Violence and Patriarchy: Male Domination in Roger Mais's "Brother Man"

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> The signifier "woman" contains an interesting contradiction, between subordinate and powerful, weak and threatening. Below the image of woman as weak and subordinate . . . is an image, often sexualised as in the image of the seductress, of terrifying power. . . . It seems to me fairly obvious that this meaning of woman is achieved through the connection with the suppressed signifier of the mother . . .
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> WENDY HOLLOWAY, "Male Mind and Female Nature"

UNLIKE THE POLITICS of decolonization, the politics of female liberation only recently has become an important feature in Jamaican literature. Some writers, such as John Hearne, Claude McKay, and Herbert G. de Lisser, did explore with some depth the changing role of women in colonial society, but the fact that few Jamaican women were producing novels during these early years may explain the relative silence on this issue in much of early Jamaican literature.[1] Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson, in their introduction to *Her True-True Name*, an anthology of prose and poetry by Caribbean women, indicate that the anglophone Caribbean has begun only recently to enjoy the publication of women's writing.[2] Much of the literary and political discourse of early colonial society derived to a large extent from the privileging of the male perspective in the community. Women were then excluded from the power centres of society. A great deal of the literature from Jamaica produced prior to the mid-1970s deals primarily with the male middle-class Jamaican coming to terms with an emerging cultural and national identity. These writers, as Rupert Lewis argues, wrote from the subjective

and limiting position of individuals "familiar with people from their own milieu" and from a less personal, larger perspective appropriate to the "leadership role the middle class has played in the political life of the Caribbean" (16). But they also wrote from the perspective of the male, who constituted, in large part, the political and established spiritual leadership of the society. Men played political games, debating in parliament such issues as the questions of federation and independence; and men emerged as political messiahs, leaders who would form the new revolutionary or neo-colonial governments of the Caribbean; and men wrote the novels—with a limited perspective.[3]

This perspective, I contend, generated works that are characterized by the prevalence of deeply entrenched patriarchal and misogynist perceptions of the female. In novels such as Vic Reid's *New Day*, John Hearne's *Voices Under the Window*, and H. Orlando Patterson's *Children of Sisyphus*, all highly political and anti-colonial texts, the female is shown to be a doubly oppressed figure whose portrayal is inevitably clouded by a diminishing of her capacity to break out of stereotypical renderings of her that do not go beyond pseudo-pornographic and highly objectified portrayals. While some critics have argued that these works merely reflected the society in which the writers lived, I would suggest that such arguments do not effectively deconstruct the underlying implications of such deeply problematic portrayals of women in the works. Indeed, Elaine Savory Fido's strong, albeit moralizing, contention that the motives of an author need to be addressed in any analysis of the works produced has relevance and value in this discussion:

> Some readers and critics would defend the writer from charges of complicity in his character's behavior or attitudes, but I would say that since it is entirely a matter of choice of what/how the writer depicts human behavior, and since we do expect a moral perspective to be presented to us which encompasses and delineates that depiction, we should ask two important questions of every writer before we sanction the content of the work: why did she/he choose such a topic and how does it illuminate her/his world view? The answers should be readily available from the text itself. (79)

Fido's argument is simply that the ideological discourse of the writer is a critical factor in shaping the nature of his/her retelling

of the "realities" of his/her society. As it relates to Mais, the argument is that our analysis of his work should assume that a close textual study will reveal that his world view, particularly his understanding of gender dynamics, has so affected his "reading" of his society that it has shaped the focus and direction of his narrative.

The world that Mais describes in *Brother Man* corresponds with a patriarchal structure in which the female is defined and controlled by the male. Whereas Mais fails to explore the larger political tensions of colonialism and race in his novel, he is very expansive about the sexual conflicts of the working-class community. The community of Brother Man is characterized by constant power games played out between men and women. One can easily regard Mais's portrayal of the ghetto community as a direct reflection of the society that existed in Jamaica during the 1940s and 1950s. However, even after granting that Jamaican working-class society was characterized by injustice towards women, and even after acknowledging that certain stereotypes existed in Jamaican society in the way women were perceived, the reader must question what Mais's reactions to these "realities" are. In his portrayal of women in his novels there is an apparent endorsement of the patriarchal structure. This endorsement is demonstrated in the repressive environment that he creates for the women. His female characters find fulfilment only through identification with, and submission to, men.

The novel presents us with a number of male-female relationships, which often serve as foils for each other. The carefully structured nature of this novel encourages the reader to make comparisons between these couples. These relationships can be categorized along the lines of good and evil, as is true of all of the relationships (male/male, female/female, or male/female) in the work. Mais's novel posits a basic moralistic structure in which good forces work to survive the onslaught of evil forces. The relationship between Minette and Brother Man quite naturally falls into the category of the good or positive relationship. In many ways it is treated as creative and productive and it is characterized by devotion and kindness. It is relatively free of tension and conflict (until it is eroded by evil forces and desires)

and while, like all the good in this novel, it is threatened by the evil element, ultimately, this good sector triumphs. In direct binary opposition is the relationship between Girlie and Papacita. Where the former relationship is circumspect and above-board, this one is brutally sexual and pathological. It constitutes the explosive relationship between the masochist and the sadist. The relationship is destructive and leads to death and madness. All other relationships in the work fall in line with these two pivotal ones. A few of them include those between Cordelia and her jailed husband, Cordelia and Bra' Ambo, Brother Man and his former wife, and Jesmina and her young boyfriend. It is indicative of a trend in this work that all the female characters are directly and inextricably linked with male figures. While a few of the men act out their lives without reference to the women around them, the central concern of all the women is to make sense of their relationships with their men. Brother Man's central preoccupation is his work as a healer, a preacher, and a cobbler. His relationship with Minette is not his foremost preoccupation. Papacita is also occupied by activities that do not require the participation of women. His schemes and criminal activity are centred on his single-minded desire to become rich. Girlie is a problem for him because she makes every effort to force him to deal with the place of women in his life. Without the women, his life would be more focussed. On the other hand, the women depend on the men for their sense of identity and purpose. With her husband in jail for ganja possession, Cordelia is left void of a sense of self. The stories of Minette and Girlie are stories about the males in their lives—nothing else. The pattern is unquestionably one that suggests that the male identity does not require the female for its definition and completion, whereas the converse (the female requiring the male's identity) is shown to be true: the woman needs the man. In such an environment, the enactment of violence against the woman takes on great significance. Such violence is commonplace in Mais's novel.

However, while Mais tries to identify a causal connection between the violence of the urban poor and the inequities of the Jamaican social structures in his first novel, *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, in *Brother Man* he is far less direct and analytical in his

political commentary. In this work, Mais is not attempting to generate a sociological discourse on the problems of the urban poor (violence against women being one such problem). Karina Williamson is correct when she suggests in her article "Roger Mais: West Indian Novelist" that there is, in *Brother Man*, and later in *Black Lightning*, a movement away from the social commentary of *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, to more "human" explorations of psychology and spirituality (144). In his two later works, there is a marked preoccupation with sexuality and the dynamics of the human condition. Importantly, however, these two works show a progressive movement away from a clearly defined social context to a literary backdrop that becomes an unobtrusive vehicle for the telling of a parable. This is especially apparent in *Black Lightning*, which is set in rural Jamaica in a seemingly timeless environment that is closed off from other segments of society:

> Yet it [*Black Lightning*] is the least local of the three novels because it deals with human relationships at their most unsophisticated; the characters are almost as well insulated from the "artificial" pressures of society as if they were on a desert island. (Williamson 144)

This world is not unlike that of *Brother Man*, which contrasts tellingly with the more socially eclectic world of *The Hills Were Joyful Together*.

In *Brother Man*, as in *Black Lightning*, we are never directed to feel that the pathologies of Mais's main characters have been shaped primarily by social degradation. As a result, we are led to see the rendering of male and female roles in the work as archetypal examples of the author's perception of gender roles in human society. The sexual relationships are based on assumptions about the psychological motivations of the two sexes. The resulting stereotypes render woman as emotional and irrational, and men as logical and action-oriented. Couched in a literary style that is parabolic and that avoids explicit references to the sociopolitical underpinnings of the society, it is difficult not to read Mais's portrayal of women as disturbingly deterministic and misguided. The fact is that there are a number of very clear patterns established in his portrayal of women. These patterns present a striking imbalance between the way men are perceived and the way women are perceived. It is this gender imbalance that interests us here.

Girlie is a perfect example of a character whose behaviour betrays a series of stereotypes about women that are upheld in the work. Although a victim of male violence, Girlie is a willing victim. Her engagement with violence is pathological. She is masochistic and thrives on the violence meted out to her. Whenever she acts violently, it is largely motivated by an intense psychosis that has emerged from her inexplicable and self-destroying love for Papacita. Invariably, she appears to be the weaker figure in the relationship, despite her ability to fight back. She takes pleasure in being subdued by Papacita, who, on the other hand, is often puzzled by Girlie's propensity towards violence and her consistent desire to have him brutalize her. For Papacita, sexual pleasure with Girlie is closely linked with the need to control through physical violence. His posturing while observing her in their little room is imaged as a game of cat and mouse. Papacita is the cat waiting to pounce on the unsuspecting mouse (22).

Mais's description of their sexual behaviour combines the energy of violence with the sensual explicitness of open sexuality. The combination is both erotic and brutal. Their battle is a ritual that is enacted regularly and it is based on the premise that Papacita must prove his manliness by dominating her physically:

> It wasn't play, either; it was all in deadly earnest. And it happened like this every time he played fast and loose with her, chasing other women. Every time he had to force her, as he was forcing her now, as he had to force her the first time, the very first time he had taken her, before they had come to live together as man and wife. (27-28)

According to the narrator, this repeated act of rape constitutes the basis of their relationship; and when the rape occurs, it becomes a shared moment of sexual gratification unparalleled in their experience. The vision of the sexual union typifies the macho-male's vision of sexual conquest:

> And every time they lived again the deep physical satisfaction that was like nothing else on the earth, that acted upon them more than an aphrodisiac, that of his forcing her, and that of her suffering being forced by him. It acted upon them both like whips, goading them on to a kind of delirium of sexual indulgence, that to them, of all pleasures had not its parallel in the world of experience. (28)[4]

Apart from Mais's obvious act of understating the violence and criminality of the act by the euphemistic use of the word "force" to connote what is clearly rape, there are other complex problems emerging from this piece of narration. Mais's portrayal of this relationship is rooted in the male fantasy of control and conquest through violent physical force, which constitutes a parallel pathological condition to the female's masochism. Indeed, Papacita's propensity to violence is deemed a sickness, a psychological instability that is finally realized in his movement towards insanity at the end of the work. While Mais tries to impress upon us Girlie's complicity in these acts of pathological masochism, the perpetuation of stereotypes is not arrested in his portrayal of the male/female dynamic. The male fantasy of rape and conquest is most apparent in the way in which Papacita becomes the active figure in the battle. His is the quest, the desire to win Girlie, while she remains the one subjected to aggression. His desire to dominate is rooted in a sense that this is the only way to avoid the humiliation of being called something less than a man by Girlie. Her succumbing to him is described as a reconquest, a renewal of the bond that initiated their relationship in the first place. The relationship represents a classic example of the masochist/sadist dynamic—a dynamic that forces the reader to wonder whether Mais is treating Girlie's behaviour both as a product of her femininity and as a product of her condition as a working-class woman. Ultimately, Girlie's pathological inclinations, while representing a feature of her character, also represent a pattern of female behaviour that posits a disturbing thesis (proposed by Mais) about the psychological condition of working-class women. This psychosis is characterized by the existence in the female personality of a tendency towards masochism and self-destruction. Elaine Savory Fido, in her study of V. S. Naipaul's fiction "Psycho-Sexual Aspects of the Woman" offers a useful articulation of the nature and impact of this same psychosis as it recurs in much of the Caribbean literature written by men:

> Masochism, the necessary complement and facilitator of sadistic sexual acts, has been importantly linked to conventional femininity. . . . It is defined variously as, for example, the seeking out of pain

> for pleasure reasons, or, less problematically, the acceptance of pain as a normal part of feminine experience. . . . The psychic accompaniments of masochism, namely passivity and dependence, are actively encouraged as elements in the upbringing of women in many cultures. (79)

Quite clearly, the positioning of the female as victim of the assault by the male culture in Fido's analysis is a political one fostered by a need among many female critics in the Caribbean to evaluate literature that has so rendered the dynamic of male/female relationships. The critique challenges the manner in which female masochism is rendered as a "natural" feature of the feminine psyche, thus validating the violence that she receives and, at the same time, exonerating the male of all blame for his acts of violence. Even though Papacita may be properly described as depraved, it would be misdirected to equate his "victim" status with that of Girlie because the power dynamics involved in all the relationships in this work privilege the male's dominance. It is not Papacita, for instance, who has a pathological desire to be hurt and dominated. It is not Papacita who needs the brutal attention of his lover to provide assurance of his validity as an individual. His pathology is sadistic. He inflicts the pain and exerts dominance. While it may be true that for Mais both Papacita and Girlie are equally trapped in their own diseased psychosis, an analysis of the internal sexual politics within such mutual abjection reveals that Papacita remains the figure in control, while Girlie deteriorates into a masochistic receptacle for Papacita's abuse. The explicit message in the relationship between Girlie and Papacita in *Brother Man* is simply that the former is the kind of woman who must be abused if she is to love:

> And at last she lay on the bed, panting . . . for he had broken her resistance. He had overcome her again, as he had done before, many times, and he knew there would be no talk about what had happened before, after that. (29)

Her final words in the midst of the love-making are extremely telling. She exclaims: "Hurt me like that—hurt me—Love me and hurt me! Hurt me hard!" (29). In a later violent struggle between Papacita and Girlie, Papacita screams "like a woman" when he is losing the struggle (118). By describing his scream as

feminine, Mais articulates his tendency to portray women as victims. This portrayal of the female persona as vulnerable and hysterical is further expressed in Girlie's movement towards insanity. Hers is the role of demented masochist. Papacita, on the other hand, is revolted by this moment of brutish humanity and it is he who is allowed to recognize their shared depravity.

Ultimately, the murder of Papacita is not an act of liberation but the culmination of a fatalistic descent into abject hopelessness and psychic disintegration. It is this deterioration of the male/female relationship that Fido warns about in "Psycho-Sexual Aspects of the Woman":

> The danger, then, is that, in what amounts to virtually world-wide conventions of submissive acceptance of pain in women and charming, yet potentially violent traits in men—called femininity and masculinity and dignified with the name of normality and ideal behavior—we run the risk of the escalation of those traits in relation to each other to mild and then to serious masochism, the only possible conclusion of which is murder of one sexual partner by another (a common fact of statistical studies of homicide is that the most likely man to kill a woman is her husband or lover). (80-81)

Undoubtedly, Papacita is deserving of his death, and Mais manages to allow us to feel some sympathy for Girlie. In fact, Girlie's act of murder may be defined as an act of defiance, a final act prompted by her frustration with the abuse she has experienced. However, Mais's plot makes Girlie's motivation one of jealousy. By destroying Papacita she merely carries to the ultimate extreme her sense of powerlessness towards him. She decides his fate because she wants him completely to herself. This complex act of power is also an act of weakness. Her insanity and hopelessness at the end of the work undermine any potential for liberation to which her act may have led. More importantly, her failure to articulate her frustration with her masochistic relationship with Papacita (except in a tone of acceptance when she speaks to Jesmina) and her complete acceptance of the myth of the female who needs to be bullied to be loved reflect a tragic perception of self that is in no way redeemed at the end of the novel. In the end we pity her rather than admire or respect her. Mais does not attempt to find reasons (psychological or social) for Girlie's state. She is simply a victim of an intense emotional attachment

to Papacita. When she speaks to Jesmina about her feelings, it is clear that she regards them as irreversible and the natural product of her feelings of love toward Papacita and of her feelings as a woman. Girlie literally begs for the beatings and rapes that she experiences. This willingness of the female to accept such insane brutishness is merely another feature of the female psyche as expressed in Mais's novel. The female is not only vulnerable but completely enslaved to her emotional core, which is defined by her relationship with the men in her life. Although Girlie's anger is shown to be well founded, she succumbs to it totally, lacking the mental and emotional fortitude to resist the temptation to act destructively. When she does kill Papacita, the reason corresponds with this pathological state of mind: if she cannot have him, no one else will. It remains a reason that sustains the male-dominated order. The woman acts because of her relationship with the man and not as a means to liberate herself from his violence. Girlie is, therefore, never truly liberated.

Her tragedy, however, is compounded by the fact that she brings it upon herself. This tendency towards self-inflicted pain is a common characteristic shared by all of the women in the work. They all possess an uncanny capacity for self-sacrifice that often borders on self-humiliation and self-destruction. In direct contrast, Mais's men are usually aggressors who have a far more rational bent to their actions. This division of male and female traits according to very male-privileged stereotypes is typical of Mais's writing in this work. This sexist stereotyping presents the male as someone who is able and inclined to think and act, and the female as one who is governed by inexplicable and irrational emotions. These stereotypes allow Mais to advance his careful categorization of male and female characters along the lines of the Biblical myths of Adam and Eve, Christ and Mary Magdalene, Joseph and Potiphar's wife, David and Bathsheba, and so on. In Minette and Girlie, the Eve paradigm, which presents the woman as both absolutely pure and completely evil, is enacted. The two women are attracted to both the Adam/Christ figure (personified in Brother Man) and the Satan figure (personified in Papacita). The ensuing conflicts become part of the central archetypal battle between good and evil that operates in the

work. More importantly, they demonstrate that all the action in the work revolves around the male figures.

Pitted against Brother Man's stoic moral purity, his celibacy and his absence of sexual passion, Papacita appears more colourful and tempting to the women. The women with whom they both deal are shown to prefer the passion and brutal sexuality of Papacita to Brother Man's righteousness. Brother Man's failure to respond sexually to Minette frustrates her and drives her towards the violent Papacita. Implicit in this scenario is a statement about the moral and sexual weakness of the female who is unable to control her passions and who gravitates towards the clearly established evil of a man who invariably brutalizes her. It is a repetition of the Eve paradigm.

In this rendering of the paradigm, Minette is posited as both victim and curious female who is drawn to the temptations of the snake. Her attraction to Papacita is driven by a dissatisfaction with her relationship with Brother Man, as Eve is dissatisfied with God and his laws. As a derivation of the Eve prototype, Minette exemplifies the manner in which many of Mais's female characters fall into two basic extremes that are generated by Judaeo-Christian archetypes, for Minette is also a purified Mary Magdalene, the prostitute rescued by the Christ. Whenever she assumes this facet of her personality (that of saved and obedient disciple of the Messiah), her circumstances improve and her position as a positive force in the work is assured. Her movement away from this ideal results in a series of tragedies, and it would not be stretching the analogy too much to suggest that her return to Brother Man and the attendant sexual union that results parallel the temptation and fall of Adam at the hands of Eve. But any strength that may be read into her position as temptress is undermined by the sexual dynamic that operates around the sexual union between her and Brother Man. In Mais's world, the capacity to sin or lead others into sin is not seen as a source of positive power. It is negative and emerges, as in the case of Minette, out of a weakness of the psyche. Minette, as woman, needs masculine attention. This lack of completion in the female reinforces Mais's rendering of the female as victim and as the proverbial "weaker" vessel. Minette is tempted by Papacita and

acquires the knowledge of sexual desire from this evil figure. This acquisition of knowledge does not have the positive quality that may be associated with Milton's portrayal of Eve as agent of knowledge in *Paradise Lost.* Here, Mais's reading corresponds with an "old-fashioned" or orthodox interpretation of the Biblical narrative, which posits the female as a negative force that has contributed significantly to the fall of humanity. In many ways, this negative encounter with the female's carnal desires leads to the fall of Brother Man, who, frail as he is after his soul-draining act of healing, is drawn into a sexual union with Minette. If it is in fact valid that the portrayal of the female as conveyor of evil and grand temptress of humanity in the traditional rendering of the Biblical myth constitutes a kind of misogyny, then it may be argued that by using such paradigms to anchor his portrayal of woman in *Brother Man,* Mais betrays a certain endorsement of misogynist tendencies. That Minette is redeemed, again, like Mary Magdalene, at the end of the work is simply a reinforcement of the deterministic portrayal of the female as essentially evil or impossibly pure. In this sense, Mary is defined by what she is not, which is Eve. But both polarities are present in her identity, as both constitute male-oriented definitions of the female personality. On several levels, then, Minette's dependence on the male for her definition and for her own emotional satisfaction makes her no different from the other women in the novel who derive their sense of identity from the males in their lives.

As an embodiment of Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, Minette's character parallels that of several of the women who become supporters and companions to Jesus and who, in the Biblical narrative, remain with him through his death, burial, and resurrection. Significantly, Mary Magdalene and her companions are the ones who first discover the risen Christ and convey to the other disciples the critical message of assurance given to them by the angel. Minette, in Mais's narrative, is granted a similar position of privilege because she remains with the injured leader through his time of unpopularity. She is also the bearer of the candle that symbolizes, at the end of the novel, the potential for hope in a dark environment. However, it must be understood that the privileging of Minette or Mary Mag-

dalene in these instances does not alter the basic gender patterns established in both works. In both Mais's novel and the Biblical narrative, the heroic figure around whom all action revolves is the male protagonist. It is this classic positioning of the female as "supportive cast member" that directs the manner in which the female is portrayed in the novel. By alluding to the significance of Mary in his narrative, Mais is, in many ways, crediting the female character with a certain degree of importance in the development of the Messiah figure. Minette parallels this pattern because, like Mary, she is saved and cleansed by the messianic Brother Man and she gradually assumes a position of importance in his life. As with the Biblical narrative, Mais's description of the "salvation" of Minette foregrounds the fact that she, the female, remains beholden to the male Messianic figure. The phrasing and cadence of the narrative that describes the "saving" of Minette are reminiscent of accounts of Christ's encounters with sinners. This is demonstrated in a comparison, for instance, of the following passage with Jesus's encounter with a "sinful woman" who anoints him (Luke 7:36-50), his healing of a woman with an "issue of blood" (Luke 8:40-48), and his encounter with an adulterer on the verge of being stoned for her sin (John 8:1-11):

> He had rescued her, starving, off the streets. She was hungry and homeless, a girl of seventeen, without hope and without illusions, and he found her like that.
>
> She had come up to him in a crowd by South Parade, had begged him to take her home with him as she had done to other strange men so many times before. Some had treated her good, and others not so good. But this one was different. He seemed not to understand what it was all about, that she was soliciting him.
>
> He had looked at her, until her eyes fell to her hands clasped in front of her, he said, "You hungry, me daughter, you don't have no place to sleep tonight?"
>
> And she felt the tears welling up in her eyes, and had just nodded, unable to speak. (31-32)

In each of the Biblical accounts mentioned, as in the quotation above, the pattern entails the expression of compassion and concern towards another who is in desperate straits and who is deemed a reject in society. While in the Biblical narrative there is strong evidence that the women demonstrate a significant sense

of importance, in Mais's narrative the attitude of the author to women is far more ambivalent. Also, while Magdalene and Joanna do not become Christ's lovers and so maintain a certain spiritual decorum between the Messiah and the "saved," Mais breaks this pattern by allowing Brother Man and Minette to become lovers. This union draws attention to Brother Man's humanity, but, more critically, it foregrounds the fallibility of the woman and her role as seducer in the context of male/female relationships. The departure is significant to Mais's treatment of the female in the work.

Minette's reaction to Brother Man typifies the encounter between the sinner and the righteous Messiah. Brother Man plays this role throughout the piece and Mais grants him a romanticized mysticism that allows those around him to be impressed with his spiritual power. Minette has difficulty coping with Brother Man's holiness because it appears to deprive him of passion and sensuality that parallel her reaction to him. Mais is careful to portray Minette in contrasting modes that reflect the dual roles of saint and prostitute. She reads with fascination the narrative of David's relationship with Bathsheba. Like Bathsheba, Minette becomes a temptation to Brother Man and eventually he finds himself succumbing to her desires. While Minette's active role in the seduction of Brother Man is a departure from Bathsheba's clearly passive role, they both share the same significance as objects of desire to "men of God." Both are instrumental in the fall of these men and both face the judgement of society for their actions regardless of their varying degrees of culpability. Brother Man's capitulation comes at a time when he is spiritually drained and vulnerable. Mais allows us to suspect that he falls into Minette's arms because he loses a certain amount of self-control and self-will. Although the incidents that follow do not come as a direct result of his sexual encounter with Minette, it is clear that the encounter takes place very soon before the beginning of his fall. Brother Man's distinction as a holy man, celibate and able to resist temptations, is arguably marred by his encounter with Minette.

However, this reading of Minette's role in the novel is not shared by some critics. Bill Carr and Jean D'Costa, for instance,

regard the sexual union of Brother Man and Minette as a realization of Brother Man's humanness and a triumph in the incarnation of the god-like figure. They both agree that there is nothing tragic or negative about the relationship between the two except when Brother Man fails to recognize Minette's love for him. Carr, in fact, argues that John Power (Brother Man) is "incomplete until he becomes aware of Minette" (23). Thus, in his reading of the work, the female character assumes the important role of humanizing the aloof male figure. At the same time, the healthy and positive nature of his relationship contrasts positively with the relationship between Girlie and Papacita, which is characterized by brutishness and treachery. While I would concede that Mais is trying to show that the relationship between Brother Man and Minette serves as a positive foil to the negative relationship between Papacita and Girlie, I would argue that the Brother Man/Minette relationship is equally saddled with pathological renderings of human sexuality that present the female as masochistic and subservient victim to the male. What these critics fail to recognize is the carefully orchestrated manipulation of the female persona that is taking place. Minette functions as a tool with which the author celebrates the humanity of his protagonist. In this sense, Minette is defined in terms of what she contributes to the character of Brother Man and not in terms of her contribution to herself as female. The distinction is important.

To argue then that the relationship between Minette and Brother Man is "purer" and more noble is to fail to recognize that it shares the tendency of the other relationship to position the woman as a receptacle of the man's sexual attention. She appears to accept (and, in the case of Girlie, to strive for) her powerlessness in the sexual union. For Minette, as for Girlie, winning the attention of the male is equivalent to a sense of complete fulfilment. In Mais's sexual dynamics, the male gives sexual gratification while the female welcomes the attention with tremendous gratitude. At the same time, the male's sexual behaviour is constantly described as animal-like, an expression of a fundamentally natural masculine instinct. The scene in which Brother Man "succumbs" to Minette's advances is a scene that demonstrates the pattern of male domination in the novel. Here, Brother

Man—the father figure—reacts with magnanimous gentleness to Minette's "begging" and, descending, he condescends to sleep with her:

> She was almost panting. An urgency within her gave her courage. She seized his hands, held them hard, pressed them against her breasts.
>
> He looked down at her, started to shake his head . . . their eyes met, held an instant. Something like an involuntary spasm shuddered through his flesh.
>
> His hands jerked away suddenly. He got to his feet so quickly that the stool went over behind him. He stumbled rather than walked away, leaving her kneeling on the floor.
>
> He turned, looked at her, saw that she was sobbing, her hands pressed to her face; her shoulders were shaking with her sobs.
>
> Something like an animal cry went from him. He blundered back across the distance that separated them, went down on his knees beside her on the floor.
>
> He took her by the wrists, pulled her hands down from her face.
>
> No words passed between them; but something did, something that went beyond words.
>
> Slowly his arms went around her, pulling her towards him. She opened her eyes, as in a dream, and felt his hot, panting breath upon her face. (136-37)

She does not seduce him. In fact, she has simply given herself to him. He has agreed to sleep with her. After this, Minette's faithfulness and devotion to Brother Man, somewhat strained and in jeopardy before the sexual encounter, becomes unequivocal and complete (174). Minette's devotion, however, is based on her conviction that Brother Man is holier and better than she is. This elevation of Brother Man by Minette adds to the overall ascendancy that the male characters have in Mais's novel. When, in the end, Minette leads Brother Man towards an inner room with a candle in her hand, she remains a follower despite her position at the front of the "procession." The flame that she shields is both the flame of the faith that she has learnt from Brother Man and the flame of her love and devotion towards him. She protects this flame with a sincere constancy. Mais attempts to indicate that Brother Man has moved from the unassailable position of god-like messiah to a basic human being in the eyes of Minette as she begins to refer to him as John instead of "Bra' Man." However, her commitment to Brother Man as a spiritual leader never

wavers. She assures him: "They'll all come crawlin' to you yet, an' beg you to forgive them" (190). Despite her prophetic role, she, like the other women, remains defined by her service to the male. It is the male, Brother Man, who remains at the centre of the narrative and who provides the woman with a purpose for her existence. Brother Man is not as inextricably linked to the women, nor does he depend on them for his purpose and identity.

We find this pattern repeated in the life of Cordelia, who is thrown into a tragic spiral of death and insanity because of the arrest of her husband on ganja charges. Her helplessness after this incident lies at the root of her eventual act of infanticide. Cordelia is very aware that the community in which she lives endorses the kind of relationship between men and women in which the woman is dependent on the reputation of her male partner for her sense of self and visibility within the community. Without a man, she is incomplete. Her illness is prompted by a combination of shame and desperation resulting from her loss of status in the community.[5] Cordelia deteriorates mentally because of her inability to cope with the pressures of her man-less existence. The portrayal is sympathetic but remains lop-sided in its overall assessment of women as weak and filled with the potential to be evil. After all, the only people who murder or seek to commit murder in this story are women, and their victims are all males: Papacita, Cordelia's son, and Brother Man. They are dangerous to all men. Even Bra' Ambo, the diabolic prototype of Satan, is puzzled and haunted by Cordelia's insanity. His evil pales when compared with her resolve to seek revenge on Brother Man:

> What was wrong with her, Bra' Ambo asked himself. She made him feel jittery. He didn't like that haunted-looking kind.
> Don' like de idea messin' wid crazy people. Don' too like de look in her eyes. (117)

Cordelia's eventual betrayal of Brother Man is made more abhorrent by the fact that Brother Man does make every effort to help her. She acts without wisdom or vision and she chooses the path of the evil one, Bra' Ambo. The "messiah's" failure to rescue her prompts her to try to destroy him. As a murderess, she is de-

mented. She smothers her baby and then proceeds to hang herself. Her story is the most irredeemable in the novel because Cordelia dies a victim of her dependence on the male. Her actions are prompted by her economic and social dependence on the male figure in her life and driven by her attempt to compensate for this dependence when her sense of security is removed.

The roles given to the female characters in the novel are more often than not either negative or subservient. The female characters tend to be dependent on the male characters for their identity. The Chorus of People in the Lane very rarely refers to the women directly. The women are identified by the males in their lives: "Papacita beat up him gal las' night. . . . Papacita de mek eye after Bra' Man gal," and so on (8-9). In such a context of male domination and misogyny, the violence that is meted out against women is not difficult to anticipate. This trend should be understood, however, in light of the consistent concern, which Mais displays in all his works, with the traditional tragic figure—the male—around whom tragic events occur. Mais's classic paradigms include, in the main, Greek and Shakespearean tragic patterns in which the dignified man struggles with his peculiar tragic flaw. The females remain, in his more classically inspired works (*Black Lightning* and *Brother Man*), peripheral to the plot. Dramatically, the women are positioned as subordinates to the central male figures. Where *Brother Man* owes its structure to the classic patterns of the Christ mythos, *Black Lightning* is modelled on the Biblical narrative of Samson, who falls prey to his own tragic flaw and to the questionable influences of the female. In both instances, the females are necessarily secondary players in the drama, and their *raison d'être* is often predicated on the existence of the male character. In these works, also, the tragic flaws of the males are often related to the actions of the female characters to whom these men must relate. Women, ultimately, become the proverbial stumbling blocks for these men.

Brother Man, the righteous one, for instance, is portrayed as a victim of the evil actions of many women. Interestingly, it is the women who betray him and who participate most actively in his "crucifixion." The first person to cast a stone at Brother Man

is a woman. And yet it is the women who come to him for help and healing. It is they who seem the most vulnerable and in need of his assistance. Their ability to lead the charge to destroy him constitutes a betrayal that is a reflection of their inability to remain true and consistent. This negative portrayal of the women is unwaveringly sustained throughout the entire novel and contrasts directly with the steadfast consistency of the main character, Brother Man.

Mais establishes this pattern very carefully in his description of Brother Man's history. Consistently, the women prove to be inextricably linked to his moments of failure and weakness. Brother Man's life has always been marred by women. His history involves a relationship with another woman, Velta, a selfish woman who cannot accept his generosity to those in need. Brother Man, the righteous one, is again unable to abide by the evil ways of women. The story of Velta's betrayal is told from Brother Man's perspective and hence paints the picture of yet another unreasonable and dangerous woman (158). These portrayals combine to present an overall image of the female persona as negative. Brother Man's relationship with Minette entails a denial on his part of female sexuality, and whenever he fails to deny it he becomes vulnerable. She drives him towards an unnatural course because he fears what a real sexual relationship will do to him. By denying Minette the fulfilment of her womanhood, Brother Man succeeds in creating a virginal figure faithful to him. He creates an ideal sexless woman who will not threaten his sense of spiritual and moral security. Unfortunately, for Brother Man, he eventually falls prey to the "wiles" of the female. It is important to remember that Minette initiates the sexual encounter.

Caught in the patriarchal stranglehold of machismo (Papacita) and strongly religious repression (Brother Man), the women of Mais's novel find their liberation through the acceptance of the male figure Brother Man. Significantly, Brother Man himself does not succeed in presenting us with an entirely positive attitude towards women, despite all his other positive values. He remains inscribed in the masculine ideology of male domination. It is largely because of the absence of a more liberated

female figure in the work, as well as the absence of any unconscious or conscious consideration on the part of the women about the oppressive nature of their situation in relationships to men, that we can conclude that male domination is quite clearly an acceptable feature in the world that Mais creates. In a world that is so violent, women are consistently victims.

NOTES

1 It is important to distinguish between the *presence* of a female protagonist in a given text and her *portrayal* within that same text. Often, the portrayal of the female protagonist undermines any value that may be derived from giving her a central role in the text. Such portrayals often perpetuate stereotypes of the female as seductress and evil force, even as she is positioned at the centre of the narrative. In H. G. de Lisser's *The White Witch of Rosehall*, for instance, while Annie Palmer clearly plays a dominant part in the narrative, her female presence is defined by a narrative discourse that continues to subject her to patriarchal and misogynist reductionism and objectification that privilege the male in their stereotyping of the female as unstable, passionate, and dangerous. Ultimately, the text celebrates the censuring of female independence and the controlling of female rebellion. It is my contention that this pattern of patriarchal control is maintained in much of Caribbean literature written by male writers.

2 Some of the most dominant writers in the Caribbean today are women. Lorna Goodison, Alecia McKenzie, Olive Senior, Velma Pollard, Grace Nichols, and Erna Brodber have all generated literary works that have forced critics to re-examine the position of the female in the Caribbean text. This paper is a necessary and natural part of the important process of salvaging the female persona in Caribbean literature so as to contrast the treatment of gender in the male-authored texts with its treatment in female-authored texts.

3 The matriarchal structure of family life in Jamaican society during the first half of this century, however, belies the extent to which the male dominated the power structure of the community. Edith Clarke, writing about the structure of the Jamaican peasant family in the 1940s and early 1950s in her seminal work *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, establishes the way in which patterns of slave society helped to shape the role of the father in the context of the family. As Clarke shows in her study, the post-Emancipation peasant societies formalized the leadership of the male even while the family structure typical of the slave period remained extant. In such slave societies, the female remained the dominant figure in the home and held second place in familial authority only to the planter. The male was a transient figure whose powerlessness was perpetuated and encouraged by the planter who saw it in his (the planter's) interest to maintain a demoralized and socially powerless male black figure:

> There was under slavery, no room for the family as a parent-child group in a house; still less for the development of those stable relationships among the wider circle of kin such as can be maintained only if kinsmen live in permanent contact or are able to travel freely and visit one another. The residential unit in the plantation system was formed by the mother and her children with the responsibility for their maintenance resting with the slave-owner. The father's place in the family was never secure. He had no externally sanctioned authority over it and could at any time be physically removed from it. His role might, indeed, end with procreation. Occasionally a father was able to undertake the responsibility for his family to the extent of supplying them with food from land which he cultivated but he was only able to acquire such land through the

> benevolence of his owner. In general, he was not the source of protection and provision for mother and children. This might come directly from some other man or from the system itself which, while a woman was of child-bearing age, secured to her and her children at least their minimum material necessities. It is against this background of the weakness of the male role in the system of family relationships that those of mother and grandmother assume particular importance. (19)

An important result of this socioeconomic relationship is the paradox of respect and resentment that the Jamaican male feels for the Jamaican female. This curious ambivalence is usually manifested in the literature through the repetition of stereotypes of the female personality, which correspond with two extremes: (a) the rebellious and headstrong deviant woman who needs to be set right and controlled by the otherwise emasculated male, and (b) the madonna or glorified grandmother/mother figure who is deeply revered. Very often in the literature these two extremes, one deviant and abhorred and the other celebrated, become the limiting and deterministic prototypes of the female personality.

4 This is not to suggest that psychological motivations are not explored significantly in *The Hills Were Joyful Together.* What is being argued here is that in *The Hills Were Joyful Together* Mais is more inclined to introduce characters like the prison chaplain and Surjue, whose relationship introduces a polemic on the class-based motivations for actions of the characters and the sociopolitical forces that have created the conditions in which the main characters live.

5 Minette was apparently a prostitute before she was rescued by Brother Man, but she relinquishes her "independence" to serve Brother Man.

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