



Disposition of the Child within the Family: A Case Study of Caribbean Literature



Research article



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Abstract

This study is based on the premise that a literary writer has a wide range of narrative agents to choose from. Literary artists discriminate in the choice of both subject-matter and technique. When a writer thus makes a selection, it is assumed that he opts for what is best suited to articulate his vision or ideological perspectives on a multiplicity of concerns. A writer's preference in terms of character-types should therefore never be taken for granted but rather should be perceived as a vehicle through which the writer lays bare his/her message. Boulton (1954) asserts: "a story or essay will achieve an effect on the reader by selection of some aspects of the subject" (p.109). Characterization in Literature is therefore a deliberate enterprise aimed at achieving certain goals. Characterization has all along been an important part in literary history. During the classical period, only characters of the highest social standing were treated as subjects of truly serious attention in literary art. Ordinary human existence could only be treated in a flippant, comic or satiric manner. A writer would thus employ a child character in literature intended for mature persons because he/she is convinced that the age factor will express his message more forcefully than if he/she employed an adult character. Wilson-Tagoe and Dabydeen (1987, p.38) assert that in novels about childhood, "the child's experiences become part of the novel's social and political vision, and are often controlled and shaped by the overall point of view of the writer". This study thus seeks to investigate the function of the child in the West - Indian adult novel.

Keywords: adult literature, caribbean literature, child character



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Introduction

Aristotle (1934) recognizes that imitation always involves a rigorous selection of those objects which are deemed appropriate for imitation. Hence, an artist selects those aspects of the subject which he wishes to treat in detail and which suit his treatment of the chosen idea or matter. E.M. Forster (1927) also maintains that everything in a work of art is intentional; even passions and crimes, even misery. On the subject of choice with respect to character, Forster asserts that how soon a writer will pick up his characters after birth and how close to the grave he will follow them is all a matter of choice related to the writer's intents. On the same point, Peck and Coyle (1984) insist that "details are not included just for their sake but relate to the overall picture of the novel" (p.105). Such details, Wilson Harris (1973) avers, are all geared towards persuasion of the reader. Wilson views character in the novel as hinged more or less on the elements of persuasion. Selection is not just confined to characterization but also other items of a work of art such as dressing, manners, conversation, historical situations, setting, language, ornamentation and others, all geared towards persuasion.

An author's distinctive view of how people relate and how they ought to relate will be reflected in the representation of every character and other details add to the author's view of the characters who as members of a society are part of a broader pattern. When a writer therefore decides to employ a child character in adult literature as the protagonist, the character should not only be analysed in relation to the setting and happenings but also against the backcloth of what the character really is - a child. Good literary writers employ child characters to draw attention to childhood itself. This is something which scores of critics have taken for granted for a very long time.

In most ancient Christian cultures, the concept of original sin linked all children together in a particular way. As the doctrine gained ascendancy, the age of baptism was lowered progressively. The child then came to represent maleficence, willfulness and egocentricism; bestowing the parent or child care-taker the onus of driving out or sometimes, thrashing out the putrid malevolence and replacing it with the upright. The virtuous entailed knowledge of God and his ways. Children were viewed as intuitively good but as inherent devils that needed firm, tactful discipline from parents with clear standards. This kind of reasoning seems to have survived to the modern times where the oft used maxim: "Spare the rod and spoil the child", is a clear pointer to the fact that children are perceived either as unformed, thus requiring some fashioning or inherently sinful, therefore standing in need of some re-sculpturing.

Sigmund Freud in particular had an enormous impact upon the modern conception of the child and childhood *in toto*. Freud adjudged babies as the inheritors and reflectors of the libidinous nature of mankind. To Freud thus, a child is instinctively erotic and this kind of visceral pleasure seeking may culminate in tragic happenings such as incestuous relationships

and even murder in a family. In essence, Freud seems to espouse the Biblical view of the child as innately vile until baptized. Baptism is a religio-initiatory rite which may encompass indoctrination and even flogging in order to make certain that the child treads on the footsteps of the righteous. This kind of disposition is evinced in the childhood novels of the West Indies.

Many societies postulate that the child is not only spontaneously iniquitous as a result of having inherited the original sin, but also extremely mentally dark (ignorant, thus requiring some enlightening) or unformed (empty, thus requiring some filling). Greeks seem to have been most attentive to the 'unformed' qualities. Owing to a child's 'unformedness', Greeks appreciated children as 'moldable'; thus capable of being drilled equally well in mind and body: "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree" (Bell and Harper: 1977, p.14). Greeks believed that children were green; that their knowledge must be acquired. This *tabula rasa* view of the child is typified in philosopher Epictetus' words: "For what is a child? Ignorance? What is a child? Want of instruction. For where a child has knowledge, he is not worse than we are" (Ibid, p.14). Greeks assumed that the child-like ignorance made the child not only impressionable but also gullible. Greeks thus underscored the need for children to be instructed on what may uplift them. This kind of grounding may necessitate serious, negative indoctrination. This is what Thomas Gradgrind is ruthlessly doing to his five children in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1959). Dickens aptly labels the chapter: "Murdering the innocent". Desiring to bring up his children as model children, Gradgrind rigidly nurtured the children from infancy on 'hard facts'. One day, approaching his symmetrical and practical home Stone Lodge, on the outskirts of the town, Gradgrind hears the noise of the Travelling Fair and horse-riding show run by Sleary and his troupe. Gradgrind is not worried that his offspring may have been influenced by the Fair. However, when he sees children peeping at the Fair through the back of Stone Lodge and recognizes among them, with considerable amazement, two of his own progeny Louisa and Tom, Gradgrind is appalled that his children have a speck of fancy after all the 'science-oriented' upbringing. Sissy Jupe, a daughter of a circus man is blamed for Tom's and Louisa's 'fanciness' and thus Cecilia is expelled from Gradgrind's school. When Cecilia is abandoned by her own father who is embarrassed by his decline in circus acts, Mr. Gradgrind proposes to take care of Sissy only so long as she cuts off her connection with the Show people. Like Gradgrind's children, Cecilia too is thus forced to tolerate the fact-grinding establishment of Stone Lodge and the school. The children in Stone Lodge indeed reflect the vulnerability of youngsters whose 'empty pitchers' can be filled with injurious matter.

The child in the family became a puppetry marionette; a passive recipient of 'moulding' as for the case of the 'unadulterated' and 're-moulding' for the 'unadulterated' like Sissy Jupe. The so-called moulding or re-moulding may actually be de-moulding as we will see in the analysis of the selected texts.

Casting Out Beelzebub and Filling The Pitchers: The Child as Inherently Villainous

The condescending adult perception of childhood discussed is also demonstrated in Caribbean childhood novels. In Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando*, when Brinetta repairs from the Chandles' house, Francis remembers her with nostalgia as a person he prized because:

No grown up had ever spoken to me as if I could understand anything. But Brinetta did. Now she was in her village place. I felt sad. (p.25)

In Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*, Tee is subjected to dire indoctrination. Right from the beginning of the novel, Tee and his brother Toddan are indoctrinated by their aunt 'Tantie' to look up to adults to show them 'what is right'. 'What is right' may actually not be propitious in the true sense of the word for the children are even swayed into imbibing adult prejudices and perceptions. Tee and Toddan dread and loathe Auntie Beatrice prior to meeting her physically. Tantie has been talking unfavourably of Beatrice; even using the appellation "The Bitch" to refer to her. Since children learn through imitation, they also refer to their aunt using the same appellation:

The threat we had come to designate compendiously as "The Bitch" hovered over everyday of our lives ... We had clear instructions what to do if The Bitch turned up while neither Tantie nor Mikey were there – we were to run over to the neighbour Ramlal – Wife and stay there ... or to Tan Marvis or down to Marva mother. Half the street was involved in the barricade against The Bitch. (p.20)

The children thus come to abhor and dread a person they have never even met. To Tee and Toddan, Auntie Beatrice becomes some type of brute with hideous, terrifying features such that "When one peaceful afternoon as *they* were sitting on the front step playing ... A car drew up and a lady with a benignant smile descended upon *them* with kissing" (p.20), the children could not visualize that beneficent and affectionate lady as the dreaded Bitch. Children such as Tee and Toddan are therefore negatively affected by the adult prejudices they are forced to imbibe. Later, when Tee is relocated to Auntie Beatrice's, Beatrice simply takes up the position of Tantie and carries on the indoctrination but now in the opposite direction. Instead of teaching Tee to respect her family members such as their aunt Tantie, Beatrice essentially psychologically harms the girl when she (Beatrice) inferiorizes everything that Tee could identify with. Terming auntie Tantie who had actually reared Tee, a 'Coolie', Beatrice goes ahead to disparage everything associated with the rural folk. In that regard, she discourages

Tee from attending the Moonies' wedding, dubbing it a Coolie affair, yet being present at such espousals was culture to Tee. By reason of her supposed unenlightenment or "backwardness", Tee's opinion on the wedding matter is not even sought. She must simply do as her aunt pleases. As a child she is voiceless and she is indeed very disappointed at being disallowed the opportunity to attend the wedding: "I nodded and hung my head, for my eyes were filled with tears of bitter disappointment" (p.113).

Like a doll, June in Jan Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation* is also press-ganged by her parents to do things against her will. It is as if she does not have a mind of her own. For instance, she is coerced by her father Cyprus and mother Lucille to go to Overseer Beardsley's house and raise the spirit of Beardsley's sick daughter, Annie. To the parents, it is like June's opinion on the matter is immaterial: "...You will do as you are told, whatever it is" (p.13). June does not like the idea of visiting Overseer Beardsley's house. However, it is like she has to accede to her intransigent father. Cyrus has the final word as to whether June should or should not go to the Beardsleys, and his word reeks of parental tyranny. It reduces the child June to a mindless toy.

Auntie Beatrice in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, laments over Tee's 'coolie-naturedness'. She wishes she got Tee when the latter was little so that the girl would have been tutored on how to do things the way all 'nice' people's children do. Maybe Tee was bent in the wrong direction and, at twelve years, cannot be unbent. Ironically it is Auntie Beatrice's offspring who seem to have grown bent in the wrong bearing, if at all the allegation that children, like trees, can be bent in the direction one wants. If indeed the way one brings up a child will determine the kind of person the child will become in adulthood is true, then Beatrice's children have been raised improperly. Bernadette, Carol and Jessica are delineated as foul mannered. They are not only disrespectful of their mother but also boorish, discourteous and contemptuous of other relatives like their cousin Tee. They are the epitome of rough-hewn children. These children are always out to mock Tee. Of Jessica and Carol, we are told that:

For all of Auntie Beatrice's efforts Carol and Jessica had no intention whatsoever of letting me (Tee) into their dubious confre'rie. There was no love lost between them, but nothing could unite them like a conspiracy of giggling immediately behind my back. (p.116)

Beatrice and her husband Norman typify parenthood run aground. They have reared their children in a carefree manner to the point that the children are so disdainful of their mother that they would even "kick her in her teeth" (p.120). These children are presented as

very quarrelsome. Tee is horrified by the behaviour of her cousins. Beatrice is even so disheartened, so alienated by her children that she ironically seeks solace from the 'backward' Tee in lieu of her 'progressive' scions. She now desires to protect Tee from the madness she (Beatrice) has generated through shoddy parenthood. Beatrice blames Norman for the riotous nature and mannerlessness of their progeny but Norman does not seem to care. When reproached for not being a responsible father, Norman only nods 'vaguely' (p.120). Having let their children to grow up anyhow, Beatrice and Norman seem unable to re-mould their offspring. The children seem unsalvageable. They are impudent and stubborn. These children rule over their parents. There is total family breakdown to the point that Beatrice is resigned. She even fears that the children will kill her. Grousing about Carol, Bernadette has even the temerity to "hiss" at her mother thus: "I find it is time you started training that little bitch" (p. 119). These children are brusque, all owing to - to use Bernadette's words - lack of proper training. Even when they answer back at their mother, their father remains unconcerned. Norman seems to have given up on them. He now engages in escapist activities *in lieu* of addressing the problem of his children squarely:

Uncle Norman struck me (Tee) as having at some previous date, retreated permanently before Auntie Beatrice's tireless initiative and talkativeness; or before the unbelievable propensity to rioting that engaged the rest of the household. Most of the time he was either absent or unnoticeable. When he was at work at home he spent a great deal of the time outside doing something unspecified to the car. (p.120)

Beatrice and Norman have thus created a bedlam by allowing their children grow up with animal traits; now they fear confronting the problem. These children are therefore employed by Merle Hodge to lash at irresponsible parents who have abdicated parental rights and duties vested in them. It is indeed a parent's onus to direct all his/her children's daily undertakings; and it is a duty of a parent to chastise a child for misdemeanor. Parental authority over the child is a God-given right. Children, certainly, cannot be held solely responsible for the consequences of their actions. It is the adults in-charge of them who ought to be accountable for the conduct of the children:

... Most of the child's characteristics are brought about by the behaviour of parents. It has been plausible to conceptualize the human parent as

the initial agent of culture and the infant or child as the object of acculturation, because the human infant seems so motorically helpless in comparison with the young of other species.

(Bell & Harper: 1977, p.53)

Since a child's behaviour reflects his/her upbringing, parents like Beatrice and Norman may thus be damaged in their social standing by their children's action. From the twelfth to the seventeenth century, leaders of religious reformations, perceiving the child's soul as frail and corruptible, moved to protect the young. These leaders elevated the status of children to a higher level of importance in the public eye and strove to bring about changes in the family in general and the education of children in particular. Among the Greeks, all the greatest law-givers and philosophers devoted significant attention to the training and education of the young. The ideal objective of the training was cultural rather than practical or vocational. The aim of the education was to develop the child's moral character for his future participation in the life of the community (Beck: 1964). The Greeks even created in their households a special position for the *Paidagogus*, a person whose primary role was to protect and oversee the moral environment of the young children. Children among the Greek were treasured not only as a link to the future but as family members just for themselves.

In many ancient cultures, the child was in point of fact perceived as a near empty vessel, an ignorant being who was helpless and incapable of directing his own affairs, who had to be chaperoned in the community by an adult, usually the father, until he or she outgrew his/her child-likeness. The behaviour described as childlike used simply to define an inability to cope with complex social expectations. This deficiency is seen as the consequence of inexperience and absence of *de riguer* understanding. Anyone in that kind of wanting situation, not of necessity a child, would behave in such a 'child-like' way. This would explain why servants in the colonial era such as the househelp in Ferdinand Oyono's *House Boy* were often been treated like children by their colonial masters. As 'child-like' persons, such servants were regarded as people with a great deal of learning to do with regard to 'proper' conduct, especially in the presence of their masters. 'Children' thus in whatever respect *in perpetuum* required a fatherly figure in order to imbibe apt behaviour. Bell and Harper (1977) contend that:

In most societies, the father had great authority over his children, sometimes even absolute authority. There seems to be some correlation between the level of militarism in a given society and the extent of paternal authority. In the gentler and more peaceful cultures of Suma and Egypt, the father's authority

seems to have been leavened by a general desire to promote the well-being of the individual child. Protection of the child against some abuses stands out clearly in Babylonian society in Hammurabi's code.

... The more Warlike Assyrians, Hittites and early Hebrews allowed fathers to exercise almost unlimited control over their offspring. (p.53)

From the foregoing, it is clear that it is the paramount duty of a parent, more so fathers, to guide their children. Norman in *Crick Crack Monkey* is therefore the antithesis of the ideal father for neglecting his responsibility towards his own children. He does not bother to correct his children when they err. Untrammelled free, he lets them run the house as they wish. When he realizes that he has actually created animal-like children through his irresponsible parenthood, Norman buries his head in the sand.

In Jan Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation*, Overseer Beardsley's daughter, Sarah, is the parallel of Norman's children. Sarah too is presented as ill-mannered. She is impudent and conceited. Like Bernadette, Jessica and Carol, Sarah belongs to a privileged socio-economic class. It is as if the better-classed mollycoddle their children. Owing to her superiority complex, Sarah finds it impossible to accommodate persons from a lower socio-economic group and upbringing. Reflective of her sorry parentage, Sarah has learnt to call the non-whites "Coolie" or "nigger". The parents cannot escape blame for Sarah's comportment, since Sarah herself reports that they (parents) continually altercate in their bedroom and she hears them. Sarah comes out as a remarkably boorish and inquisitive child whose best hobby is eavesdropping.

On the other hand, June, a lower-class child, is decorous owing to her strict mother and totalitarian father. June grows up focused on the future even though she holds that she is being dragged onto a certain path not for her own good, but her parents'. June indeed is viewed by her mother as a ladder to prosperity. Lucille is gratified as a parent to be able to provide for June; to be able to take her to the best school in New Amsterdam. With June in a new school, Lucille visualizes a greatly ameliorated future: "From now on June would be a different child, they would be a different family, free people" (p.95). That June is used to propel her family into a better status notwithstanding, she is brought up correctly and wrongly at the same time. By impelling June to mimic Euro-centric accents in speaking English, Lucille is as a matter of fact alienating and maiming her child psychologically. At age twelve, June is cognizant of and embarrassed that her mother spoke English differently.

Even with her flaws, Lucille comes out as a punctilious parent. Although she admonishes June to use proper English subsequent to her (Lucille's) inferiority complex, good English is indeed paramount to June's education.

When June joins the New Amsterdam school, Lucille, as a conscientious parent, advises her to keep boys off. Certainly, because of June's parents' austerity, she grows up right.

Unlike the opinionated upper class children, June, as a child, empathizes with a fellow 'coolie' child, for not having a uniform as good as hers. June even goes to the extent of beseeching her mother to make a new uniform for Lavender, forgetting that this means money. Such a gesture is undoubtedly true of sensitive well-bred children who may demand that their parents even provide for other people's disadvantaged children. June comes out as a concerned child. When Lucille asks June to mind her "own business and leave other people to mind theirs" (p.93). June cannot accept this. June uses her own mother's teachings to argue against the idea of worrying only of her own business. Her mother has also inculcated in her that: "neighbours should help each other, especially in times of trouble" (ibid.).

While good rearing is requisite, Janice Shinebourne uses June's upbringing to lash at despotic parents who may be too overbearing to the point of infringing on their children's rights. When June moves from St. Peter's to New Amsterdam, she is discouraged from playing with other village children and for this, June is lacerated to the point of not playing any more, which may mean not exercising some of her childhood rights. Indeed, stopping June from playing with her village friends is a denial of a fundamental childhood right – the right to leisure and play. Play is essential for the child and children learn through play. By inferiorizing her background and all that she liked associating with, June's parents, more so her mother make June develop an inferiority complex. She even becomes ashamed of her own heritage to the point that she shies from telling her Amsterdam school friend Louise, about her former village school, and about her old friends from St. Peter's, lest Louise deride them. This is the same feeling Beatrice in *Crick Crack, Monkey* arouses in her niece Tee – a feeling of self-hate.

June, thanks to her mother, becomes so sensitive to matters of class differentiation that when she visits Merle Seawars' house and Merle smiles incessantly, June imagines that Merle finds her funny: "Merle kept on smiling and it began to get on June's nerves; it seemed that rich people did not have to try very hard to find country people funny" (p.118). Merle notes that June has an inferiority complex and tells June but the latter maintains that the wealthy revel in ridiculing the poor. In the process of pounding out the devil and bending the rod the right way, Lucille has actually cast in Satan and folded the fish the wrong way. Lucille has injured June's psyche and total outlook of life; thus maimed June's general growth and perception of the world. The position of the child in the family is seen as precarious. While the youngster would grow up bending towards the parents' disposition, Merle Hodge notes that this choice may not always be the correct one.

Merle Searwars typifies the upper class children who have been reared aptly. Because of this, Merle is respectful of all human beings, their status notwithstanding. Merle's mother is depicted as an astute and enlightened parent. She perceives racial misunderstanding in the society as an outcome of dire ignorance. She sees education as the antidote to the racial problems. With education, people of different races would be able to respect each other's humanity and culture.

In spite of being effective as a parent her superciliousness disregarding, Lucille is delineated as a brainwashed woman. She epitomizes parents who are ashamed of their heritage and infect their children with this feeling of shame. Lucille is so sensitive about class matters that she gets annoyed on learning that June is still a soul-mate of, Ralph Brijlall, a former schoolmate. Lucille even goes ahead to accuse June, a mere child, of setting her heart on marrying Ralph (another child), a Coolie. According to Lucille, Coolies are good-for-nothing people because:

they drink rum, they just eat and drink rum in their spare time, and beat their wives, and fight ... Their wives cook from three O'clock in the morning to late at night! ... Coolie women have to carry all the burdens for the men, the burden of the sick, the old, the children, burying the dead, and get no thanks for it, only licks! And the women beat their daughters and treat them worse than the men treat them! *Coolies* pick up cow dung with *their* hands, bring up children with lice in their hair and feed up the lice with coconut oil. (p.128)

While Lucille sheds light on an aspect of child abuse among the Coolies, where daughters are maltreated by their mothers as if to make reprisal for what the mothers themselves undergo from their husbands (or in the spirit of bending them good for their future husbands), Lucille comes out as grossly alienated. Lucille loathes her own background to the extent of calling herself not a West Indian or simply Indian but a British who would wish to have nothing to do with savages (Coolies). However, in the bitter exchange of words with her mother that ensues, June is presented as judicious and informed child who has outgrown the supposed childhood unintelligence. June may also be used to challenge the contention that children are vacuous vessels who will only bespeak the qualities of what is filled in them. June understands that Indian people are not poor due to their own fault but owing to some injustice they experienced in the past.

Just like Lucille de-moulds June by making her acquire an inferiority complex, so does Beatrice de-mould Tee. Tee too develops an inferiority complex and begins to loathe her own heritage. Tee mutates and begins to detest what she used to adore. For instance, she begins to consider the carnival, a cultural event she always looked forward to as *niggery* (p.123-125). Tee is even ashamed of having attended carnivals in the past. In this episode, we see Tee getting alienated to the point of execrating her own background. Tee is even chagrined that her deceased mother was a market woman. She is ill at ease that her cousins Bernadette, Carol and Jessica may come to get wind of this fact and despise her the more.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, children in the family are voiceless. Parents take children for granted and force their wishes on the children. Just as Lucille presupposes that June would love going to the Beardsleys' to keep the infirm child, Annie, company on Easter vacation, Auntie Beatrice presumes that Tee would go with them to Canapo where they (the Normans) rented a beach house. The child's opinion on this issue of going to the beach is not sought. It is as though the child's sentiments are irrelevant. In Canapo, we expect togetherness to be exhibited among the family members but ironically it is here that we see aloofness in the family at its peak. Due to poor upbringing, Beatrice's own children neglect her, leaving her forlorn. Being only interested in themselves, the children go against the very purpose of the vacation trip: to bring togetherness in the family. Ironically, it is only Tee, the so-called *undeveloped*, who stays around and provides Beatrice company.

Although Beatrice is ashamed of Tee's *low-grade* upbringing and *backward* mannerisms, she is appreciative of Tee. Tee is Beatrice's only consolation when her children neglect her. Indeed, children should be a source of succour to their parents. Beatrice's children were left to grow with Beelzebub in them and now they cannot be remodeled. But according to Beatrice, the problem with her children is that they have refused to be children. In a monologue directed to her children, Beatrice laments:

Some children think they are too grown up; some children think they fell out of the sky, ... some children think they have no use whatsoever for anybody but themselves; but never mind, they soon find that they are not needed either. Here (referring to Tee) is a child who knows what it is like to be a child.
(p.122)

In Canapo, Bernadette intrepidly yells at her mother and refuses to convey Beatrice's dinner invitation to her (Bernadette's) friends and the Da Silvas; thus messing up her mother's dinner plans. Her excuse for not delivering the invitation is the lamest and most preposterous – that she had planned to go elsewhere at dinnertime and that communicating the invitation would

have meant also availing herself during dinner. This is a manifestation of woeful scantiness of deference by June for her parent. The obstreperous children hence make the vacation at Canapo a complete fiasco.

Beatrice is disillusioned with her family. She expected to have a harmonious, happy family. Having experienced the unpleasant side of broken families since she was brought up in one, Beatrice dreamt of her family coming back together after the mother and father separated and the children had to live in different places. Her family, however, never reunited. Then Beatrice dreamt of her own marital house as harmonized but now that she has her own family, she is very disillusioned: "Spend my life teaching my children to be decent, teaching them what is important, and they forget who it is that got them where they are" (p.133). Beelzebub has refused to be pounded out of her progeny. Ironically, Auntie Beatrice is only obsessed with re-moulding Tee to fit into her (Beatrice's) social class. She is so consumed with superiority that she is concerned not about the salient but peripheral, insignificant matters. Maybe she harped the same to her children hence nurturing ill-mannered superiorized children. Complaining about Tee, Beatrice also views her as a vessel crammed with the wrong component and cannot be unfilled since the mildewed substance has become her lifeblood:

Nobody can say I haven't tried, God is my witness I have tried,
But what can you do, what? Who can undo the work of the devil?
And what have I got for my trouble, what? If it wasn't my own
flesh and blood so help me Almighty I would give up. Huh! My
own flesh and blood! Who would think so? Anybody who didn't
know would say it was some family with no kind of background.
Nobody would believe there was good blood. But give the sons of
Kings to pigs and they will turn into pigs. Ah, yes! (p.150)

However, Beatrice cannot derive any comfort and bliss from her *devil-less* children. She only gets stress, anguish and grief. Ironically, it is the *uncultured* child Tee who becomes Beatrice's source of happiness: "She said what a good girl I was and it was God's will after all that my poor mother should die, all things were for the best, for now she had a comfort" (p.133-134).

In Ian McDonald's *The Humming Bird Tree*, even though Alan is displeased with his mother's objection to his 'over-fraternization' with Indians, he eventually, as a result of incessant indoctrination, subconsciously accepts that his Indian pals Kaiser and Jaillin belong to a separate compartment. He has an aversion to the whole idea of compartmentalizing friendship but then he seems to believe that certain things cannot be changed because his

parents, these people that one should respect, view them otherwise. In his blind reverence, Alan seems to ingest some of his parents' poison without questioning.

The socialization of the child certainly determines what kind of a person the child would be. Due to their socialization, Kaiser and Jaillin seem to know more, even about the adult world than Alan. Despite their age, Kaiser and Jaillin seem to be so experienced that Alan feels younger than both of them when they begin to talk about the adult world which Alan has no inkling of as yet. Alan also acknowledges that socialization and circumstances may have forced Kaiser and Jaillin to rush over their childhood:

The truth is that they had been living in a world where they had been forced to fend for themselves like any other man or woman in their village from an age when I was hardly rid of my long, girlish and golden curls and had to look after me, when my mother wasn't there, a nurse continually at my beck and call and eagle-eyed for mischief. As a result, I hadn't lost much of my childhood's innocence while they in their compulsory hard life had lost it long ago. There was something in them which was not childish; I saw that often and could not understand. (p.21)

Alan is even mesmerized when one time Kaiser, almost soaking in tears tells him that his father's cow had died the night before. Alan wonders why Kaiser has to worry about his father's cow. Being so innocently naïve because of his background and class, Alan cannot understand why Kaiser should worry over how the dead cow will be replaced. To Alan, how to replace the dead cow should be Kaiser's father's headache, not Kaiser's:

What concern was it of his if his father's cow died and he had to buy another one. None that I could see. I did not trouble myself over what my father bought or did not buy in our household. When we had a new car it was an excitement; for all I knew it might have cost a million dollars. I hadn't the least idea what borrowing might imply in an Indian peasant family, a heavy drain on the trickle of income, a social stigma. (p.22)

Alan does not fathom Kaiser's disquietude not because he (Alan) belongs to a bourgeoisie class with little financial problems if any but because he has not been socialized into

understanding how “the other” side lived. This lack of knowledge is a question of socialization, not class. A child would grow up to be what the adults want him to be. Milner (1975) asserts:

Attitudes, unlike the stars of the stage and screen are made rather than born. Social attitudes do not unfold from germ plasm or inhere in particular generic configurations; they are not innate, nor do they enter human tissue for transmission to future generations ... They arise, are communicated and are sustained in the social life of man. (p.350)

This is clearly seen in McDonald’s *The Humming Bird Tree* where the rebellious Alan finds himself toeing the line without duress owing to grueling indoctrination effected in him since early childhood; indoctrination that doesn’t seem to go. In *The Humming Bird Tree*, children of peasants reflect their parents’ frustrations. Such children are used by adults in the latter’s egoistic pursuits to the point the children would even appear fiendish whereas wickedness can never be an aspect of child-likeness. For example, Ramlal entices children with sweets so that they can pelt at a thievish dog with stones. Children are thus influenced by baits of niceties to engage in barbarous ventures like adults.

Children in are therefore presented as vulnerable to the parents or parental figures, physically, psychologically and emotionally. They can easily be swayed. At the same time, shown the right path, they can grow up to be epitomes of extraordinary moral strength. While all children may be vulnerable to their parents, the girl child is reflected as more defenseless even against the male siblings. The girl child’s position in the family is thus a perilous one. This is seen in *The Humming Bird Tree* where Jaillin is actually towered above and kept under her brother’s thumb. When Kaiser teases his sister for marveling at her own feet and Jaillin gets piqued, beats at him with clenched fists and threatens to report him to their father, Kaiser retorts: “If you tell tale I going beat you’ little backside fo’ you like it was a donkey I beating!” (p.76).

We have noted in this section that children are generally vulnerable to their parents. They can be abused physically; they can be manipulated psychologically and emotionally and thus made or broken by their parental figures. We noted that parents influence their children’s psyche so that they may follow into the paths they have envisaged for them. These paths may not be what the child would opt for in their *empty* or non-indoctrinated self (if there can be such existence) but may tag along just because their sub-conscious mind has been incited. Indeed, the foundations for the child are laid by the parents. The way parents explain things to their children determines the latter’s construction of their world and reality. Because of a

child's lack of ready access to non-social sources of information, the child is peculiarly vulnerable to those social sources appearing and reappearing in the immediate environment. In this case, parents and older siblings find themselves in positions of great power on the child. In our next sub-topic, we look at bad modeling by parental figures and how this impacts on the prejudices that a child acquires.

"But mama says...": Models and the Acquisition of Biases

Goodman (1964) avers that both strengths and blights in grown-ups are acquired in childhood, more so, through the child's models: "They give him the pushes or pulls which most importantly affect his total personality" (p.207). The child learns more from the people who are dominant figures in his world. Usually, these people are either his parents or siblings; the people in whose company he spends more time. With these people, the child has more opportunities to observe their ways and listen to what they say. Goodman maintains that children "usually admire and want to be like their elders and hence soak up the ways of these elders, without much inclination to pick and choose" (p.142). In case of any conflicting views and inconsistencies in the prime models, children soak up and absorb the same.

Concurring with Goodman, Allport (1954) alleges that children imitate their parents' attitude because they identify with their parents or want to please them. The child thus becomes just a stream that follows the current. Park (1950) affirms that: "a man without prejudices is a man without conviction, and ultimately without character" (p.230). He contends that certain prejudices are acquired and that such prejudices include racial or class antipathies and reserves:

Race consciousness ... is ... an acquired trait, quite as much as the taste for olives or the mania for collecting stamps. Children do not have it. They take the world of human beings in which they find themselves as part of the order of nature and respond to a black or yellow face as readily as they do to a white, depending upon the character and intimacy of the association. (p.237)

The child at first has no reserves. He does not have the foggiest idea about pride or even humility. A child is also devoid of other excitements and afflictions of self-consciousness. The child thus acquires such consciousness through association with the models, that is, through adult influence. Indeed, manifestations of class and racial consciousness or what we generally call group consciousness do not appear in children until shortly after the age of

puberty. This explains why the Caribbean authors we studied focus on this age of early adolescence since it is the age of *awareness*, the age of questioning. The questioning and awareness exhibited veritably tells us the kind of socialization the children underwent. Parents as prime models can therefore socialize the child to have positive attitude towards other human beings any differences disregarding, or can make a child loathe another group for no good reason. This is presented by the Caribbean authors as a form of psychological abuse.

In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* for instance, Antoinette is a tortured woman psychologically partly owing to the biases she acquired in her childhood. Antoinette's mother, Annette, had a condescending attitude towards black people. One instance that demonstrates this kind of reservation is when Antoinette speculates why their black servants, Christophine, Godfrey and Sass, chose to remain in servitude even after the emancipation act was passed. Annette thinks it is:

because they wanted somewhere to sleep and somewhere to eat. That boy Sass! When his mother pranced off and left him here – a great *she* cared – why he was a little skeleton ... Godfrey is a rascal ... doesn't do a thing but eats enough for a couple of horses. Pretends he's deaf – he doesn't want to hear what a devil he is! (p.4)

Antoinette's mother seems to have no regard for her servants. She actually perceives them either as apparatus or savage beasts of burden. This attitude is not surprising. Annette was even given one of the servants (Christophine) by her parents as a wedding present. To Annette, the black-skinned only deserve to be chattels, properties of the 'better' race.

Antoinette too unconsciously becomes affected by the racial prejudices of her models to the extent of calling Tia, her black friend, a "cheating nigger" (p.5) for not keeping her promise about paying her three pence if Antoinette summersaulted under water. Antoinette proudly tells Tia that she can get more money if she wanted because her family is rich. But Tia, another child who may have been 'pounded' with racial jaundice, parries Antoinette's snobbery patronizingly. Tia tells Antoinette that she has heard that the latter's family was not affluent as Antoinette's claims but as "poor like beggar" (p.5).

Tia purports that:

We ate salt fish – no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money

... Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and, black nigger better than white nigger. (p.6)

When at the pool, Tia takes Antoinette's dress without the latter's consent and Antoinette is forced to put on Tia's dress, Antoinette's mother's wanton dogmatism is even more vivid. When Annette sees her daughter in a black child's garb, she enjoins her servant Christophine to "throw away that thing. Burn it" (p.6).

Antoinette's stepfather Mason is no different from Annette. Mason has a wrong attitude about blacks. To him, black people are intellectually "children" (p.12). Although this appears complimentary at the superficial level in that, like children, blacks "wouldn't hurt a fly" (p.12), at a deeper level it implies that persons of black skin are too indolent to be dangerous; can be tossed around at will; they are virtually harmless. Just like children, blacks are vulnerable to oppression and subjugation by other races.

The racial animosity pervading this society harrows Antoinette psychologically so that she even dreams that she is being pursued by somebody who hates her. She wakes up crying and tries to reassure herself that she can always hide at the corner of the bedroom door or under the tree of life in the garden; behind the wall green with moss, behind the barriers of the cliffs and the high mountain or on the other side of the sea. Moments later, Antoinette decides to go for a walk as a way of escape from this psychological distress. Indeed she considers any bad eventuality that may be engendered by the stroll as better than the racial hatred:

I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think it's better than people. Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin – once I saw a snake. All better than people. Better. Better, better than people. (p.8)

While Antoinette tries to overcome the chauvinism inculcated in her, her black friend does not facilitate this process but only aggravates an already bad situation. When daunted by the racism in Coulibri, Antoinette runs into Tia's arms for consolation, Tia, who has been modeled into a racist, rejects her, hurls a stone at her and Antoinette is hurt. These two children in point of fact would wish to remain close friends but the innate jaundiced eyes always seem to affect their relationship. Tia regrets her action almost immediately after hurting her friend. She even cries. Undeniably, while racial animosity is not child-like, children

cannot escape from the modeling that their parents and older siblings have to offer and whatever type of 'designing' they experience; it impacts on them for the rest of their lives.

Just like Tia and Antoinette, Kaiser and Alan's relationship in *The Humming Bird Tree* is riddled with gross class and racial apprehension owing to the socialization of the children. As much as Alan desires candid friendship with Kaiser, the latter sometimes derides the friendship. For example when Jaillin says that she would be ready to give a portion of the shilling she earned for that day's work to Alan to purchase a 'sweety'; Kaiser calls Jaillin mad and stupid and laughs at this suggestion. He argues that Alan has so much money of his own that he would guffaw at the promise of some pence. This remark from Kaiser hurts Alan who, despite getting five dollars pocket money every week and hardly knew what to do with it all, would have accepted Jaillin's gesture in good faith. Alan notes that there is a barrier between him and Kaiser; a class barricade now that he has overcome the racial bar. Alan knows that this impediment is derived from something deeply ingrained in Kaiser's psyche: "there was a barrier between us not to be broken by the equivalent of childhood and its games" (p.23).

Kaiser has been modeled into a profoundly class and race-conscious child. When Alan is opposed to the killing of birds (Kaiser's hobby), the self-apprehensive child, Kaiser, takes this disapproval as white people's disparagement of lowly people's ways of doing things. Just as Tia would refer to Antoinette as a "white cockroach" in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, so does Kaiser sometimes use the same appellation to refer to Alan. Although Kaiser sees no hindrance in befriending Alan, he is very aware of his status and colour to accept Alan as a friend. He tells Alan: "You is right you know, boy, but you is white" (p.10).

Kaiser is so self-conscious that he keeps on getting the wrong idea about his friend Alan on several occasions. When after the cock fight Jaillin raises her skirt to mop her face with it and exposes her body, Kaiser accuses her of showing off her body to Alan whereas such an action would only repulse Alan like the smell of a rotten fish. When Alan denies that he would express detestation at Jaillin's body or chaff other people's culture, Kaiser in his over-self-apprehension insists that Alan is not earnest:

You think I don' hear what you' custom saying all the time? They not nice to play wid. They vulgar. Everything we do that is the word: all we vulgar. I bet you think cockfight vulgar. I bet you think Ramlal parlour vulgar. I bet you think we is vulgar. That is the word, eh? Why you come 'round' here at all, if you see everything vulgar. (p.94)

Kaiser comes out as over-conscious. This makes him almost cynical and distrustful of whites. This kind of attitude also makes him rather belligerent and churlish for his age. Kaiser is

confrontational to the extent that crossing swords does not give him a fright. Indeed, he believes in fighting to assert his authority over other children. His cynicism and sadistic character may be a progeny of his parents' character. Alan's father alleges that Kaiser's father "doesn't have a tender hand with his wife or with cows" (p.97). Mr. Holmes thus "expects the children get buffeted about a good bit too" (p.97). Kaiser, thus, is a reflection of the kind of tutelage he undergoes consciously or unconsciously, in his home. On aggressiveness in children Milner (1975) believes that:

Observation of aggressive models ... increases the probability that the observers will behave in an aggressive manner if the model is rewarded, or at least does not receive punishment for aggressive behaviour ... There is every reason that verbal behaviour is also accessible to imitation in the same way. (pp. 37-43)

As a result of his upbringing, Kaiser is overly aware of his skin colour so that when his sister Jaillin falls in love with Alan, Kaiser is very quick to call to mind that among other things, the duo's skin pigmentation is at variance. By implication, Kaiser is dissuading Alan and Jaillin from getting involved in a serious relationship.

Children in the Caribbean society reflected in *The Humming Bird Tree* have been socialized to be cognizant of their race and rank. This bad moulding even makes two Indian boys sneer at Kaiser when they see him walking with Alan. The boys accuse Kaiser of thinking he is a big shot to walk so valorously with a white person. These boys even cast racial remarks at Alan and threaten to stone him. However, Alan, the liberal child, the epitome of a bona fide child, does not understand how racism works: "I was puzzled and hurt that boys I didn't know from Adam seemed to dislike me so intensely, for no reason that I could see" (p.26). The two boys reflect the indoctrination that has been effected in them, making them barbarous children. Such children delight in fighting. These boys have become misanthropic to the point of becoming criminals. We are told that they even rape fellow children. However, the author uses the boys to show that wretchedness begets more adversity and exasperation.

At the cockfight rendezvous in the Indian village, Alan again confronts racial animosity from Indian boys who had been socialized in ethnic vainglory. Wondering aloud, one boy asks Kaiser: "What you bring dat dirty whiteman... here fo' at all?" (p.85). The children had to perch on tree branches in order to get a good view of the cockfight game. Alan is clumsy at tree climbing and because of this fact, the Indian children make fun of him. In laughing, the Indian children forget their grievance of being hounded off a tree branch by Kaiser in order to give room to him, Alan and Jaillin. Indeed, children by nature do not hold grudges. Hence,

they can only be influenced to keep hard feelings towards each other for a protracted period of time. Children forget until the adult prejudices ingrained in them re-surface.

Alan comes out as an accommodating child due to his upbringing. Alan's father is quite easy to get along with. He allows Kaiser, a non-white, to ride in his car. An agricultural supervisor of estates, Mr. Holmes is very understanding at his work place. He is quite popular among his subjects because of his altruistic attributes. He even receives presents from villagers at every estate on account of his magnanimity. Mr. Holmes fought for the workers' rights such as the right to a pension scheme. He was therefore esteemed by all Indians. Alan's father is delineated as a changing white who is shedding off his superiority complex. He is particularly considerate of his underlings' woes to the extent of loaning Kaiser's father money to purchase another cow when the family cow dies. He charges no interest for the loan and sets no time limit for repayment. Kaiser confesses: "I don't know another white person who would ha' do that same thing for we poor Indian people" (p.22).

Because Alan's father is such a tolerant and kind person, we understand why Alan, unlike other white children, is not predisposed to respond uncharitably towards people from a different group simply because of their ethnic affiliations. On acquisition of prejudices, Allport (1954, p.18) states that: "Personal values are often determined by affiliation; people like their ingroup and dislike outgroups". Indeed, children learn to evaluate groups the way their parents do either by direct training or by observing and imitating their parents' verbal and non-verbal behaviour. From the foregoing, Alan's friendship to Jaillin is therefore not surprising. He has learnt from his father's actions not to be discriminative. Alan's happiest moments are when he is playing tic-tac-toe at the river, netting dragon flies, singing rhyme on the great rock 'Mr. Big Nose' – with Kaiser and Jaillin. He loses his heart to Jaillin. He is so enamoured that he prays "every night to God with terrible insistence that I should marry Jaillin when I grew up to be a man" (p.20).

His benevolent character and optimism for a world devoid of prejudice notwithstanding, Alan cannot break free from the speck of bigotry inherent in his father and overflowing in his mother. Albeit Alan's father is benign towards people of the so-called inferior races, he still believes in white superiority. For instance, he would not invite non-white overseers to a cocktail reception for business friends. Just like Alan's mother, Mr. Holmes was uncomfortable with the changes taking place, where government House Balls included non-whites and where the Pitch walk around the Queen's Park Savana, initially a whites' only area, is now used by everyone. Deep down, Alan's father is also a white chauvinist. When he gets wind of the fact that Alan and Jaillin attended church together, Mr. Holmes, for the first time getting disquieted that his son was becoming over-involved with a non-white, forbids Alan from playing with Kaiser and Jaillin "so much" (p. 128). Indeed, in this novel, Alan is forced to

embrace his parents' biases. Mr. Holmes regards Alan's over-involvement with non-whites as lack of respect for oneself.

If Alan's father is conservative, Alan's mother is both diehard and opinionated. Unlike her husband, Mrs. Holmes has no respect towards other races. When we meet her for the first time, she is bubbling with racial bigotry. She is appalled that her child has been playing with 'inferiors' instead of playing with her 'equals' like Tony Lee and Tanner: "She always said ... I must play with them, my proper friends and not Kaiser who was a boy from the village and our yard boy" (p.33). When Kaiser and Jaillin engage in games to an extent of reporting late for their afternoon work, they are denied food. Alan is given lunch while Kaiser and Jaillin are allotted chores right away. One wonders whether Kaiser and Jaillin do not need to take nourishment before resuming their onerous assignments. Alan's mother is also totally opposed to her son visiting the villages lest he "become a little Indian boy" (p.36). Mrs. Holmes does not cease to prejudice her child against his Indian friends. Admonishing Alan against befriending non-whites in fear that the latter may influence him with their 'ill-manners', Alan's mother retorts:

I have warned you about going around with Kaiser playing with them sometimes ... But you mustn't treat them as everyday friends. Do you ever see Alice or the Washerwoman playing cards with us Son? ...Kaiser and Jaillin can't help how they behave, dear, they haven't been brought...Remember they are different from you. (p.98)

This is a mother poisoning a child's mind against other children. Prejudiced attitudes are indeed often accompanied by or lead to stereotyping. Stereotyping entails exaggerating the peculiarity of a group of people, thus distinguishing it from others:

The entire group is tarred with the same brush, obscuring individual differences. The process is made easier where there are visible physical differences between groups; these can be convincingly depicted as a signifying other, more profound differences, hence a 'reason' for differential treatment. (Milner: 1975, p.9)

It is these physical differences that Alan's mother keeps on alluding to in her attempts to dissuade her son from fraternizing with persons of other races. Despite Alan's efforts to run away from the poison of his mother's racial bigotry, he cannot fully escape. Traces of this contamination still lurk in his subconscious mind. Occasionally they rise to his conscious mind and affect his relationship with his Indian friends. Indeed, the way a child is brought up will determine the kind of adult he will become. Alan has been fighting to break the barrier that

hinders friendliness between him and Kaiser and Jaillin. At first the deterrent seemed to emanate from the self-apprehensive Kaiser. However, there are also obstacles on Alan's part as a white person; barricades that he is always reminded of by his mother. The venom of bigotry inherent in Alan is revealed when Alan sometimes gets muddled and concurs with his mother that truly, Jaillin's and Kaiser's friendship belongs to a different compartment from that which the white friends belong. Alan falls prey to his parents' psychological mangling and he even comes to espouse the idea that the Indian children should not attend his party. Alan is ashamed of allowing his Indian soul mates into his reception yet he cannot qualify the abashment:

I sensed that their presence would bring much embarrassment; I was always shy of them meeting my other friends. But I had asked if they might come, and defended them, to ease an emotion which pressed me to accept them with the whole heart, with no compelled reservations. I did not know my mind very well. So I pretended to be – in a confused; impure way, I suppose, really was – hurt by mother's uncompromising refusal. Kaiser and Jaillin, I decided were dear friends, but friends whom I must keep in a separate compartment of my life because of a necessity which I did not fully comprehend, which I did not like at all, but which I much respected since it seemed so securely a part of the attitude towards life of almost everyone that mattered and in particular my mother and father. (p.36-37)

Alan hence succumbs to racial dogmatism in order to identify with his models and his group. The poison of ethnic intolerance surges again in Alan when Kaiser calls him a "white coolie" because unlike majority of white people, Alan has never seen snow nor been in any place where it snows. Alan's traces of racial and class haughtiness reverberate in his annoyance at being proclaimed a Coolie. When later on Alan tries to impress himself to Kaiser and Jaillin by purporting that he is related to some mythical Italian Prince and Kaiser voices his suspicions – that maybe Alan has also some Indian blood running in him, Alan gets temperamental:

The suggestion stunned me for a second. I never thought at all before I spoke. It cracked out of my reddened face. `What! Don't be mad! I'm white, don't you see that?... (p.112)

Alan loses his head at being called Indian. His chest is laid bare. His prejudices are unearthed. Having presented himself all along as an open-minded human being, Alan is caught unawares.

He too, like Kaiser, has some taints of racial predisposition, which hamper him from being a true friend to Kaiser and Jaillin.

Jaillin is agitated that Alan should be ashamed to have Indian blood whereas he has been behaving as a veritable comrade who did not believe in racial supremacy. Jaillin thus asks: "Why would you be so shame to have Indian blood mix in you?" (p.113) Alan alleges that his reaction just happened: "It just came out" (p.113). This proves that his anti-classism and anti-racism notwithstanding, a superiority complex instilled by his parents is still latent in Alan. Alan is discomfited by his own demonstration of prejudice. He considers the chauvinism a concomitant of the indoctrination he has gone through since birth. He may deny being bigoted but having been inculcated in him since he was a baby, Alan may not elude this latent racial opinionatedness. Alan is embittered and crest-fallen by this truth:

It was true that it had just come out. I hadn't meant to hurt them, but I could see now that it must have been cruel. The blood rose in my face. If anybody showed such disgust at the mention of white blood in them! All of a sudden, I saw our position more clearly than I had ever seen it. The force called prejudice had spilled in front of my eyes. What was I to think? It had come out of me naturally as a sneeze so I knew that it was not something I could easily get control of by conscious thought. A proper opinion about certain things had engrained like religion. I felt now a little of the power that was wrenching our friendship. I would have to keep that automatic feeling hidden until I could conquer it. (p.113)

Alan gets confused. Subduing the engrained propensity may look like the answer to maintaining friendship with non-whites but Alan is worried that if he does succeed in conquering these leanings, he would on the other hand betray and incense his parents and his ethnic group – white. He is thus left between the devil and the deep blue sea: "Society was closing around me with its masks, distinctions, special instincts and cunning" (p.113). Hence, Alan is a victim, a prisoner of his parents' and society's prepossessions. He realizes that breaking from the shackles of the innate biases would require prodigious force and more hands, more minds that share the same convictions as him. He feels helpless and succumbs to the easy way out – pleasing his folk.

When Alan's parents exhibit crude racism by firing Kaiser and Jaillin for no crime other than being found playing with their child. Although Alan is initially riled by the dismissal of his friends, he too comes to agree with his parents that Kaiser and Jaillin belonged to a different culture, race and class and so it may just be as well that they had to part ways. Whereas earlier on Alan had admired Jaillin's body, he comes to perceive Jaillin's skin

pigmentation as some kind of defect. Alan's parents' incessant admonitions and reminders of race and class differences have actually impacted heavily on Alan's psychology such that he cannot contemplate befriending non-whites again. He becomes enveloped with bigotry and changes friends in order to live according to fellow white people's prejudices:

I drew apart from the world of brown faces. I disengaged myself from the village and all to do with it. I entered the white colonial world which from birth I had belonged to but from which I had walked away for a time ... I began to like dancing fairly well, went more and more to parties in private homes where petite gigglers with gold hair attracted my growing and definable boyish lust. Sometimes eating a red-belled pomerack I remembered an old view of the village, but that was very seldom. Kaiser and Jaillin from time to time emerged from the past, now as romantic figures, now as comic, but in any case as lost as the gnomish story books I used to read as a child ... (p.147-148)

Alan thus changes owing to his parents' influences and insistence and he too becomes colonial-minded like his group.

Alan's great-aunt Ida is also an epitome of bigotry and racial pride. She is very sensitive to anything that may besmirch the reputation of whites as '*superiors*'. She is thus saddened by the worldly changes where other races are considering themselves good enough, and where other races are now allowed to organize their own carnivals (Initially a whites' preserve). She is suffering from wounded white pride. She cries, is enveloped with helplessness, pity and nostalgia (p.161). This woman had also greatly influenced Alan at a moment in time by reminding him to defend the old ways. Such influence is one of the reasons why Alan was impelled to reject Kaiser and Jaillin and enter into the inheritance he was born.

In this section, we have seen that adult models are a major impediment in the fight for a 'colour-less', class-less world. Nourished on prejudicial lies, such adults have become inflexible and would wish to instill such intransigence in their progeny. In the meantime, children continue to remain victims; vessels for the perpetuation of adult narrow-mindedness. In the next section, we examine the commodification of children and how it impacts on the child.

My Car, My House, My Child: Child Commodification and its Concomitants

The fact that in bearing children mothers have endured uncomfortable pregnancy and painful birth would ... go some way to make children 'theirs' rather than someone else's. (Wringe: 1981, p.101)

If children belong to their mothers biologically and since wives have always been seen as their husbands' chattels, then it follows that children also ultimately belong to the father.

Discussing the legal position of the child, Berger (1971) points to the common assumption even in law that children were the possessions of those who brought them forth. Berger notes that various Acts such as the Education Acts and the Children's Acts of Great Britain, while providing protection for children against exploitation, have done nothing to enhance the status of children as persons in their own right. Rather, children are seen in all these Acts as appendages of their parents. Certainly, children have for a long time been viewed as the property of someone, either the parents or the state. This kind of mentality is distinctly evinced in the Caribbean novels studied and accounts for the way children are typically treated by adults all over the world.

In Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando*, Francis is bundled to Mayaro to earn a living for his mother and siblings. Francis is sent to San Fernando without his acquiescence. News of Francis's departure is relayed in a very awkward manner: "Francis going to live in San Fernando" (p.3). This is peremptory. The mother has heretofore come to a decision without consulting Francis first. Asking him later is only a formality. Francis himself is astounded when he receives this news. He is also acutely disheartened. He feels that his life is being disrupted and it is like he cannot stop it: "I suddenly remembered school and how I would not be going back and became alarmed" (p.6).

However, Francis is a perceptive child who comprehends that his relocation to San Fernando has to do with his family's destitution. He has to work in order to subsidize his family: "I thought of our own poverty and my mother sending me here because she could hardly feed us all" (p.46). The fact that his mother was left with four starving children to raise upon her husband's demise should not be Francis's disquietude but his mother's, the extended family and the State. Francis himself should be the mother's and government's burden and not vice-versa. The view that children have been regarded as property and not people receives abutment from the fact that children have frequently been put to work by parents. After being forced to labour at a tender age, the children's remuneration is awarded to the parents. The case of numerous child house-helpers in Kenya and elsewhere is a good example. Many of the child servants are not paid directly. Rather, their emoluments are given to their parents for the upkeep of both the parent and the child's siblings.

Arguing that parents have been accorded excessive rights over their children, Hart (1955) and Sockett in Bridges & Scimscrew (1975) note that a parent has the right to the domestic services of his children who are living with him or are under eighteen but capable of rendering such services. Such authority has been abused when 'domestic services' has been twisted to entail contributing to the family kitty.

Children such as Francis however are used by the authors to bear out the bleakness of various facets of their society. Francis is forced to work because his mother cannot sustain her four children owing to her poor pay. Francis's mother is poorly remunerated for a donkey's work. She washes, starches, irons, sweeps up the big house, runs errands; all for a pittance. Francis notes that his mother actually slaved for a beggarly package. Francis thus agrees to be propertized lest his mother die from working her fingers to the bone just in order to keep the children from starving:

People could not help seeing how ma slaved. They said she would run her blood into water. Hearing this so often I seriously feared it would happen. I always thought, if it could happen, would it happen one of these days? I looked at Ma now and she gazed back anxiously, hungry for the word, I said Yes ... (p.5)

In San Fernando, Francis is also used as a chattel. Although about his daily routine, Francis talks of having much to do that the day would pass quickly, and that time was full (p.25), this smacks of gross slavery. Because of the meagre pay from the Chandles, Francis is even compelled to cheat. For instance, he would lie about the prices of goods he was sent to purchase and the difference between the real price and the phoney price he would buy anything he liked.

Francis is rarely happy at the Chandles. He feels alienated, uprooted from home: "My longing for home was a great pain in my heart" (p.32).

In Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*, Tee and Toddan whose mother had died are also treated by their relatives as some kind of assets that can be tossed from hand to hand. Like puppetry marionettes, they have taken the direction of the swing without raising a voice. Tantie and Beatrice bitterly contest for guardianship of these two children. In the process they forget that these children too have minds of their own; have feelings. When Beatrice threatens to take them from Tantie's, she has no consideration for their feelings: "We will take the children" (p.8). Tee is alarmed, wondering why they should be flung from relative to relative as if they were some insensate pieces of wood. The flinging really confuses Tee. She gets psychologically lacerated to the point of wishing the aunts vanished suddenly. Maybe then, the tossing and scramble would stop.

Tee and Toddan are propelled into adult wrangles whose essence they cannot fathom. When Beatrice comes and takes the two children for a drive in Tantie's absence, Tantie is outraged that the children accepted to go for a ride with "The Bitch". In her anger, Tantie even beats Tee with a dishcloth. These children are affected by the way they are treated like some property. They are also swayed by the adult prejudices they are forced to imbibe but whose roots they are not told. Children are thus presented as vulnerable to their parents and

relatives. Owing to the mentality that children are possessions, Tee and Toddan form the basis of a tussle and war of words between Beatrice and Tantie. The psychological effects on the children, of such tussle, can be quite adverse.

When Tee and Toddan are moved to Auntie Beatrice's, like Francis in *The Year in San Fernando* or June's forced visit to the Beardsleys' in *The Last English Plantation*, their approval does not matter. Their opinion is not taken into account. It is as though they are the belongings of these adults. Within no time, Tee (Cynthia) and Toddan (Codrington) are again flipped back to Tantie like mindless appliances. Here children are seen as victims who are simply used as pawns. However, the children are happy to be back at Miss Rosa's (Tantie's).

In *The Last English Plantation*, Lucille is so immersed in her hopes which only seem possible through June that she thrusts these hopes down the child's throat. These hopes and aspirations contribute to her being over-austere with June; treating her like some kind of ladder to the good life; a commodity of optimism. June is to join New Amsterdam school like the children of the overseers because that would not only elevate her parents' status in the community, but she would also be able to obtain good education. According to Lucille, education is the key to happiness. If June did well, she could be anything she wanted – doctor, lawyer or teacher. Lucille insists that June should attend a good school because it is only that way that she would be able to raise their standard of living. But then, June was happy at the New Dam Village School. Moving to New Amsterdam, June is affected by parting with her old friends. At the new school, June feels that she is being used merely to front Lucille's ambitions. Thinking of the pains her mother is undergoing in order to give her good education, June is convinced that:

This education had nothing to do with her and everything to do with Lucille. That was the problem. Lucille was pretending she cared about her education when all she wanted was to get her out of New Dam into town. (p.95-96)

At the new school, life is tortuous for June. She is so injured by the discrimination and insults she gets at her new school that she wishes to run away from the school. When she bewails to her mother about this, Lucille lambasts her as somebody who would like to go back to 'Coolie-hood' and work in the canefields, manuring and giving men water; milking cows, bailing punts, weeding canals; Coolie jobs which June thinks are better than the bigotry and banter she has to face at school:

Yes! Yes! It is better than New Amsterdam children! All they go to school to do is 'buse down one another. They not interested in studying one little bit. At lessons today they didn't know anything and the teachers don't dare criticize

them so we country children take all the blame! Only 'busing down, insulting and beating go on in that school. (p.126)

Child-commodification in Ian McDonald's *The Humming-Bird Tree* is witnessed in the coercion of children into servitude in order to support their poor families. Kaiser and Jaillin represent such children. Despite being only fourteen, Kaiser is employed as Alan's family's Yard Boy. As vague as the appellation of his portfolio seems, so are his duties not restrictive. A mere child, Kaiser does all kinds of jobs; yard-oriented as well as house-oriented. He has no specific role. He is just any beast of burden:

He cut the lawn, kept the flower beds tidy, looked after the fowls and ducks, tended the fruit tree, cleaned and polished the car ... He did all sorts of odd jobs about the house, cleaning the shoes and washing floors, killing chicken for lunch, polishing the silver ware, picking lemons for Alice, the cook ... (p.8)

For all that kind of work, Kaiser does not get a miserable wage but only a "better pay than he would get anywhere else as well as food and often if he was lucky, some of the old clothes Alan discarded and the Tennis shoes that had holes in them" (p.8)

Kaiser's is the plight of many children all over the world who are sometimes pressurized by their parents to seek employment in order to contribute to the family's well-being. Such children are denied many rights such as: right to education, right to protection, right to material support and right to play. At a very young age children of such families experience life that is dark and dismal. If it is not formal employment, small girls may be forced to look after their younger siblings.

Aries (1962) avers that the plight of many children since time immemorial has been anarchic. It may be getting better now with many international and national bodies championing for children's rights all over the world. Fourteenth century parents would even sell their children into servitude. In the middle ages, parents scarcely credited their children with any individuality. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that European governments attempted to legislate against infanticide, child abuse and child labour.

The child has in point of fact been looked at as a commodity in all respects. Like apparels they could be sold into slavery; like chicken they could be killed any time; like pets, they could be abandoned any time. Like mules, they could be mauled and terrorized anyhow. Like objects of joy, they could be sexually molested. Summing up the historical evolution of the child, De Mause (1974) aptly remarks that:

...the history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently began to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care and the more likely the children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized and sexually abused. (p.203)

In the opinion of De Mause, the very last thing that anyone would want to be prior to the twentieth century was a child, or if one desired to become a human adult eventually, the only thing to do was to get over one's childhood as soon as possible. Gratien wrote (Anthony et. al. :1978, p. 12): "Only time can cure the person of childhood".

Although the twentieth century was referred to as the century of the child, at least in the west which has apparently become more concerned about the physical, moral and sexual problems of the children, the child, more so in the lesser developed countries, is still commodified to the extent of even being sold into marriages. Child marriages are presented as a great problem among the Maasai and the Kuria of Kenya (Sunday standard, Nov. 16th 1996). Potential brides even as young as nine year olds are literally abducted before being forced into wedlock in a practice which is actually totally devoid of any cultural values but which is propelled by sheer lust for easy affluence on the part of parents. Lamenting about the plight of the girl child in the same daily, Douglas Okwatch and Jacob Otieno note that more than eighty-five percent of girls in Kuria district are withdrawn from school by their parents for marriage. The writers also note that in these forced marriages, the parents are interested in enriching themselves. The issue is how much one can make from their daughter in terms of bride wealth.

Such a scenario is illustrated in both Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* through Binetou and Celie respectively. Binetou is pulled out of school in order to get married. When Binetou's mother gets the information that her daughter has an affair with a wealthy, though old man, she is quick to take advantage of the situation. She does not care that Binetou is not only still schooling, but also that the man she would wish to marry off her daughter to is elderly enough to be the girl's father. All that Binetou's mother cares about is that Binetou's aged suitor has promised her a Villa and a monthly allowance. Therefore, such a parent is only concerned about cashing in on the situation in order to elevate her socio-economic status. Binetou is thus sacrificed at the altar of sheer opulence. The child as a daughter comes out as an object that can be made capital out of to fulfill the perverted whims of the narcissistic and jaundiced parents. On sexual problems of children, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* reflects on Celie, just aged fourteen. Celie is used as a sexual tool by her step-father who takes advantage of her femininity. Celie is repeatedly raped by the man she calls father. The defilement results in two births. As vulnerable as the products of the rape are, the two infants are sold off to a missionary couple and their mother Celie is married off to a

Mr._____ (Dash) or Albert; a man she does not love. Apparently Mr._____ also does not cherish Celie. An epitome of the typical man, Albert just wanted a caretaker for his children following the demise of their mother, his former wife. Celie being a woman, would also satisfy Mr. _____'s erotic desires after all. Celie's step-father Alphonso and Albert personify adults who view the girl child and woman in general as mere commodities, mere gadgets to gratify patriarchal whims and wishes.

While the reverse of the situation in *So Long a Letter* is true in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* in that girls (read – Antoinette) are married off early so that some men (Rochester) may benefit from their affluent inheritance, the position of the girl child remains the same; that of dire vulnerability. Mason, Antoinette's stepfather, fixes Antoinette's marriage in such a way that all the girl's money would belong to Mr. Rochester. At this point in time, Antoinette is still a child, more so intellectually. Christophine, a woman of African descent who actually brought up Antoinette as the girl's family's house-help and who considers herself a second mother to the child quarrels with Mason for "handing over everything the child owns to a perfect stranger" (p.60). Without the money creditable to the girl, it is incomprehensible why Rochester would marry Antoinette. He doesn't love her in the first place. Rochester propertyizes Antoinette. He even calls her his 'marionette' (p.84). As a marionette, Antoinette is Rochester's doll for all forms of gratification, sexual and financial. Sexually we are told he only lusts for her even though he loathes her eccentricities. Financially Rochester is only interested in the financial security that Antoinette brings.

The girl child has been presented in the Caribbean literature studied as doubly disadvantaged. She is vulnerable to commodification both as a child and as a girl. While in *The Humming Bird Tree* Kaiser may have been forced into servitude in his early adolescence, Kaiser's younger sister, Jaillin, started washing clothes when she was very young. Jaillin is Alan's age-mate yet while talking to Alan about her, Kaiser says: "She was coming up this part helping Ma wash clothes befo' they finish push you in a dam' pram" (p.18).

In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, most of the black servants of the whites are girl children. Antoinette's servant in Granbois, Hilda, is such a child: "She was a young girl of about twelve or fourteen" (p.33). Amelie, another girl servant is also referred to by Rochester as a child although we are not told her exact age.

On child labour in general, we are told of Emile, an adult porter whom when asked his age by Rochester, answers: *fourteen*. Albeit this is not his true age (he doesn't know his age anyway), this may indicate that cases of child labourers were manifold in this particular society.

Conclusion

Generally, this study has established that the child has been abused in his family physically, emotionally and intellectually owing to his mental and physical vulnerability and fragility. By

mistakenly perceiving children as some empty pitchers that need filling, parents have ended up filling these *pitchers* with injurious matter. This inverted socialization that even teaches a child to despise and hate for no logical reason, may be self-serving on the part of the parent and is viewed by the Caribbean writers as psychological abuse. This is because the socialization of the child determines the kind of person the child would be in adulthood. Bad socialization is therefore regarded as *psychological rape* whose scars persist through generations because *rape* victims also unconsciously end up being *rapists* to their own scions. It becomes a vicious, ugly circle. In the mistaken belief that their progeny are their own property, even investment, and in a bid to live their dreams, parents have confused and maimed their children both physically and psychologically. Because children have a lot of faith in their parents, they end up aping even wrong attributes in an endeavour to not only please the latter but also in order to have a sense of belonging, however lopsided. Physically, children have been molested, coerced into servitude, forced into marriage and coerced into professions they do not cherish. *Child-ownership* has become the subject of acrimony among relatives. In nutshell, therefore, we have seen that the child in the family is vulnerable to both parents and older siblings.

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