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Being Within and Without:

The Effects of Colonial Education and the Genre of Bildungsroman on Double Consciousness in *Crick Crack, Monkey*

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ABSTRACT

Merle Hodge, the author of *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970) dexterously portrays the maturation of a young girl, Tee, affected by the imposition of European models onto her Trinidadian culture. I argue that this imposition is chiefly advanced through a repressive colonial education, both formal and informal, and manifests in Tee as double consciousness. Tee internalizes the class and race conflicts exacerbated by a pro-British establishment which leads to an identity split that can not be reconciled. Race, class and education are interwoven, turning them from separate concepts to an imperial identity of Britishness which alienates Tee from her own heritage by causing her to view herself as a reflection of this destructive force of colonial power. Additionally, I acknowledge that writing in the genre Bildungsroman sets a different sort of obstacle for Hodge. Writers of the Caribbean novel of maturation exist in a literary limbo--their classification as a Bildungsroman has been heavily contested, thwarting their attempts to rediscover a unique cultural heritage through their writings. The traditions of the Bildungsroman as a nationalistic, patriarchal text yields very different results when placed in the context of a third-world, postcolonial, female-centered novel of development. The use of the Bildungsroman in West Indian literature compounds the effects of racial othering and the imposed infantilization of the colonized people which reflects in the structural components of the genre.

KEYWORDS

West Indian Novel, Caribbean Literature, double consciousness, colonialism, maturation, bildungsroman, development, Trinidad, colonial education, whiteness

In the small town of Curepe, Trinidad in 1944, the author of *Crick Crack, Monkey* was born. The complex history of Trinidad and divisive social issues enabled Merle Hodge to write *Crick Crack, Monkey*, a story told from the perspective of a young girl, Tee, about the obstacles of race and culture facing adolescent Trinidadians during their maturation. Trinidad's battles with colonialism, European domination, and a plantation economy stagnated its development, imprisoning the people of Trinidad in a racially biased and repressive system. Before it gained independence in 1962, Trinidad switched hands many times, from Dutch to English to French rulers, and the imbalance of power in favor of a minority of white colonizers intensified. Merle Hodge tells the story of Tee, fatherless and motherless, being raised amidst a custody battle between her low-class, urban Aunt Tantie, and her elitist Aunt Beatrice. As Tee grows older, she internalizes a culture of dissonance surrounding race and class and eventually rejects her rustic, proletarian roots entirely, moving to England—to whiteness and legitimacy.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, we plainly observe how years of troublesome relations between England and Trinidad transfigure Trinidadians' ability to relate to themselves and to each other, altering their consciousness into a discordant binary. This reflects the notion of double consciousness, a concept which emerged in 20th century African-American literary tradition as many recently freed slaves endeavored to reconcile their African heritage in an oppressive, predominantly white society. However, this same internal duality is experienced by colonized peoples, revealing itself through the warring cultures of indigenous tradition and British imperialism. The experience of West Indian novelists and Black American novelists writing about white hegemony differ in that "while the black American writer's Bildungsroman becomes a platform for protest, the West Indian's operates out of the child's consciousness, thus she is primarily apolitical" (LeSeur 27). The novelists' goals are quite distinct, but both speak to the problem of identification in a cultural system in which they are the minority. Merle Hodge addresses the specific problem of Tee's British eurocentric education displacing her indigenous, Trinidadian heritage.

Crick Crack, Monkey manifests double-consciousness not only in narrative form via Tee's formal and informal education, but in its genre type as a Bildungsroman. This specific novel type traces a person's development into maturity and affects the manifestation of double-consciousness within Tee by placing it within the context of a colonized-colonizer relationship. The effect the Bildungsroman had on nationhood politics, capitalist agendas and modernity is brilliantly summarized by Jed Esty in his book *Unseasonable Youth*. Esty asserts that the Bildungsroman dawned from the European tradition during a

transnational movement to secure a worthwhile form of the nation and become a defined culture--its success depends on the concurrent state of the individual's maturation into adulthood and the embodiment of the nation-state as a political form (Esty 3). In *Decolonizing Genre: Caribbean Women Writers and the Bildungsroman* (1999), Maria Lima identifies the main focus of the classic Bildungsroman as exploring the relationship between experience, subjectivity, and society within a white, male, nationalistic context (Lima 5). The trope of youth and development which is at the core of the Bildungsroman plays into the narrative of stagnant development in the colonized world where the people are forced to be lesser than and subordinate to their culturally opposite oppressors. As Britain becomes a world power, its expansion from a bounded set of peoples to an exploded global network of industrial nations and colonies affects Tee's relation to the nation state (Britain) and thus her narrative framework in the Bildungsroman. In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, I argue, the mode of Bildungsroman exacerbates the already present internal strife generated by Tee's polarized education and constructs an atmosphere of alienation and self-doubt via her forced maturation in an estranged political landscape.

To begin, Tee's colonial education is racialized as well as gendered because it enforces patriarchal male standards of education while completely ignoring indigenous standards of education. Education systems are directly reflective of a culture's values--Tee questions the efficacy of her culture as its people, language, and customs are entirely absent from all institutions of learning. In "This Englishness Will Kill You", Ketu Katrak expands on the feelings of alienation a colonial education produces. He writes:

Colonized people's mental colonizations' through English language education, British values, and culture result in states of exclusion and alienation. Such alienations are experienced in conditions of mental exile within one's own culture to which, given one's education, one un- belongs. (Katrak 63)

Katrak correctly identifies British education as a catalyst for an estrangement from the self as it has been shaped by one culture and the propulsion of the self into another unfamiliar self, shaped by a different culture. In his article "Double Consciousness" (2016), John Pittman determines that double consciousness, as described by famous civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois, describes a sense of a two-ness within a person as well as the psychological challenge of viewing oneself through the lens of another

culture (Pittman). The people of Trinidad have no choice but to understand their life through the experience of British colonialism and English notions of propriety because their education system pushes an exclusively English agenda. While Tee gains knowledge, school presents her with the distinct challenge of engaging with the language of her oppressors in a reality that has been manufactured by that which is alien to her.

White colonialism thrusts an unattainable standard of Britishness upon the people of Trinidad, and that atmosphere of blatant inequality destroys a person's relationship to their identity. The education system sets standards of culture, language, and religion via the lens of European orthodoxy. For example, Tee's fellow classmates at school are systematically conditioned to repeat Christian doctrine without any true understanding of the content of the prayers. The recitation of the "Our Father" prayer demonstrates the flaws with compelled Anglican instruction: "Our father witchartin heavn HALLE owedbethynname THY kingdumkum THY willbedunnunnert azitizinevn" (Hodge 29). The carelessness by which the children are being taught something as significant as religion exemplifies Euro-centric condescension. The savior complex inherent in religious proselytism assumes the subjugated group must be redeemed by the religion of the self-proclaimed superior majority. This type of propaganda carries significantly more weight when the historically privileged group encroaches on the intellectual independence of the minority group, as they do by forcing compliance to their standards of education. Tee reminisces about her introduction into English, musing:

My reading career also began with A for apple, the exotic fruit that made its brief and stingy appearance at Christmastime, and pursued through my Caribbean Reader Primer One the fortunes and circumstances of two British children known as Jim and Jill, or it might have been Tim and Mary. (Hodge 25)

Trinidadians are inculcated to believe that England is their authentic home, calling it the 'Mother country.' However, Tee's experience learning the English language demonstrates the scope of separation between both cultures. Tee is given no tools to bridge this cultural divide, and is crippled by the obscure references to a world entirely unknown to her. The presumption that Trinidadians would absorb a foreign culture is truly ironic. Trinidadians are consistently alienated from British society as well as their native culture by the propagation of Englishness into their non-white realities, which removes from them the

possibility to identify with either population. Interestingly, the Caribbean consciousness understands this subjectivity of experience and brilliantly states that the “same” and the “other” keep changing places, putting forth the idea that one’s relational understanding of their place in the world is not static (Lima 24). While feelings of blackness and whiteness and the implications of these feelings fluctuate, patterns of discrimination produce a binary in which a sense of true belonging and identification is nearly impossible. Furthermore, while Britain desires to have the respect of their inferiors, they present to the inhabitants of Trinidad an imprecise variant of important English notions, calling them to blindly accept and reflect these notions without a proper understanding of their true meaning. This makes for an even more complicated understanding of double consciousness by forcing the colonized person to view himself through a culture that keeps him blind to the true substance of what is being imposed on him.

This confusion is plainly evident as Hodge chooses to present hybrid colonial education through the psyche of a child. For example, Tee says, “I had come to learn that Glory and The Mother Country and Up-There and Over-There had all one and the same geographical location” (Hodge 33). Tee is under the impression that Heaven and Britain are the same place, and furthermore, that Heaven is an actual geographical location. Her British-centered education offers a one-dimensional outlook on the world in which a superior Britain is at the center of the world. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon examines the double consciousness of colonized peoples. Referencing Tee’s unilateral perspective Fanon writes, “Usually, unwilling or unable to choose, these intellectuals collect all the historical determinations which have conditioned them and place themselves in a thoroughly ‘universal perspective’” (qtd in Black 396). This ‘universal perspective’ is the British perspective that pushes itself on a Trinidadian mindset, even though it is quite distinct from the experiences of the native Trinidadians, forcing itself into their psyches under the pretense of universality. Education is the greatest tool of colonization, and as Robert Blauner describes it, exposes “... the manner in which a minority group becomes a part of the dominant society” (396). Conformation is stressed, not merely for its own sake, but to attain a symmetrical society which functions as a whole by suppressing individuals. In a society where there is only room for one truth, the British truth, Tee’s Trinidadian self grows more and more insignificant and is overshadowed, although not completely, by her English self.

The English system of schooling views the pupil as an extension of the British nation, a parcel of a much greater framework which advances rigidity above individual agency. On the contrary, a Trinidadian education is an education about life, culture, and social interactions and focuses on the educative results

of emotional experience. As a Trinidadian, Tee becomes much more attuned to her surroundings and the nuances behind people's actions while gaining practical experience learning to live in a diverse community. The character of Ma embodies Trinidadian culture through the telling of her African 'nancy' stories. Ma is the matriarch of Tee's family, the wise elder whom the children adore. She teaches the kids through adages with an understanding of a child's mindset that is entirely absent from the English style of schooling. For instance, as Ma cooks for the kids, she teaches them about appreciating what they have by saying, "Who ask don't get Who don't ask don't want Who don't want don't get Who don't get don't care" (Hodge 16). Aunt Tantie's yard is directly next to an African compound, where the black working class neighbors live together communally, in service of each other and with mutual cooperation. This atmosphere of community is reflected in Tee's playful childhood as she reminisces: "We roamed the yard and swarmed down to the water and played hoop around the breadfruit tree as if we would always be wiry-limbed children whose darting about the sun would capture like amber and fix into eternity" (Hodge 20). Her life is an amalgamation of people and activities, all warm and lively in their own way, severely contrasting with the austerity of her formal education. Ma also teaches Tee the importance of allowing herself to be fluid, mentioning many times that she believes that the spirit of her grandmother lives within Tee. Ma proclaims, "Tee was growing into her grandmother again, her spirit was in me" (Hodge 21). Ma's belief is characteristic of the Caribbean philosophy that one person can contain within themselves multiple souls. This theology affirms the validity of different viewpoints and embraces the often ambiguous journey in learning about oneself independent of societal expectations, especially in such a politically charged atmosphere.

Contrasting to Ma's style of teaching, Tee's primary school instructor, Sir, abuses his natural influence over his pupils and commands them by being forceful and disparaging of their intellect. Tee writes, "Sir stamped about and roared and banged the whip on the table and on our desks and on us until we could 'gently rise up as with one will'" (Hodge 61). Ma teaches Tee to celebrate her individualism while Sir pushes an agenda of uniformity and homogeneity. Tee rationalizes the brutality of Sir's regime as she has rationalized her black skin in a culture that celebrates whiteness over blackness. By doing this, she pressures herself into conformity over accepting her hybrid personal development. The relationships between the children in Tee's family parallel Tee's own double consciousness—each child is an individual part of a larger, more complete entity, just as each part of Tee must be expressed in order for Tee to be a whole person. The formalness of Tee's British education does the opposite, by stressing rules,

regulations, and conformity to achieve harmony. Tee mistakenly believes she must fit into a category to make sense of herself, which she attempts to do by stifling her blackness in favor of the British ideal of a clean, smart, tidy white girl. Focusing on female socialization under colonialism, Katrak explains Tee's rejection of the self when he writes, "Although Tee's education does not focus on sewing and cooking, it inculcates colonial values that denigrate, even deny her own culture and physical environment"(68). Tee believes her childhood under the carefree, familial presence of Ma and Tantie is a deviation from the "correct" culture, which is imposed on her not just in school, but in her daily life as a colonized person in a white world.

Tee's double consciousness takes an imaginative route of expression with the invention of a new persona, Helen. Helen is the most concrete manifestation of double-consciousness in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, elucidating the consequences of her one-dimensional, racially segregated education. Tee speaks of the comfort books offer her: "Books transported you always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went a-sleighbing and built snowmen... Books transported you always into Reality and Rightness" (Hodge 67). Tee associates truth with a foreign land and a distant culture which she has been taught is superior to her own. She eventually claims that Helen is her "Proper Me. And me, I was a shadow hovering about in incompleteness" (Hodge 68). Tee's consciousness occupies a rather ambiguous sphere where she is too young to recognize the implications behind living in such tumultuous circumstances, yet old enough to be clearly affected by it. The child's psyche cannot imagine having two disparate identities within one person, causing Tee to feel as though she has to make a choice between her black, Trinidadian self and the self that desires to live a typical English life. Stigmatizing the black experience and forcing children like Tee to have a dialogue only with British culture further divides the reader rather than helping him to end his internal self-division (Lima 69). John Pittman observes that the concept of double consciousness "...seems to be a socio-cultural construct rather than a baldly bio-racial given", meaning that the condition is not inherent but rather imposed onto racially 'othered' groups. A perfect example of this imposition is Tee's existence as a young, poor black woman living in a world where her national identity is monitored and filtered by colonial powers. Her identity as a function of all these intersecting experiences manifests into double consciousness, and as a child she expresses this as her alter-ego, Helen. Given that Eurocentric education prescribes that there is a wrong and a right way to exist, Tee adopts this

perspective and begins to view her split identities in terms of right and wrong, eventually invalidating her Trinidadian culture.

Moving further, Tee's education exposes her to racism and class conflicts which complicate her attempts to rediscover her heritage and unify her warring selves. Maria Lima describes the effects of education on racial awareness when she writes of the colonial Bildungsroman: "These novels also reveal the class/color divisions that are a result of colonization, and that education magnifies" (15). Initially, Tee attends a local primary school with other children from her working class upbringing amongst the familiarity of a shared language, heritage, and skin color. In an instance when Aunt Beatrice calls Toddan Codrington, Tee vehemently protests that Codrington is not his name, denying his English name in favor of his Trinidadian name (Hodge 36). However, Tee's passionate defense of Trinidadian life subsides under the overwhelming force of British conventions, and when she is asked by Mr. Thomas what her name is later on in the book, she responds with her English name, Cynthia Davis, instead of referring to herself by her shortened, provincial name (Hodge 64). Tee goes from being a defender of Tantie and the carefree, Caribbean lifestyle of her childhood to assimilating into the upper-class culture, which is undoubtedly the influence of her complete indoctrination under the British colonial system. The lasting impacts of colonization are evident in the prevalence of a racist class ideology and ethnocentrism of the upper-class, evidenced when Tee moves to live with her Aunt Beatrice and attends St. Ann's High School. Aunt Beatrice's racist remarks, such as when she says to Tee, "Yes I know, darling, but you didn't expect her to go to Mass in that niggery-looking dress, did you?", expose a trend in British education which is not only cultural suppression, but racial oppression as well: it's no secret that "the darker you are the harder you have to try" (Hodge 85, 121). Blackness is simply not a valid form of self-expression, and as Tee begins to understand that and assimilate, she truly sees herself through the lens of colonial whiteness. He writes, "We cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our alienation. We have taken everything from the other side. Yet the other side has given us nothing except to sway us in its direction through a thousand twists, except lure us, seduce us, and imprison us" (qtd in Black 397). Fanon describes how colonized people try to liberate themselves but are unable to do so because they remain solely within the colonizer's perspective and not the indigenous perspective. The difficulty arises in overcoming the colonizer's perspective in a colonial system in which Tee has no means of retrieving her past, which even if recovered, would be an inadequate adversary to topple such a profound mental colonization.

As Tee is displaced from her home with Tantie and goes to live with Aunt Beatrice, her capacity to connect with her Trinidadian self diminishes and manifests in her desire to leave Trinidad and move to England to be with her father. In her article “Claiming an Identity: Caribbean Women Writers in English”, author Brenda F. Berrian scrutinizes the psychological torment that forces Tee into “a situation where she finds herself wanting to and/or having to reject her relatives to discover herself” (213). While I agree that Tee does in fact reject her relatives, it is not in an effort to discover herself as she truly is, but to discover only the English parts of herself that conform to Aunt Beatrice’s bourgeoisie expectations. The novel demonstrates Tee’s gradual alienation from her Caribbean culture, which she mourns when she says, “I had moved up and no longer had any place here. But it was painful” (Hodge 122). Hodge uses the specific vocabulary of ‘up’ to describe her new place in society, exhibiting the effectiveness of Aunt Beatrice’s propaganda in convincing Tee that the white British culture is superior to the one of her childhood. Tee’s move to England demonstrates a reconciliation with patriarchy and the imposed underdevelopment of Trinidadian society by the patriarchy. Tee unconsciously validates white hegemony and the repressive system which stunted her personal growth and infantilized her, perpetuating instead of alleviating her internal strife, removing her further and further away from any possibility of reuniting with her former self.

Though the specific figures of the Bildungsroman differ from nation to nation, the conventional aspects of the Bildungsroman do not. In its traditional expression, the Bildungsroman follows the psychological development of its protagonist into adulthood, wherein he assimilates into the social order as an example of a virtuous “good citizen” (LeSeur 28). Identity is greatly associated with gender, as the Bildungsroman genre was written by male theorists, depicts male protagonists in a white, European context and “often ignore(s) gender, race, class, nationality, location, and sexuality” (Lima 3). Therefore, the postcolonial West Indian Bildungsroman rebels against the limitations posed by the Bildungsroman and explores the validity of presenting itself as a transformed rather than a flawed manifestation of the Bildungsroman. Tee serves as the central figure of our post-colonial novel, and demonstrates that the presentation of the key qualities of the Bildungsroman, such as nation-building and the rise of selfhood, can not occur conventionally in a post-colonial context, specifically because both the nation and the self have been compromised by outside forces. Jed Esty explains that “nations contain and naturalize the problem of uneven development by appeal to a common culture, language and destiny” (26). The nation as a concept collapses with the emergence of colonial societies, with different social experiences and

colonial histories outside of the global, capitalist market from which the European model of the nation emerges. As England dominates Trinidad, this appeal is lost, and what is introduced instead is a restrictive, foreign culture which attempts to subvert the relationship between the colonial subjects and their homeland. There is no nation for the people of Trinidad—what was once their nation has been corrupted and forced out of their consciousness, and thus the narrative framework of the Bildungsroman problematizes the idea of identity and how to achieve it in a colonial world.

National-historical time bounds the people of Trinidad within a patriarchal mindset that eliminates the female voice from nationhood and selfhood. Merle Hodge and other female bildungsroman writers push back against this very strongly by upending traditional gender roles. Lima presents the ideological battle between colonizer and colonized in gender theory by writing, “Colonized nations, moreover, have frequently been represented by Europeans as ‘female’ requiring ‘paternal governance’ by the dominant power, while the movements towards nationalism and independence have been primarily male-centered” (19). In *Crick Crack, Monkey* England is always mentioned in terms of femininity, often being referred to as the Motherland rather than the fatherland. It is a popular concept, one that reflects in the West Indian novel’s celebration of female and maternal relationships as well as “a troubling of the marriage plot”, which is evident from Aunt Tantie’s free and liberal interactions with men (Esty 23). Tee, and other protagonists like her who have no paternal figures and instead rely entirely on women and their communities for spiritual fulfillment, depict a sort of transplanted nationhood which rejects colonial paternity in favor of the emphasis on the nation as a maternal force of community. Tee can not connect to her English “motherland” and so constructs a physical reality that she can relate to surrounded by actual women who care for her. The development of the nation is meant to parallel the development of the individual, Tee, even though individuality and self-sufficiency are not characteristics that are associated with colonized people and especially women (Lima 115).

Additionally, Tee does not follow many of the trends of the Bildungsroman precisely because of the material and educational impoverishment she has been born into. “Education functions as an agent of socialization,” writes Lima, “enabling the protagonist to choose, to accept or reject the values he is presented with” (44). Tee is without agency and power to accept or reject her imposed cultural values. The rejection of these cultural values traps her in a low-class mindset which cuts her off from success, and adherence to the norms thrust upon her disavows the validity of her own culture. Tee has no access to selfhood in the method prescribed to her by the European Bildungsroman, because the culture of

conformity denies Tee the right to be an individual and to act upon her desires. The postcolonial Bildungsroman seeks a sense of wholeness in a society which puts Englishness and Trinidadianess in oppositional categories. Maria Lima points out that “in these novels the ‘native’ occupies the positions of both the ‘self’ and ‘other’”, which reveals a fragmentation of the self and an ‘othering’ which results from the forced development of colonial countries, not only geopolitically but emotionally as well (Lima 24). There is no model of hybridity for Tee to follow, as the construction of the mutually exclusive categories is part of her colonization and her British education. As we “explore intersections of colonialism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism in contexts that almost prevent access to the ‘selfhood’ the genre has claimed to be possible”, the answer to the question of mediating between two apparently opposite selves does not lie in the conventions of the Bildungsroman, but rather in the careful examination of the flaws of the genre (Lima 14).

Although double consciousness has long been viewed as strictly an African-American concept, it has applications to many different cultures, including the Trinidadian culture as shown through the main character of Tee. Instead of attempting to reconcile her double consciousness into a complete identity, the force of an overwhelming British middle-class makes Tee ashamed of her second self, coercing her into accepting one consciousness over the other. Tee falls victim to colonial suppression of her native culture and escapes Trinidad for the Motherland, England, repressing her double consciousness. This novel demonstrates the unfortunate reality of many people in the Caribbean, a people who assume one culture and inhabit another mentality to fit into a society that has been forced unto them. The colonial system of education prevents access to ambiguity and, for Tee, the possibility of understanding her contradictory feelings as a valid form of self-expression. The use of the genre of Bildungsroman in West Indian literature is perhaps an ironic one, but its connection between the nation and the self was attractive to a displaced people. The question for the modern postcolonial Bildungsroman is one of decolonization and the retrieval of their ‘authentic’ cultural systems. At some point, colonial history and British history merges, creating an entirely new nation and understanding of the individuals that live in such dynamic circumstances. Tee’s colonial education as well as the genre of Bildungsroman prioritizes singularity and absolutes; Tee’s struggle for reconciliation of her double-consciousness will come when she rejects these absolutes and strives for her own truth within, rather than from systems that seek to regulate and appropriate her process of maturation.

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