

Double Identity in the Novels of Garth St. Omer

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It was as if she were divided; the part that was Dennys' looking down detachedly at the other part which would always, in essence, belong to Derek, and would always feel the pain of the past. The split in her was not new. Only different. Her schizophrenia, after Derek's letter, had been the only thing to save her and to enable her to move under the watchful eyes of those who seemed not to be watching. . . .¹

THE characters of the St. Lucian novelist Garth St. Omer (b. 1931) inhabit a world in which psychic division is the normal state of the human personality. Understood, it can be controlled; failure to understand results in tragedy — usually suicide, death or madness for the individual concerned. Anne-Marie, the character referred to in the above passage from his first novel, *A Room on the Hill* (1968), is a characteristic St. Omer figure since she embodies the theme of division in a number of ways. On an obvious level, she is racially mixed and thus contains within her personality the different ethnic strains which in West Indian literature often lead to tragedy in such stereotyped portrayals of the divided mulatto as Edgar Mittelholzer's *Sylvia*.² Again, she is "divided" between her former lover, the successful Derek, who has abandoned her for a white girl he has made pregnant, and her present lover, Dennys, a disillusioned and embittered artist, with whom she later is killed in a car crash. Most important of all she is the victim of the double system of values which is the linch-pin of her island society's moral code. Though illegitimate, she is sent to school by her father in a uniform supposed to be reserved for legitimate offspring. When she discovers that she has unknowingly assumed a false identity, the elegance of her uniform seems to her to be "at once

symbol of her father's duplicity and the hypocrisy of an entire existence" (p. 151). Faced with such knowledge, Anne-Marie finds "schizophrenia" the only means by which she can cope with living in the double-uniform society. But her turning inwards is no defence against capricious fate, in the form of the car accident in which she is killed; and even after death she remains beyond the social pale, for society also operates a double system of funerals and she is denied a proper church burial because of her illegitimacy.

Her tragedy is, however, only a comparatively minor element in the novel; she is only one of half a dozen characters who die premature and symbolic deaths in the small island society. St. Omer's unnamed island provides a setting for a drama of existentialist futility. Though, like John Hearne's Cayuna, George Lamming's San Cristobal and V. S. Naipaul's Isabella, it is a fictional construct which allows the novelist greater freedom than an actual island would, it is more anonymous than any of these fictional islands. If certain details referred to both in this novel and in "Another Time, Another Place"³ — most notably the French patois spoken on the island and the burning of its capital⁴ — seem to suggest St. Lucia, such hints are at best vague and offer no real clue to the uninitiated. While Hearne uses obvious surrogates — Queenshaven for Kingston, the Jungle for the Dungle, Saragossa for Spanish Town — St. Omer almost entirely eschews the use of proper names. In fact, only two are mentioned in connection with the island: Columbus Square, a fashionable square in the island's capital, and La Colombe, a smaller island off the shore of the main island. Coupled with a reference to Columbus's having "discovered" the island⁵ (*A Room on the Hill*, p. 161), their effect is less to evoke a precise sense of place than to establish a deliberately anonymous New World ambience.

This anonymity⁶ proves to be one of St. Omer's major strengths: it enables him to write novels which succeed

as expressions both of "small island blues"⁷ and a more fundamental existentialist *angst*, novels which explore the impasse in which the individual finds himself in the double-uniform society and at the same time suggest that psychic division is a general human problem.

The central character in *A Room on the Hill* is John Lestrade, who, after watching his friend Stephen (the name is perhaps intended to suggest martyrdom) drown, decides to remove himself to the seclusion of the "room on the hill" of the title. His attempt to achieve a lofty, spectatorial view of life is also suggested by the name his creator has given him (*estrade* means "platform" or "stage") and like Anne-Marie he has withdrawn inwards and regrets that people are not themselves islands — in which case "Every man would be his and his responsibility alone" (p. 118) — but are enmeshed by the morals of the island society.

The imagistic density of St. Omer's work is such that it is impossible to deal with many of its nuances in an article of this length, but especially interesting in *A Room on the Hill* is another allusion suggested by the name Lestrade. In his "Overture" to *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, St. Omer's fellow-St. Lucian and contemporary, Derek Walcott, mentions, in a list of "the derelicts who mimed their tragedies, the lunatics who every day improvised absurd monodramas" during his youth, the figure of one "Lestrade sallow and humped like a provincial Sherlock Holmes,"⁸ and he includes just such a "provincial Sherlock Holmes" in the title-play of this collection in the character of Corporal Lestrade. At first sight a similar Conan Doyle allusion seems unlikely in *A Room on the Hill*. But when one realizes that the novel is in a sense a mystery story, the force of such an allusion becomes apparent. John has watched Stephen drown without answering his cries for help. He has, however, been benumbed less by the shock of what is happening to his friend than by a Lycidas-like identification with a double of himself. He sees his own

“overwhelming desire for achievement” (p. 32) being nipped in the bud:

His own dead body had seemed to be borne with that cry on the same wind and the stench of it had entered all his pores at once so that, in his fear, he had stood transfixed and had looked at, but not seen, the figure of his friend struggling in the water before him. (p. 32)

So John's failure to respond, tantamount to symbolic suicide, emanates from the sudden shock of discovering the futility of ambition. John Lestrade, the “provincial Sherlock Holmes,” begins to unravel, not a detective-story, but a much more fundamental kind of mystery. Later he arrives at another existentialist discovery, when he learns that despite the cries for help Stephen's death was in fact suicide, and reflects that “his suicide, far from being an act of despair, might have been one of revolt” (p. 119).⁹ He is able to go beyond the orthodox Catholic response to suicide to be expected from a member of his society and to grasp the Camusian concept of philosophical suicide.¹⁰

Among numerous literary influences on St. Omer's work (Proust, Joyce and Walcott are also important) that of the French existentialists looms largest.¹¹ Only occasionally is the debt explicit, as when John makes the Sartrean remark “people are hell” (p. 80), but throughout *A Room on the Hill* St. Omer is reworking existentialist themes and his protagonist emerges as an existentialist hero through his realization that fear comes from moral responsibility and rebellion and his awareness that his life lacks “linear development” (p. 185).

Yet despite John's induction into existentialist awareness the ending of the novel is far from affirmative, as Anne-Marie is refused a proper church burial and, in a bizarre climax, her funeral procession becomes entangled with a group of masqueraders. Denied the accompaniment of church bells for her funeral — hitherto bells seem to have been ringing almost throughout the novel — Anne-Marie is, it appears, being buried to the strains of music more appropriate to her birth on the wrong side of the social

divide, the masqueraders' flute and drum. But St. Omer is here suggesting not only the tragic ironies caused by the social divide, but also the essential similarity of funeral and masquerade, both manifestations of the "imitative dead-end"¹² of the island's life. In his later novels, the idea of life as masquerade, a West Indian metaphor for existentialist absurdity, will be to the fore. Here it is only hinted at in the collocation of funeral and masquerade in the climax and in the ambiguity which one finally comes to see in Les-trade's French name: by the end of the novel, one is unsure whether it connotes detached observation from a "platform" or willy-nilly involvement as an actor on the "stage" of life on which the cosmic masquerade is played out.

In *A Room on the Hill* education is viewed by society as the normal means of attaining some solid "achievement" and escaping from the constrictions of island life. St. Omer's second novel, *Shades of Grey* (1968), which is made up of two novellas, enlarges on this theme in its two complementary studies: "The Lights on the Hill" examines the predicament of an islander gone abroad to a West Indian university; "Another Time, Another Place," though temporally and spatially distant from its companion-piece, as its title suggests, deals with the same theme in its examination of the effect educational success has on the life of a younger islander. Links between the two parts do not stop with the theme of education. Both protagonists are studies in the in-between, penumbral consciousness suggested by the novel's title; both have to come to terms with being promoted into the ranks of the middle classes by virtue of their educational success.

Stephenson, the hero of "The Lights on the Hill," is a fuller study of the type explored in Anne-Marie. "Half-white and illegitimate" (p. 56), his name is suggestive of a Jekyll-and-Hyde split, such as that alluded to explicitly by Wilson Harris in his use of the name Stevenson for his protagonist in his novel *Heartland*.¹³ As with Anne-Marie, the split in Stephenson takes multiple forms, but they are

centred on the psychological split caused by the disparity between his lowly social origins and his middle-class life as a student, which includes a relationship with a middle-class girl, appropriately named Thea, since Stephenson regards her as a goddess.

Although the novella is not without melodramatic subject-matter — a character struck dead by lightning; a fight between a husband and wife in the symbolic arena of the university playing fields — its style is, like that of *A Room on the Hill*, spare and Proustian. For the most part Stephenson reviews his past life, so that the effect is not so much one of narrative impetus forward, as of trying to understand immutable past facts. At first Stephenson's reflections seem random, but after a while a pattern begins to emerge. His earlier life has been divided between periods of upward educational aspiration and periods of aimless drifting. After leaving his own island, Stephenson has spent some time working as a schoolmaster on another island¹⁴ and the image which best characterizes this period of his life is that of him floating on his back in the sea:

The ends of black ribbon [the beach] merged with the horizon and the waves came in uninhibitedly from the ocean. Berthed up by them, up and down as he floated on his back, he felt in complete harmony with their free, uncontrolled nature. He had a sensation of well-being, unqualified, as though he were immortal or a God. He abandoned himself to a present that seemed to stretch, like the beach, forever under the sun. (p. 34)

Drifting in this free present, he has come to feel "confidence" (p. 46), but on leaving the island and coming to the university, he has left this identity behind him and reassumed the identity he had previously had on his island home. In particular, his relationship with Thea represents "continuity" (p. 64) and this plunges him back into insecurity. There is no sharp dramatic climax to this low-key novella, but the end represents a resolution of sorts, when Stephenson breaks off his relationship with Thea, afraid of involvement and trying to convince himself that existentialist freedom of choice is illusory:

He had tried to persuade himself that perhaps he was not responsible. That he could not have denied or prevented that desire for achievement that had driven him nor the dissatisfaction that not having it caused him. He had told himself that he was merely that which, ever since his birth and without his having any say at all, he had been tending to become. (p. 113)

St. Omer offers no comment here, only the feeling that there is no easy road to happiness for Stephenson, and the novel, like the first chapter, ends with a cry from the nearby lunatic asylum.

Shades of Grey is not uniformly pessimistic, however. The novel has two epigraphs: from Derek Walcott,

Irresolute and proud,
I can never go back;

and from Shakespeare,

How like a winter has my absence been
From thee.¹⁵

The first suggests the impossibility of return, the second the joy re-union would bring, and they seem to fit the two stories respectively,¹⁶ for "Another Time, Another Place" represents a kind of re-union, as the author describes the world of his adolescence in a slightly less sombre vein.

Derek Charles, the protagonist, is split, like Stephenson, by the gradual alienation from his social class which his middle-class education imposes on him. Towards the end of the novella when Derek, who has won a scholarship, is asked by his headmaster, an Irish priest, to return to help his "people" (p. 218) as a teacher, he reacts by rejecting this possible identity:

For a moment the headmaster was the symbol of what teaching would mean for himself. He thought he detected a certain self-sacrifice, a feeling as of saint or martyr or patriot. But he was no saint, no martyr, could be no patriot. He had no cause nor any country now other than himself. (pp. 222-23)

After his momentary identification with the headmaster, he realizes that to serve as a schoolmaster would, for him, mean to become like old Archie (a character who also appears in *A Room on the Hill*), a frustrated, middle-ranking

teacher, who, with no prospects of promotion or pension, has taken to drink.

The identification with the headmaster and the introduction of Archie to suggest a possible future of Derek's own are typical of St. Omer's use of character in this and other novels. In his treatment of the theme of double identity, he constantly employs minor characters as foils to his protagonists to suggest alternative extensions of their personalities. Here, in addition to the headmaster and Archie, there are several other such figures. Like both John Lestrade and Stephenson, Derek is affected by the death of a contemporary, his cousin Cecil, who is a kind of doppelgänger figure. Similarly, the image of a boy fishing from a small boat out at sea makes Derek feel he should be engaged in some meaningful work, which would enable him to exist with "no contradictions" (p. 198), instead of being separated from his own kind by his education and forced to be "a soldier in a war he had not caused nor wished to fight" (p. 198). Even his girlfriend, Berthe, whom he comes to detest because she has been seduced by his schoolmates, seems to incur his worst animosity because he sees her as an "image of himself" (p. 203).

The same principle of characterization is also used in the first part of the novel, which concentrates less on Derek's development and more on the island's sexual code, particularly as it affects young girls. Berthe is seen against the background of a group of girls who have had to contend with society's censure for becoming pregnant outside marriage. One, Sybil, has had her honour salvaged when her baby's father has married her, even though he has immediately deserted her and gone to live in Trinidad. In contrast, her sister Babsy goes twice to a back-street abortionist and dies from her second abortion. Living in such an atmosphere, Berthe is warned by her mother of the dangers of pre-marital sex and consequently resists Derek's advances for most of the novella, only to fall victim to his friends, at which point she appropriately goes to live with

Sybil and Babsy. There is no resolution of this theme, only the horror of Babsy's death and the suggestion, through St. Omer's art of contrasted characters, that this is a potential fate for all his women. For them the island life seems even more of an impasse than for his male protagonists. At least Stephenson and Derek have the equivocal escape-route of their education.

St. Omer's novels are really all one work. They are interrelated through the continuation of themes from one novel to another and the reappearance of characters from earlier novels. *Nor Any Country* (1969) takes its title and epigraph from the passage towards the end of "Another Time, Another Place" quoted above, while its central character has previously appeared briefly in "The Lights on the Hill."

In fact the events of this novel take place before those in "The Lights on the Hill." Peter Breville, a character who has obvious affinities with Stephenson and Derek Charles, returns to the island from the metropolis to spend a week, prior to taking up an appointment at the campus of the island in the north. Double identity is implicit from the outset. As he makes the Middle Passage crossing back to his homeland, Peter ruminates on the effects which the metropolitan society has had on his personality:

Already, he was aware of an absence of tension and of strain. He had left the city and the special anonymity it conferred behind him. And the unknown woman, who did not know him, but who yet had recognized him sufficiently to whisper her greeting ("I see the niggers are here again") conspiratorially, out of tight lips before the Supermarket shelves, would have to look now for others to whisper her special greeting of recognition to. Peter smiled. For a long time he had believed he had remained personally inviolate within the skin he wore which everyone recognized, and that, in the anonymous city, he, too, could have remained anonymous.¹⁷

His homecoming proves to be an equally alien experience, akin to that described by Derek Walcott in a poem inscribed to St. Omer:

there are no rites
 for those who have returned
 . . . there are homecomings without home.¹⁸

Expecting an "oasis of relaxation and friendliness" (p. 60), Peter finds it exists only in his memory. He can no longer converse fluently in the patois of the ordinary islanders and finds he is most at ease with other returned professionals. This becomes clear when he visits the hotel of Keith Austin, a retired black lawyer with a mulatto wife, like himself, who seems to represent what he might have become, had he been born a generation earlier. St. Omer's attitude to the Austins' world of brandy-drinking and listening to Bach is reminiscent of John Hearne's portrayal of Brandt's pen in *Stranger at the Gate* — without condoning it, he demonstrates an obvious affection for it. And, in what is perhaps the most powerful passage in the novel, there is the same complexity of tone when Peter muses on the image of a long dead Colonial Governor. As Edward Baugh says,¹⁹ there is a basic human identification here on Peter's part, which does nothing to obscure the fact that the man with whom he is identifying represents the enemy. It is an identification which is as double-edged as Walcott's with Robinson Crusoe.

For Peter returning to the island also means returning to his family: to his father, a man with a single-minded vision of "achievement", who is proud of his son's success; to his wife, Phyllis, whom he married eight years before, because she was pregnant, and then deserted; and to his elder brother, Paul, from whom he had become estranged some time before leaving the island after a fight.

Peter and Paul form the most interesting duality in both this novel and in *J* —, *Black Bam and the Masqueraders* (1972), which is a sequel to *Nor Any Country*. They are fully-fledged doubles in the Dostoëvskyan or Conradian sense. Years ago, when they were boys, Paul seemed the more talented of the two, excelling both in academic and sporting activities, and it was on him that their father pinned his dream of "achievement". But his career was

nipped in the bud when he refused to marry the girl he had made pregnant and consequently lost his job. Now, in the present of the novel, he has retreated within the castle of his skin and adopted a pose of madness as a defence-mechanism in dealing with the world. Peter, of course, has taken over the role it once looked as if Paul would play. His early life followed a very similar pattern to Paul's, but when he made Phyllis pregnant, he married her and quickly escaped and from this point onwards their lives have followed divergent paths.

Ironically, it is Peter, who as a boy preferred masquerade bands to foreign culture, who has achieved metropolitan success and who is now envied by Paul. Paul, in contrast, has now given himself over to a life of masquerading, coming home from his job as a warehouseman in the middle of the morning to don a suit in which to return to work in a kind of absurd parody of his father's mimesis of metropolitan values. But for a full exploration of the masquerade theme, the reader has to wait for *J —, Black Bam and the Masqueraders*.

The dénouement of this novel centres on Peter's resolve to take Phyllis and Paul's young son, Michael, with him to his new life. It is the product of a conversation with Paul and seems to indicate a new awareness of social responsibilities on Peter's part. Nevertheless any suggestion of a romantic happy ending is firmly discounted at the very end when Phyllis's remark that she may be pregnant makes Peter feel he is "listening, in the dark, to a record one had made long ago" (p. 110). In fact, the most significant movement forward at the end of the novel is the arrival of Peter and Paul at mutual understanding, a realization that, though their lives may have become very different superficially, they are finally a complementary pair. It would seem that this is what St. Omer had in mind when he gave them the names Peter and Paul, suggestive either of the "two little dicky-birds sitting on the wall" of the children's nursery-rhyme or of Sts. Peter and Paul, the

patrons of fishermen, whose feast is celebrated in his story "Syrop,"²⁰ another work which juxtaposes two brothers to suggest twin identities.

In *J —, Black Bam and the Masqueraders* Peter and Paul Breville again provide a central duality. Now, however, a much more even balance is achieved between the two than in *Nor Any Country*, where Paul remained a somewhat shadowy figure. The novel alternates between third person accounts of the life of Peter and Phyllis on and around the same campus as that in "The Lights on the Hill" — the periods covered in the two works are roughly contemporary and events alluded to briefly there are dealt with in more detail here — and letters written to Peter from the home island by Paul, who, now reconciled to his brother, attempts to explain the sequence of events, both external and mental, which led up to his assumption of his mask of crafty madness. Structurally the most ambitious of St. Omer's novels in its attempt to sustain these two parallel but separate points of view, *J —, Black Bam and the Masqueraders* is nevertheless his most successful novel. Though the two narrative strands remain unintegrated they serve to enrich one another by counterpoint and finally reach carefully developed conclusions which are, again, but two sides of the same coin. The double structure enables St. Omer to achieve his most probing exploration of the theme of double identity.

Paul's "madness" is now much more fully explained, as he remembers how as a boy he dedicated himself to an ideal of "solid achievement, rather than shoddy façade,"²¹ which is what he regards his father's metropolitan imitation as being. His hatred of his father — "your father" as he always insists on calling him to Peter — has grown with the years, and his father is in turn disappointed with him, but, again ironically, when he was young, Paul was even more oriented towards the metropolis than his father. So his rejection by the island establishment which believes in

“achievement” has represented a complete turning upside down of his value-system.

St. Omer develops this point most tellingly through his use, once again, of masquerade imagery. As a boy Paul, the talented scholar and sportsman, was disdainful of the masquerade band, symbol of the local culture, and preferred to spend his time reading foreign periodicals in the library. After his disgrace this attitude has hardened to a point where, when approached by a lone masquerader and though thoroughly aware of the hypnotic spell of the dance, he has rebuffed him, thus taking up a more extreme position than even his father, who has tossed a coin to the masqueraders. It is a denial of an aspect of himself and also, as St. Omer sees it, a failure to be compassionate towards those trapped in the parodic art forms which are the legacy of the slave society. For in his portrayal of the “mimic men” aspect of West Indian life, St. Omer insists that steel-band and masquerade band are as much colonial offshoots as the more obviously mimetic culture of the middle classes.

Paul realizes this only at the end of the novel through a climactic encounter with “J —”, the lone masquerader whom he has previously rebuffed, and with Black Bam and their band. As in *A Room on the Hill*, the masquerade band is juxtaposed with a Catholic funeral to suggest a basic underlying affinity beneath their superficial differences and Paul makes the link between “serious, uncertain masqueraders” (p. 93) like himself and the more overtly contemptuous J —:

It seemed that I had glimpsed something and that what I had glimpsed concerned me intimately. It was as if I had come face to face with contempt suddenly and for the first time. I who had thought I knew it so well. . . . Was it then that I decided I should become mad? I do not know. But the next morning I did not go to church. Nor have I been since. They say I'm mad. I know it's only that I have chosen a way to live with my confusion and with the pain that results from my inability to resolve it. (pp. 102-103)

So, like John Lestrade, Paul has chosen a life of existentialist anguish, which though it provides little relief from “con-

fusion" and "pain", at least allows a more mature awareness. He has taken a step forward from being a not fully conscious masquerader, like the mother of Patsy, the girl whom he has made pregnant and refused to marry. Patsy's mother has come to him in an attempt to persuade him to marry her daughter. She is a washerwoman for the well-to-do, and Paul regards her as a poor imitation of those for whom she works:

The people she washed for, whose discarded clothes she wore, had always been able to arrange a marriage. I made her, who wore their cast-off clothes, see herself as the cast-off version that she really was of those who had worn them before her.

Months later, when I decided to become mad, it was to preserve my identity whole for myself that I reflected its bits for others to look upon. (p. 93)

So for Paul the pretence of madness is a means of preserving psychic wholeness.

The sections of the novel centred on Peter describe the sterile married life he now is living with Phyllis and his affair with a French woman named Jeannine. Having risen to become a university lecturer, Peter is now an unqualified success in terms of the home island's notion of "achievement", but a picture of himself in academic robes serves only to fill him with a "sense of futility and irrelevance" (p. 92). His state of mind is conveyed through some of the most powerful imagery in St. Omer's work, such as in this passage, which vividly suggests the deathly quality of the life he is leading:

The feel of broken glass remained. The bits were lodged between his gums and the soft lining of his mouth. He gargled once more and felt bits of glass move backward along the line of his gums to his throat. Quickly he spat out. One or two pieces of broken glass fell out with the water. But the remaining bits moved steadily towards the back of his mouth and to his throat. He awoke in a panic. (p. 84)

His overriding problem is that the past which has shaped his life is like the broken glass: one or two pieces may be spat out, but the remainder seem to be moving inexorably towards destruction. He is weighted down by a sense of the

deterministic inevitability of his life and links this to his having been a product of a colonial society:

He thought of the children he and Phyllis had been, untaught to question or examine, expected — trained — merely to obey and to follow in the paths of those who had walked before them, unconcerned with, and ignorant of much of what went on in the rest of the world, depending as their parents had depended before them, on the unquestioned authority of the Church and the Law — a Church and a Law that had not been instituted for them, or by them, had not emerged from their distinctive needs but which, accepting blindly, they had never examined. (pp. 68-69)

It is a view of life remarkably similar to V. S. Naipaul's, that "to be a colonial is, in a way, to know a total kind of security. It is to have all decisions about major issues taken out of one's hands."²² For St. Omer, like Naipaul, West Indian life is all too often poisoned by its mimetic quality and colonialism is primarily a psychological condition.

Both Peter and Paul arrive at this realization, but Peter finds psychological emancipation less possible than Paul. Like Paul he discovers that colonial life is all masquerade. His visit to the opera at the end of the novel parallels Paul's encounter with the masqueraders. Paul comes to understand that "it is only we, the serious, uncertain masqueraders fearful of the laughter of those who observe us who commit excesses" (p. 93); Peter makes a similar identification between different kinds of masqueraders when he visits the opera:

The performers with their period costumes, their naturally black faces, and the abysmally mediocre quality of their performances . . . had reminded him of a picture he had once seen, of slaves celebrating their independence, dressed up in the clothes of those who had enslaved them and who soberly watched them celebrate.²³ (p. 109)

But for him there is no escape into "madness".

J —, Black Bam and the Masqueraders with its two plots and twin endings seems to offer an apt conclusion to the problem of double identity posed in St. Omer's quartet of novels, not through any easy affirmation or negation, but rather through its carefully sustained parallelism, which

suggests the underlying similarities between disparate, double experience. St. Omer's vision, which initially may appear to be defeatist, is in fact a large ironic vision like Naipaul's. His characters are repeatedly seen to be trapped in circular patterns of experience and fossilized situations, unable to be anything other than actors in the universal masquerade, his equivalent of Naipaul's "Cosmic Dance".²⁴ There is no escape for them through particular courses of action, only the anguished emancipation which comes through inner awareness.

NOTES

- ¹A *Room on the Hill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 152. Subsequent references cite this edition.
- ²See Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 40-50; and Michael Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* (London: Longman Caribbean, 1975), pp. xi-xvi.
- ³*Shades of Grey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 193ff. Subsequent references cite this edition.
- ⁴Much of Castries, the capital of St. Lucia, was destroyed by fire in 1948. Cf. Derek Walcott's poem "A City's Death by Fire," *In a Green Night* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), p. 14.
- ⁵Columbus did not visit St. Lucia on any of his four voyages.
- ⁶On St. Omer's "anonymity", see Jacqueline Kaye, "Anonymity and Subjectivism in the Novels of Garth St. Omer," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 10, 1 (August 1975), 45-52.
- ⁷See Gordon Rohlehr's review of St. Omer's first three novels, "Small Island Blues," *Voices*, 2, 1 (Sept.-Dec. 1969), 22-28.
- ⁸*Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 23.
- ⁹For a brief discussion of literature and suicide in the Caribbean, see my article "A Style of Dying," *Guyana Sunday Chronicle* (5 May 1974), 7.
- ¹⁰See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), *passim*.
- ¹¹St. Omer took a French degree at the University of the West Indies, 1956-59.
- ¹²Kenneth Ramchand's phrase, Introduction to *Jane's Career* (London: Heinemann, Caribbean Writers Series, No. 5, 1972), p. xvi.
- ¹³The character Da Silva refers to "the Jekyll-and-Hyde devil" in Stevenson's name: *Heartland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 44. Cf. Mittelholzer's Sylvia's attraction to the Jekyll and Hyde split, *The Life and Death of Sylvia* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953), p. 163.

- ¹⁴After leaving St. Lucia and before going to the University of the West Indies, St. Omer was a secondary schoolteacher in Dominica.
- ¹⁵The Walcott epigraph is from "Crusoe's Island," *The Castaway* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 56. The Shakespeare epigraph is the opening of Sonnet XCVII.
- ¹⁶It is the only one of St. Omer's novels which has two epigraphs.
- ¹⁷*Nor Any Country* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 16. Subsequent references cite this edition.
- ¹⁸"Homecoming: Anse La Raye," *The Gulf* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 50-51.
- ¹⁹*Bim*, No. 50 (Jan. - June 1970), 130.
- ²⁰"Syrop", *Introduction 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. 139-87. In addition to the novels discussed in this article and "Syrop", St. Omer has also published the following fictional pieces, all in *Bim*: "The Meeting" (extract), No. 15 (Dec. 1951), 176-78; "Boy" (extract), No. 20 (June 1954), 261-63; "The Revendeuse", No. 22 (June 1955), 121-25; "The Departure", No. 23 (Dec. 1955), 138-45; and "No Second Chance", No. 24 (Jan. - June 1957), 245-251.
- ²¹J.—, *Black Bam and the Masqueraders* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 32. Subsequent references cite this edition.
- ²²V. S. Naipaul in conversation with Ian Hamilton, "Without a Place," *The Times Literary Supplement* (30 July 1971), 897.
- ²³Cf. a very similar passage in *Shades of Grey*, p. 223.
- ²⁴V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 63. Cf. the closing words of the novel: "I left them all and walked briskly towards the aeroplane, not looking back, looking only at my shadow before me, a dancing dwarf on the tarmac" (*Ibid.*, p. 172 — my italics).