nothing," because it is clear that no one, even those paid to protect and educate them, will actually recognize their potential or help them succeed. Joseph says, "all the time they seeing you as animal, riot, nigger, but you know you is nothing, atoms, only image and legend in their minds" (101). Joseph steals the video camera because, as he says, "I can't read nor write but I can see" (107): for him the camera is "a different kind of book" (105). The young narrator feels less optimistic: "[Joseph] was, after all, genuinely incompetent . . . full of unrealistic half-formed ideas which he didn't have the resources to develop. Everything was contained in books and he was handicapped by illiteracy" (107).<sup>2</sup> After Joseph commits suicide the narrator can see him only as a

negative example, since he clearly fears that he too will fail in his attempt at gaining recognition as an individual, rather than as a stereotype. He chooses another white book to steal, the British literary canon, even though he fears that "all this reading of books and effort at learning will lead nowhere" (179).

Two emotional relationships central to the narrator's struggle to construct an identity for himself are those he forges with the white, upper-class Janet and with Joseph. In a sense they map out the bleak opposition that the dominant stereotypes force on those categorized as Other: assimilate (and, implicitly, vanish into the majority) or just vanish into the shadows of the margin. As Dabydeen put it in a comment about his generation in England: as the result of the public hostility to immigrants there was "a very great pressure among us to become invisible" (70). At Oxford, then, the narrator believes he will be transformed into someone worthy of Janet: "I will have become somebody definite, my education compensating for my colour in the eyes of her parents" (245). He worries about his motives: "Patel's taunt that I want to become a white man is ridiculous" (230), but he is so powerless that he has few choices. Joseph becomes an image of blackness against which the narrator feels compelled to define himself, even though he also feels pressures to assert their common "West Indianness." Nonetheless, he concludes, "the most important thing is to save myself from the misery of his kind of being" (231).

It is the crossing of the dangerous frontiers of gender, race, and class necessary for the narrator to construct relationships with these two where the dangers of complicity with the dominant discourse are the greatest. And yet, as Kenneth Ramchand makes clear, it is across just such frontiers that West Indian writers must move to achieve any form of true community. Speaking of (and quoting from) Wilson Harris, he writes:

Instead of creating characters whose positioning on one side or other of the region's historical conflicts consolidates those conflicts and does violence to the make-up of the person, the West Indian novelist should set out to 'visualize a fulfilment,' a reconciliation in the person and throughout society, of the parts of a heritage of broken cultures. (iii)

Dabydeen certainly does not see reconciliation as an easy achievement: all the non-white characters in the novel are, in a sense, deformed by the pressures of racism (as are Monica and Janet, to differing degrees, by the pressures of sexism) and their chances of reconciliation with others is strongly dependent on their background and personal history.

The young narrator clearly cannot detach Janet from his fantasy of her stable privileged family life or Joseph from fears of failing, of falling even further down the social hierarchy; the older narrator is able to allow them their own original and compelling voices. But in their relations to the novel's thematic structure, they nonetheless remain counters in a working out of binary oppositions. The white woman and the black man become poles between which the narrator seeks to find himself, their abstract quality made clear by Joseph's death and Janet's departure for Australia. One of Dabydeen's own poems, "Caliban" outlines the dilemma from the perspective of the coolie Caliban, loved by a white woman:

The first night  
 I endured your creation  
 . . . . .  
 You were always bountiful with fantasy,  
 Fashioning me your Image or casting me Native (*Coolie* 34)

It is difficult, maybe impossible, not to use those defined as Other in ways that suit one's own needs for a public identity.

In contrast, the narrator's relations with his South Asian friends are less schematic and less fraught with anxiety. Shaz helps him achieve what he regards as sexual maturity and Patel helps him financially. Nasim's mother worries over him. He is grateful for these evidences of concern, but accepts them as one would similar favours from a family member. Nasim's sister, unlike Janet or Monica, is classified as family; to sleep with her "would have been like sleeping with a sister" (212). The narrator's disagreements with these friends are just that, rather than symbolic of larger social conflicts. These relationships do not pose the threat of those that must bridge discursive dichotomies or defy the dominant discourse.

Janet, for example, is using her relationship with the narrator to distinguish herself from her family, and certainly as an exercise of power, since he, unlike someone like Shaz, is prepared to let her take the lead sexually. Because of their differences of race and class, their relationship is charged with the potential for disaster for both of them. He consents to her desire to keep their relationship secret from her parents until he graduates: "I will be her dark secret, her illicit pregnancy, her undeveloped child" (245). Thus in his view she becomes dominant like his mother or his grandmother. Just before he leaves for Oxford and she for Australia, Janet fits him out in a white shirt which he is to wear when they meet again; it has unfortunate connotations for the narrator, whose father wore a similar shirt, beating his wife when she could not get the ink stains off the pocket. (This is an allusion to the "starched collars and got-up shirt fronts" of the Company's chief accountant in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which may well have depended on a similar oppression of the native woman who "had a distaste for the work" of doing laundry [1828].) As Janet pulls at the sleeves to check the fit, the narrator says, "I felt like one of Shaz's whores, or a slave on an auction block" (243). With her, he is feminized, objectified, infantilized and sexually ashamed. This is the effect of the white culture she symbolizes on the black Other.

Janet also becomes symbolic both of the alma mater and of its gatekeepers quite explicitly, shortly after the narrator attempts to penetrate her, but finds the entrance "unmanageably small" (203). He does not attempt to rape this Miranda, nor can he even make love to her. He is symbolically represented as not yet her equal. The text awaits his transformation by Oxford just as he does. After this failure, he feels "uselessness" (204). Janet seems unruffled, however, and asks him when his interview is at Oxford and what he will talk about: "Pretend I'm the board of scholars and you are sitting before me" (205). She has quickly transformed herself from passive virgin to dominant mistress, taking on the role of the gatekeeper of white culture. Indeed, her class background and her colour, if not her gender, entitle her to this culture almost by right. Asked to define poetry, the narrator says: "It's like a seed, according to Shelley, containing the past and

future plant" (205). Given his recent failure, the connections are obvious, and Janet replies:

Well, I suppose it depends on what kind of plant—either a sissy daffodil or a Venus fly-trap. I bet Shelley was thinking of daffodils. Men always go for vulnerable images, things they can control and dominate. Me, I think poetry is a meat-eating, cunning flower that traps your tongue and won't let go. (205)

Suddenly evoking images of the *vagina dentata*, she turns the muse into "la belle dame sans merci" relentlessly trapping and discarding men. As she leaves, she smilingly and ironically says, "Well, do your best in Oxford and make sure you get in this time" (205). Here, although she has been given her own voice, one that reveals her originality, wit, and power, she is clearly also being "used" for artistic reasons in the narrative. Just as she might prove a dangerous muse for the narrator, so might Oxford leave him "death pale," assimilated, unable to write. As the novel draws to an end, the narrator begins to see his relationship with Janet in less idealistic terms. When he blurts out his desire—"but you are fragrant, you are everything I intended,"—he realizes how his feelings for her have not, in fact, been intended, but have been forced by his "plain needs" and "weakness" (243). Patel puts it more crudely: "Just because you ain't got a mother don't mean that England will mother you, you stupid mother-fucker. . . . Why don't you grow up and be yourself instead of mourning for white pussy?" (246). In his relationship with Janet, issues of race and class will always disrupt any attempt to construct their relationship in terms of intracultural norms of friendship or sexual partnership. She stands for England, for Oxford, for white privilege just as Joseph stands for the West Indies, for Borstal, for black oppression.

It is the memory of Joseph that has the potential, at least, to break down the young narrator's idealization of British culture. Joseph kills himself because the only work he can find using his camera is filming pornography for Patel and he cannot bear it: he is "fed up with filth" (234). The narrator tries to convince him that "it's not the subject, it's the technique that matters, perfecting your knowledge of how the camera works, and how you can make it work for you" (234), but Joseph's reaction makes it clear

that this approach is wrong. To abstract subject from technique is to transform art into exploitation. The young narrator tries to convince Patel to continue to help Joseph, even after Joseph has deliberately ruined a film, and rebukes Patel for his racism in Auntie Clarice's words: "there's no need to call him a nigger. He's one of us and we're one of him" (240). Nonetheless, he himself still sees Joseph as inferior: "perhaps he wanted to burn like a Hindu corpse to show us Asians that he was no different from us, that he was not an inferior being, that 'you is we,' as Auntie Clarice had said" (197). Even after the narrator is at Oxford, the memory of Joseph, "an inveterate criminal, keeps breaking in to the most burglar-proof of institutions, reminding me of my dark shadow, drawing me back to my dark self" (195-96). But the narrator's reaction is still revulsion: "I begin to despise Joseph, his babbling, his half-formed being, his lack of privilege, his stupid way of living and dying" (198). He sees Joseph as the antithesis of everything he has been trained to value by white education. He "long[s] to be white, to be calm, to write with grace and clarity, to make words which have status" (197) and is convinced that Oxford will transform him into someone who can do this. Here the danger of forgetting one's people, of forgetting one's own history, of thinking it belongs, like other remnants of Balham, in the "bins" (210) is made clear.

In fact, the text plays with the possibility that the narrator might indeed have forgotten Joseph in the section of the novel that goes farthest into the future of any other section (although, typically, it is found in the first third of the book). The narrator recollects having his car repaired in a garage which resembles Joseph's description of his father's, but when he begins to ask whether the man had a son called Joseph, he forgets Joseph's family name, which is, significantly, "Countryman." As Marlow's fascination with Kurtz focusses *Heart of Darkness*, so the narrator's fascination with Joseph becomes a moral test. The narrator's forgetting is like Marlow's lie to Kurtz's intended, a revelation of the difficulty of facing the horror of what the social hierarchy can do to the weak. Marlow's gradual realization that Kurtz is, in fact, far from a model, works for the narrator in reverse. Joseph, whom the young narrator often sees as unhinged, impractical,

and incoherent is shown by the older narrator to have much better developed political, poetic, and critical insights than the young narrator had himself. Like the narrator's first poem, this novel also becomes an elegy for a dead person of colour, although its elegiac qualities only become clear retroactively.<sup>3</sup> The narrator does save himself from vanishing like Joseph and his novel saves Joseph from dying unmemorialized. Further, Joseph's memory saves the narrator from going white, from vanishing into the heart of whiteness, from rebirth out of the womb of Oxford as Janet's "medieval knight" (244), completely assimilated into white bourgeois gentility.

Benita Perry has expressed concern that Dabydeen's poems in *Slave Song* may be implicated in a "discourse shared by the master's culture and beyond," in this case a sexist discourse "that represents rape as what woman wants," because the "pain, frustration and anger is spoken by the native positioned as the very figure of phobic white fears and desires" (6). The greater flexibility of the novel form, its doubled ironic play, and its representation of characters who speak out of multiple and conflicted discourses lessens this danger in *The Intended*, although ultimately, since there is no "outside" to discourse, it is impossible to avoid complicity at some level with some dominant and oppressive discourse. Dabydeen shows characters, including the youthful subject of the narrative, overwhelmed by racist discourse, either turning their resulting anger outward at both whites and blacks, or inward on themselves in the form of self-doubt, even suicidal self-loathing. For the narrator, the solution comes in both the risk of assimilation and complicity, "tek education," and the use of that education to produce resistance, "remember." Thus he takes both of Auntie Clarice's pieces of advice to heart. The final text is an example of how an assimilative education can be turned against assimilation, can be used to provide the confidence and power to look again at the past, to describe the process of oppression, to scrutinize past cultural betrayals in painful detail. And the novel's crucial remembering of the West Indian culture symbolized by both Joseph and Auntie Clarice takes place not only in the novel's content, but also in the ways its form can be linked to Creole.

Guyanese Creole has been seen by writers such as Wordsworth McAndrew and Herbert Devonish as a means to provide Afro- and Indo-Guyanans with a unified national identity that would promote political equality in two groups deliberately kept at odds by the colonial master: "each group was encouraged to share the planters' disparaging stereotypes of the other" (Rickford 66). Thus its use is as much a gesture towards Guyanan cross-racial solidarity as are Dabydeen's paired poetry collections, *Slave Song* (1984) and *Coolie Odyssey* (1988). In fact, its use is a gesture towards West Indian unity, since related creoles are spoken throughout the Caribbean. In *The Intended*, it can be argued that the use of Creole not only in dialogue, but also in the narrative structure serves to valorize those of Joseph's views that annoyed and appalled the young narrator, obsessed in his drive for completion, perfection, and clarity.

The young narrator, waiting to leave for Oxford, remembers a "haphazard" letter from his mother, written "in a struggling English, the verb-tenses mixed up so that I couldn't figure past from present from future" (213), and a little later wonders: "Perhaps I am not English enough: a piece of pidgin, not knowing where the past ended, where the present began, not knowing how the future was to be made" (216-17). In Guyanan Creole, as in many other such languages, "tense marking is optional" (Roy 146); it is possible, but not necessary. What is marked grammatically is aspect, that is, roughly, whether an action is complete at the time of speaking or whether the action is continuing.<sup>4</sup> Like Creole, the novel generally ignores tense, instead promoting the imperfective over the perfective aspect.

A careful look at the time sequence of the novel reveals that the narrative slides from Guyanan past to Balham present and, although rarely, to Oxford future, even within the short sections within chapters that are simply marked off by white spaces. The same is true of the book's four long chapters, which are marked off with Roman numerals. The first chapter begins in Balham, and gives an account of the first day at school in England, but is devoted mainly to an account of the narrator's last day with his grandparents before he leaves Guyana. Both of these accounts move around in time, however, with interpolated stories, memo-



ries, and digressions. In each subsequent chapter, the narrator has aged and his relationships with his friends have changed, but no section lacks a passage set in the Guyanan past. In other words, its influence is continuing, despite the narrator's feeling that he is forgetting his past. One particularly significant story recurs, that of Shaz and the narrator taking food to Joseph in a condemned and abandoned house, first after he has escaped from jail where he was taken for stealing the video camera, and later after he has fled from his job filming porn for Patel. Versions of this encounter recur (88, 164, 166, 170, 193, 234) and in each instance Joseph's abjection, depression, and filthiness and the narrator's feelings of helplessness increase. This compulsive repetition indicates both the narrator's guilt about Joseph's death and that this meeting is incomplete—Joseph will continue to haunt the text and the narrator. In grammatical terms, Joseph's aspect is marked continuative. The narrator, sitting in the library at Oxford, remembers a scene where Joseph had been trying to learn to write "cocoon" on the muddy floor of his hideout:

I see Joseph's stick gouging letters in the mud, the sense of which now comes to me fitfully. He was telling me that he was half-formed, like the jelly in a cocoon, like the C trying to round itself to an O, getting there with great effort, but breaking up because of the police, the Boy's Home, the absent father, the dead mother, the lack of education, the poverty, the condition of blackness. Even the quest for completion was absurd, for O signified nothing, the word ended with N for nothing. (196)

The narrator's response at this point is to yearn for completion: "I will grow strong in this library, this cocoon, I will absorb its nutrients of quiet scholarship, I will emerge from it and be somebody, some recognizable shape, not a lump of aborted anonymous flesh" (198). That he does not forget Joseph, that he is not reborn a white "somebody," however, is finally made clear in the structure of the text, which mimics not the rational order enforced by Standard English and "essayist literacy,"<sup>5</sup> but the only apparently haphazard one of Creole. Joseph "had a way of rambling, never getting to the point" (88), and the novel finally commemorates and celebrates this refusal.<sup>6</sup> Joseph, after all, expresses throughout the book his poetic and visionary inter-

pretations of life, language, literature, and the condition of England, interpretations that reveal the sterility of the “theme and image” approach favoured by the narrator, not to mention that of his uncritical attempts to become white. Joseph sees what the young narrator cannot, but the older narrator dares to:

Poetry is like bird . . . and it gliding or lifting and plunging. . . . What you doing with your pentating and strokee and all dem rules is putting iron-bar one by one in a spacious room so the bird flying round and round and breaking beak and wing against the wall trying to reach the sunlight. You turning all the room in the universe and in the human mind into bird cage. (95)

The text itself, in its form, its messiness, counters the iron cage of racial absolutism and hierarchy, the dominance of Standard English, and the ideal of clarity, order, and homogeneous identity, moving the reader back to Wilson Harris’s “re-visionary potential”: “an active and infinite ingredient within imageries and texts of reality—to which one responds intuitively at many levels, . . . [a response that implies] the ecstasy of complex counterpoint within a living medium, a changing language: complex counterpoint between partial origins, between partial imprints of unfinished genesis, partial absolutes” (20). At the end of the novel, the young narrator departs for Oxford, hoping to learn there how to form “perfect conclusions.” By this point, the reader has already learned that the belief in perfect conclusions is fostered by oppressive ideologies that turn the wide world into an iron cage.

#### NOTES

- 1 The novel itself is a complex intertext, something I have only been able to gesture at here. If it is to be considered postmodern as a result, its explicit focus on texts that obsess postcolonial writers in their political project, such as Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, as well as on postcolonial works like Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock*, certainly distinguishes it from the postmodern writing of American, British, and European writers.
- 2 Graff’s work makes it clear that literacy does not necessarily promote social improvement for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, although illiteracy is frequently blamed for their position there.
- 3 The novel is clearly a version, a messy version, of what Bruffee identifies as the “elegiac romance,” a genre developed by Conrad. A similar point is made by the fact that only the incomplete draft versions of the narrator’s epitaph for Mr. Ali’s sister are found in the text, not the final version that is, presumably, carved on her gravestone.

- 4 See Roy, whose account of Bajan, the creole spoken in Barbados, notes the similarities between it and Guyanese Creole, and Rickford, who revises some of the tense/aspect rules in Guyanese Creole (137-43).
- 5 The narrator, schooled in "essayist literacy," cannot appreciate Joseph's orally derived vision of the world. Indeed, their differences are as much differences of consciousness as of race or class. For more on "essayist literacy" see Gee, especially 62-63.
- 6 Although the novel celebrates the powers of creole, it does not tackle Rasta talk, or "Iyaric." Joseph does not appear to use it, although he does definitely speak a creole. Pollard comments on Rasta talk:

In Iyaric, in order to emphasize the unity of all mankind who stand for truth and right, the word "you" is eliminated as divisive and separating "I" from "I." "I and I" is therefore used instead of "you," "me," "they," "them," "theirs" and "us." (158)

The command to remember "you is we" does, in some sense, establish distinctions and alliances that may or may not be welcome to the hearer: indeed, Auntie Clarice's parting words were certainly not always easy for the narrator to remember or live by.

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