

*Review*

# **Ambivalent identity and self repatriation in the plot characterisation of selected black auto/biographical novels**

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Literature of the Black Diaspora locates within its multi-layered gamut, a kaleidoscope of artistic productions; self-narratives careered by the quest for identity and self-expatriation from a ruthless atmosphere of slavery and racial subjugation. Studies have fixated on thematic preoccupation, language form in works of Afro-American and Caribbean traditions. Not so much has been explored especially on identity and journey motifs in the autobiographical novels of both traditions. This study seeks to interrogate novels from both climes for the purpose of foregrounding the signposts of journey through plot characterisation. For the purpose of this study on plot character reading of novels of the two literary traditions, we shall deploy aspects of Aderemi Raji-Oyelade's reading kinesis, a character theory which hinges on two axioms of character kinesis. One privileges the reader who attempts to construct a network of transformative acts of the main character negotiating a conscious retrieval of his/her presence in the text. The other is the kinetic dimension which underlines the function of the character as he/she evolves in a process of motion introducing, confirming or contradicting and ultimately completing the image of the self. Characters' movements towards awareness are evident in V.S Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*, Michael Anthony's *A Year in San Fernando*, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. These texts were subjected to critical analyses to show their identarian aesthetics informed by character transmutability. All the texts evince a great degree of the kinetic reader's locomotive sense of self struggle and realization gleaned from the characters' textual kinesis. Literature of the Black Diaspora, drawing from two major traditions of prose writings, employs similar aesthetic rendering of the self; that is, their ordeals in the excruciating environment where their colour confines them to the receiving side of the yoke of second class citizenry.

**Key words:** Identity, self-narrative, Afro- American- Caribbean traditions, reading kinesis.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Forced and voluntary migrations have given shape to artistic representations as well as critical ordering and re-ordering. Black literature of the Diaspora cannot be untangled from the thread of struggle, self-assertion and cultural survival in a new home simmered in dehistoricisation and cultural abrogation. Slavery and

barefaced racism were the attendant nightmares for blacks who were forcefully transported from Africa during the Atlantic slave trade. In 1619, James Town in Virginia was the first historical abode of the twenty slaves who turned out indentured labourers working on the American plantation. Slavery is the single most premeditating factor

from which black literature evolved. Corroborating this, Butcher, 1956 avers that:

*Slavery introduced into the very hearts of Blacks, a crucial dilemma whose resultant problems with their progressive resolutions account for many fateful events in Black history and for most of the characteristic qualities of Black culture.*

The psychological trauma that followed this altered the lives of blacks. Black representations came through literature and several other art forms rooted in the black vernacular that became the quest media for self-re-inscription into the fabric of black identity and cultural survivalism of post-slavery era.

The reality is that rootlessness and homelessness in their strange home created in the blacks a search for their home where there is physical and spiritual harmony. The journey motif is to this literature the steel that makes its presence undeniable.

Literary scholars have asserted that the journey motif is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it is one of the most common features in literature; from the quest narrative, the picaresque, to the American western autobiographical works.

To affirm its overreaching character, one readily recalls Vladimir Propp, the Russian scholar among the earliest to stamp its recurrence in literature. The motif is resonant in Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). The tale in this book of folktale is predicated on the hero's quest to fulfil a particular desire informed by lack. Like Vladimir Propp, Stout (1983) examines the journey narrative in American literature and states that our (Sic) fiction is instructional to clarify that literature of the Black Diaspora cannot be separated from physical and mental migration (journey motif) as it is upon this recurrent phenomenon that the literature finds its life.

Literature of the Black Diaspora always tries to record the quest of characters and here in particular the blacks, like it does with other fictional characters. Many fictional texts dramatise this pattern of quotidian repatriation; Zora Neale Hurston, in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942), brings to our view, the refraction of her life especially of her preference for career over marriage.

The earlier classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, relates self-assertion and black womanhood. It chronicles a story of a young black woman in search of her true self to achieve genuine happiness; this is for the woman whose eyes on the real focus.

In the novel, one finds most in evidential spread, signposts of spatial and mental journeying, as Janie's

marriage to an old man captures the emotional and physical dimensions of heroine in particular.

Angelou (1986), *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, also a self-fictional representation of a trajectory of physical and psychological quest for assertion, situates within black identity and journey motif and reflective of double burden for a world stifled by racism and female otherness. The heroine faces more intense physical and psychological upset as first a woman and a black woman in particular. This black character's experiences are connected to journey motif as many of such narratives conspicuously relate. In the words of Fanon, the earnest search for self and cultural affirmation has yielded in exactitude:

*The corrosive element all that comes near them, the deforming element disfiguring all that has to do with white beauty and morality, the despository of maleficent powers and the unconscious irretrievable element of blind forces (Fanon, 1963: 32).*

Fanon's view hinges on a counter discourse of cultural elitism that has perpetrated lopsided racial subjugation against the blacks. There is to this end, an attempt at cultural retrieval, seen here as identity repatriation from the condescension of the black personality and to the appropriate undistorted truth about black historiography rooted in nobility rather than the ignominy configured by the white man.

Literature of The Black Diaspora assumes the satellite for the artistic rendering of identity search and cultural recuperation. This essay, against this backdrop, explores struggle, identity and cultural survival in purposively selected self-fictional text through the Raji-Oyeladean plot and characterization model. It foregrounds the discourse of identity careered through journey motif in the novels that have been drawn from the African American and Caribbean traditions.

### Plot of characterization

Characters in fiction occupy space. They negotiate boundaries and leave their impressions of characterisation; in effect, especially for the hero they determine the logic of narratology. Thus, it is the centrifugal force and the kinetic feature of character portraiture. Raji-Oyelade (1993) argues that all human actions are closely tied and seconded by the cohering powers of the plot within which the living unfolds. Fictional personages are active agents in the progression

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of plot. Plot, conceived critically, is predicated on the principle of causality, and it is the organic locomotive kernel upon which thoughts, deeds and setting find their eloquence in a narrative venture. There is to a litmus sense, the idea that the plot is the nucleus of the narrative art. It is upon this premise that we shall examine and explore the portals of kinesis revealed in plot of black characterisation towards foregrounding the pervasive journey motifs in the quest towards self-canonisation.

### **A psycho-kinesic exploration of plot and character configurations in Caribbean and Afro-American auto/biographical narratives**

Naipaul's *House A for Mr. Biswas* (1961) is woven around the facts of his father's life. It is predicated on the protagonist's earnest desire to have a house/shelter of his own. This is symbolic of an attempt of a person's need for identity (re)configuration.

Mohan Biswas universalizes a character traversing temporal and spatial limitations, in an attempt at creating a recognisable abode that marks his individuated ruptures of the self.

Each section deals with varying locomotive stages of Mr. Biswas' life. All through the plot, his character flagellates his struggle in jobs from sign painter to journalist. The story hybridises humour and pathos in exploring a man's quest for anatomised self. This search for self-sovereignty is a reflection of post-colonial Trinidad.

A house for Mr. Biswas, thus exemplifies a movement across the historiographical axes of imperialism, indenture, experiences of migration and dislocation with respect to Trinidad. It most aptly suggests fully charged changes of life in Trinidad; a kinetic foray through the plot of characterization of Mr. Biswas would reveal this much. The protagonist, Mr. Biswas is well developed and he lives in the world of ingenious characters amidst exhaustive characterology. On the background societal compass of Naipaul's writing, Deodat avers:

*The stagnant decaying Hindu world; the poverty and chaos of the Greek society; and the painful struggle of one man to rise above both are all rendered with the authenticity that only historical truths will allow and the artistry that only a truly talented writer can generate.*

In the light of its psychoanalytic form, it is inferred that the repressed chaos in his disintegrating society finds its eruption:

*At first I looked for this release in humour, but as the horizon of my writing expanded, I sought to reconstruct my disintegrated society to impose order in the world (...) this is what happens when people are strong: this is what happens when people are weak. I had to find that degree*

*of intellectual comfort or I would have gone mad (59).*

What seems observable in the character exhibition in Naipaul's novel is "characterology" to borrow Aderemi Raji-Oyelade's parlance which suggested here as the fissive reconfiguration of the self. This means that he reproduces himself in his characters as they evince dynamics of his "emotions and traits" (Adams, 1989).

The novel careers the lives of the typical Caribbean people in their abject condition and unfurls by progressive denial of revolutionary twist that will result in quality life for them and further, unfurled by progressive denial of revolutionary twist that will result in quality life for the people. Kumar and Naj (2013) contend that Naipaul presents a space in which his characters move and feel a sense of unease, a sense of not belonging at home or in the vocabulary of novel which they say Naipaul (2003) calls "familiar temporariness". What is evident in Kumar and Naj assertion is the progressive and not the static longing and quest for "rootedness" as against rootlessness.

In the movement of the plot what is similarly construed, is that his characters embody a kind of "paranoia or neurosis" of the primordial repertoire of past failures, madness, despondency and rootlessness. One sympathises with Mr Biswas as he is trapped in a web of despair and defeat occasioned by his awareness. This is captured in:

*Everything he now saw became sullied by his fear, every field, every house, every tree, every turn in the road (...) so that by merely looking at the world, he was progressively destroying his present and his past (Naipaul, 2003).*

The house is the most iconic symbol and it signifies a reaching for physical and spiritual home. "The need of shelter is shared as much by the Hindus and Creole society as by Mr. Biswas himself" (Ramchand, 1996).

The metaphor of the house as the search of Mr Biswas suggests, is a keen desire for the untangling tapes of social restriction or "peripheralness" in life. Kumar (2008) opines that a house might well be a metaphor of the existentialist journey through life as well as symbol of the fatalistic Indian philosophy.

The plot progression which captures Mr. Biswas' dogged attempts at the construction of his own house away from Tulsi's abode is a journey away from repudiation of, and dependence on another, to a reconfiguration of an identity that is untingered in the unwitting cosmetics of a renewed selfhood.

The novel in its kinetic pattern voyages into social historiography, as it relays too, the mental conflicts between Mr. Biswas and the different cosmos of the fiction.

From the plot exposition, Mr. Biswas is cast in a repressive light in the narrow landscape of Trinidad. His first phase of life is designated pastoral. Biswas is very

much aware of his physical unattractiveness and so broils in self-jest so that no weight of mockery from the outside unsettles him. Defence mechanism is rife here as a psychological cover for what could rattle his ego.

In spite of his need for family social steel, he continues to maintain aloof individuality in a bid to craft a new social niche for himself. His aspirations remain still-birthing in the course of a certain plot character unfolding. In his awareness of his desolation and his predicament, he tells his son, "I am just somebody. Nobody at all" (Naipaul, 2003).

This way, Mr. Biswas retains the "nobodiness" when compared to identifiable "labourers", their inherited social nomenclature or identity. Here too, there is a sign of repression and eruption of stored energies of unfulfilled desires to achieve an identity that is whole and rooted.

Mr. Biswas becomes his uncle's shopkeeper at the time his brothers work as labourers. After he abandons his uncle's shop, he takes up a job as a sign painter. The social mobility is marked as shifting individuation. Many blacks, basically experience the constant switch from one job to another. It was in his new job that he meets Shama, a daughter of the Tulsis. He marries Shama and in this marriage, he experiences the reality of the responsibility that it brings. Still very much at the economic edge, he settles for a life shelter in Hanuman's house without dowry. Hanuman's house is not without an apt cavalier portraiture, as depicted:

*(...) Hanuman house stood like an alien white fortress. The walls looked as thick as they were and when the narrow doors of Tulsis store on the ground floor were closed, the House became bulky, impregnable and blank. The side walls were windowless and on the upper floor the window were more slits in the facades (Naipaul, 2003: 81).*

Hanuman is a prison of Mr. Biswas' self-will, self-discovery and fulfillment. He is a soul yearning for self-restitution. Mr. Biswas arrives at self-knowledge of the subtle expressive cold treatment he receives from the Tulsis while he is not unloosened from their apron's string as he always requires his submission and appreciation for their sheltering benevolence.

The plot again in the second section swings to Chase, where Mr. Biswas starts his family life with Shama. In Chase, he feels the unwelcoming air but remains optimistic that life will help construct for him, a definite identity, but he soon fails at this. He becomes increasingly sequestered from people when he fails in his efforts at self-retrieval. The journey to attain selfhood remains aborted in yet another flight towards a defining or defined identity.

Mr. Biswas feels that in Hanuman, housing his half-throttled image as mimic man is more acceptable to being totally submerged and alienated. Naipaul, perhaps, dramatises the larger structure from which an individual evolves.

Thus, for the individual identity to emerge, the collective is ideally pivotal. For Mr. Biswas, life without Shama is a nightmare; his children and even the Tulsis acquire significance as he goes to Hanuman house more frequently than he realistically would not have gone.

Life at Green Vale intensifies his sadness. Although Green Vale provides him with decent sense of freedom and significance, he soon slumps as insecurity pervades both his physical and mental spheres. This is clearly evinced in:

*He waved the stick. He moved to the window and looking at her waving the stick he began to draw the bolt. Don't touch me, he bawled and there were sobs mixed with his words (...). He began screaming and crying. He pressed his palms on the windowsill and tried to hoist himself up (...)* (Naipaul, 2003: 288).

To have a home trickles into the imagination of Mr Biswas and he begins to take realistic form as he begins the building of his house in Green Vale but it is nowhere near the house of his dream. Thus, solitude and alienation deepen, as he fails to construct a long sought identity of self and recognition for himself.

The second section of the novel captures Port of Spain, a physical space with vistas of professional opportunities that he earnestly had sought but eluded him. He soon becomes a reporter for the "Trinidad Sentinel" with a monthly pay of fifteen dollars. This job brings to him a sense of respect from the Tulsis too.

The relationship with Mrs. Tulsis takes a positive turn as hostility ceases from both sides. He temporarily drops the idea of self-image orchestration. His brief happiness, however, turns sour in Trinidad; Sentinel is taken over by a new proprietor. Seths falls out too with Tulsis and Mrs. Tulsis' decision to live in short hills comes as terrible upset to him. There comes with this, a twist in the hierarchy of the Tulsis' family that had long endured domestic upheavals; and after the return of Owad, there is a more dose of disintegration.

The incident that involves Owad slapping Anand keeps the plot of the novel on the wheel of kinesis as Anand tells his father that they must move. He cannot bear to live here another day (Naipaul, 2003). The familiar journey of humiliation that pervades Mr. Biswas' life from childhood stirs in him the sympathy for the familiar terrain his son plies.

He is, therefore, shaken by his son's appeal that they leave the Tulsis. Eventually, there seems to be a certain sun on the rubble as Mr. Biswas secures a loan from Ajodha and purchases a house in Port of Spain. Here is his view about the house:

*"The sun came through the open window...woodwork and frosted glass was hot to touch. The inside of the brick wall was warm. The sun went through the house and laid dazzling stripes on the exposed staircase"* (Naipaul, 2003: 572).

Naipaul deployment of the image of the sun and the awe inspiring adjective “dazzling” all suggest his delight and the sense of accomplishment he feels. All the masks of dejection and solitudes as a result of “floatiness” in identity come off with this piece of finding the icon of the split self, a house for a fusion. Of course, there is the merging of a floating self with its skin so that in it, a new individual with a definite, concrete self comes out.

The sun starts setting on him at forty six; his struggles are finally receding. The man of an obscure background has achieved, however little, the success permitted by his confining environment. He therefore leaves this scene for his children to steer their course of fate:

*“There was nothing Mr. Biswas could do but wait. Wait for Anand, wait for Savi, wait for the five years to come to an end, wait, wait” (Naipaul, 2003).*

The death of Mr. Biswas therefore remarks the certain de-stasis in the plot of the novel. He dies at the moment of pleasurable company with his daughter as he has achieved one, albeit, tortuous victory in life.

As Kumar (2008) also argues “a house is not just a matter of getting shelter from heat, cold or rain. In fact, it is both imposition of order and a carving out of authentic selfhood within the heterogeneous and fragmented society of Trinidad”.

The struggle and strife as a recurrent motif in the novel reside with Mr. Biswas. It also envelops other characters such as Shelch and Owad and it does not also exclude his children. Although Mr. Tulsī’s two sons have the security of enlightenment that education brings, they are not comfortable as those little children think. Shekhar, like Mr. Biswas, joins his wife’s family in their home. This position brings to parallel ties the rootlessness shared by characters in this floating world, nearly perpetually slippery.

Owad, Shekhar and Anand remain in the web of poverty as they face alternating choices whether to remain the constructed identity of their family and go into obscurity or embrace and reconfigure their separate places in the new world. Mr. Biswas is left situated between his genuine self and his clan Trinidad society. “Mr. Biswas’ desire for selfdom and his keen battle to ensure accommodation and necessity are the central movements of the novel” (Deodat, 1979). Through Anand’s character, Naipaul’s novel is an exploration of the West Indian who has achieved educational and financial success but who is still psychologically burdened by his broken, inglorious heritage (Greenberg, 2000: 78). In conclusion, we find Naipaul’s narrative a plot characterization of Mr. Biswas, the coloured character who in his kinetic wheel negotiates spaces in an earnest search for self-freedom within a Caribbean society whose wholeness is ruptured by hegemonic grip of the West. The radar follows the reader through this circuit of self-journeying, the empathetic string is sustained till denouement.

Similarly, Michael Anthony’s novel, *The Year in Fernando* (1965) chronicles a fraction (one year) in the life of a twelve year old boy who departs his village Mayaro, for the city, to take up a servant role in the house of Mrs. Chandles. The story of this boy shares similitude with Anthony’s life in the year he spent in San Fernando, from after the Christmas celebration that spans from 1943 to the one before 1944 when he was twelve too. His narrative is striking as there are no signposts of his adult awareness filtering into his attempt at his vivid recollection of that significant slice of his childhood experiences. The first person perspective entirely entombed in the voice of a child runs through the narrative course of the novel. Ramchand (1996) locates the source from which the novel’s irony stems: “*We had heard only very little about Mr. Chandles. The little we had heard were whispers and we did not gather much, but we saw him sometimes leaning over the barrister of the forestry office and indeed he was as aristocratic as they said he was. He looked tidy and elegant and he always wore jacket and tie, unusual under the blazing sun. These things confirmed that he was well off, and his manner and hearing, and the condescending look he gave everything about him, made us feel that he had gained high honours in life*” (Anthony, 1996).

The plot lays bare the thread of Francis’ character, as with infant innocence, he chronicles his story uncritical and unbiased of any undercurrent signification. This is semblance to Lamming George’s 1970 intention in his; *In the Castle of My Skin* which is to suggest the essential outlines of the typical boyhood in a west Indian community that is growing painfully like four boys in the novel into political self-awareness; and his concern to suggest the complex shifting in the community at large, at times, takes precedence over any notion of fidelity to the boy’s consciousness (The West Indian Novel and its Background, 207).

Through narrative locomotion, particularly, on a bus taking him home, Francis in the final paragraph verbally externalises the shades of thought criss-crossing his mind:

*I closed the window because the rains were almost pairing down now. I sat down easily and there was a lot of talking inside the bus. It was easy to sit with the windows closed and the rains pouring and the bus speeding along the wet road. The talking was cheerful. I remembered the mountain and suddenly I looked back but all the windows were closed because of rains. The bus roared on and my mind went on Mrs. Chandles, who was dying, and Mr. Chandles. So strange of late, and now homeless; and I thought of Edwin and that dollar. I thought of all the mixed up things, of all the funny things in fact, which made the year at Romaine Street (Anthony, 1996).*

We do not situate Michael Anthony’s novel within any

political thematic construct as pervasive with such autobiographical pieces which Caribbean atmosphere ought to reflect the social ferment brewed by racial subjugation or identity fragmentation. Many reviewers against this background posit that the novel is less significant as they think it does not straddle social message as deemed appropriate.

Conversely, it is inferred that the significance of the plot of characterisation hinges on subtle orchestration of meaning as Michael Anthony's moving tale of open consciousness, serves to leave interpretative quotient to the adult reader. He does not in any way give the impression that Francis is mature and consequently attains self-awareness. So, we see from his narration of his life at San Fernando, cryptic dimension of his life which he unconsciously kills:

*My eyes looked out on Celesta Street but it was not the lit up panes I was seeing now. Dejection swept upon me. Now at this hour I was suffering for them in need of home. Now I felt as a prisoner in this giddy town....* (Anthony, 1996).

In the universe of the novel lies the progression of the plot in which the child narrator, Francis, gives the silent echoes of his indentured identity that he is less aware of, as he is but a child who openly recalls the consciousness he recounts and apparently does not experience traumatized bouts in. His innocence in other words is yet tainted. The reader may suggest that Francis' identity outside Mayaro San Fernando is deflated. The mother on visiting Francis after a year soon comes on an inauspicious incident that makes the visit which ought to create a pleasurable twist in the mind frame of Francis. The lasting impression and the aspiration of Francis are botched by Mrs. Chandles' attitude.

The incident soon crystalizes on the infant bed of playfulness as the pavement along Romaine Street becomes a replacive scenery of childhood excitement. The characterisation of Francis symbolically may relate to the West Indies who have been enmeshed in the colonial environment, recall sometimes their roots but embrace the pleasures of the moment of virtual reality.

The child narrator is depicted to travel across space. This journey is both physical and mental. This particularly explains mental voyage taken by him:

*My heart was burning for home. For a moment I felt like crying out, but at that moment of greatest pain my mother's voice came back to me. It was as if she is here and talking* (Anthony, 1996).

As the quotation here reveals, the candid recollections are substituted for journey. This is clearly delineated as a propelling consternation of a desire to return to the original home. The character appears like one a cuddling the root home from another disconnected home where bewilderment of its strangeness is the attendant reaction

to the temporal abode. George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, evinces how tyrannical the colonial ferment is in Barbados:

*In every corner of the school the tricolour union jack flew its message. The colonies thought three in number had by constant repetition produced something vast and terrible, a kind of pressure or presence of which everyone was a part* (36).

George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953) is to a great degree a narrative that exhibits the quest for self-recovery.

The novel is couched in the mold of bildungsroman or an autobiography. This is because it relates the journey from infantile innocence of the protagonist G to adult awareness. It is instructive to note that the novel does not only explore the story of an individual childhood but also focuses on the more resounding intention of the insurrection of the colonial grip in the community that seeks to unskin the fragile cloak of childhood.

In other words, the novel fictionalises the community's quest albeit, through an individual character desires to grow within the repressive actions of colonial government.

We found in Lamming's novel, an artistic portraiture of the locomotion; the physical and mental of the community conflated into the individual who seek route, out of the imperialist constriction of self-will and collective cultural sovereignty. The autobiographical stature of the novel is hinted at:

*Indeed, the book itself enacts a similar dynamic: just as G. seeks to develop a viable personal identity amid the confining restraints of colonialism, so too does Lamming seek a viable mode of cultural expression amid a tradition dominated by European models.*

G. the fulcrum of narrativisation is embroiled in a restrictive and frosty colonial environment. This novel is some portraiture of national awakening in Barbados even as in exile they recreate in their homes.

Lamming's fiction weaves historical and social wrangling of peasants in Barbados specifically and blacks in general. G, novelistic de-stasis is the growth of West Indian society emerging from the yoke of slavery into a society unburdened by freedom.

In comparison, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* runs parallel to the character unfolding in Lamming's autobiographical fiction. The society in Lamming's narrative revolves around G. that represents a society in transition and the struggle for identity, history and race, made obvious in the lives of people Lamming tries to artistically reproduce.

Lamming's G is molded by experiences. These experiences are provided for him and his family. Religion, the gang, school, the politics of the time, and childhood as Lamming shows are sad and insane for G.

The typical recognition of Mr. Slime as Black Jesus is a reflection of a journey into the scriptural world of indoctrination. Mr. Slime is viewed as “a kind of Black Jesus” (167). The establishment of the Penny Bank and the friendly society contributes to the kinesis character of the novel as the people aspirations are shown in the peasant life of G.

Religion offers G's criminality a sort of protection. He refuses the lure of integration into the religious body. This body demands that G takes a new form. This scares him as their identity as constructed by G is repressive and he fears and reflects on the invitation of rebirth in Christ.

Religion to the children is devoid of such deeper commitment in its pragmatic nature but they soon come to the discovery of the landlord's place. The party at which the landlord hosts the expatriate sailors is seen by Boy Blue as the next word:

*Tis like a next world, the music an “the drink and all than, a particular way they hold on to one another” (In the Castle, 173).*

The awareness that occurs in landlord's garden brings them into his scheme. The prayer group that the boys refused to join becomes their hideout. They by this, reach the awareness of the criminal roles they take up but find the experience rather delighting and no thought ruse for a change. By escaping into the prayer group, what Lamming re-echoes is Karl Marx's praxis “religion is the opium on the masses”. They through this escape strife and suffering imposed on them by their will to inscribe themselves to the zone of comfort that has eluded them.

Religious identity as Lamming fictionalises is couched in logical statement. It is rather hypocritical to temporarily escape into religion which falls short of permanent respite, solace or comfort but reprieve for only the moment.

*In the Castle*, education of children does not incorporate the history of slavery. This stifles the child identity as he takes subjugation without questioning it. This form of education affects the unprotesting child and perpetually keeps him dependent without his sense of perception for freedom and independence shaped.

It is instructive that G is instigated to stone the headmaster and becomes a hero. He carries this out and his innocence makes him confused and in the end, he does that get punished and he does not complain.

In the *Castle of my Skin* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is both a bildungsroman and kuntlesroman. These novels trace the development of individuals from innocence to awareness and the growth of the artists through apprenticeship to vivid manifestation of their creative dimension.

Lamming very much like James Joyce's in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, borrows the device of the epiphanies. An epiphany has three dimensions and therefore calls for a transformation. Atherton avers that, “an epiphany is that moment when a thing gains

significance”. It could perhaps, be when a person made remark which displays his true character when he is as we say “gave him away”.

In another sense it may suffice a sudden realization or revelation unpremeditated which as Gerald Manly Hopkins sees “when one part of the veil shrouding the mystery of the world was suddenly drawn aside for a moment, and the true meaning of an object revealed...” (guld in Atherton XII). In Christian belief, it is the period when God manifests himself: the epiphanies in the novel are however more of group experiences than personal ones. Lamming's G's transforming knowledge, his realisation of his identity stem from Boy Blue, a member of his gang at the moment, of his expansion to the development of awareness in individuals, Boy Blue has it that:

*You never know as you yourself say when something go off pop in your head and you ain't the same man you think you were, you start to do and say things which you know is true but it seem it ain't you doing and saying them... A thing goes off your head pop pop, an' yours a different man. You ain't the same sort of person everybody is. You start to feel that there's nobody like you, I don't mean that you'll get great, and don't want to speak to anybody. I don't mean that at all. I mean you'll get the feeling there ain't no other man like yourself, that you is you, so to speak, on there can't be any other you. You start to believe you see things nobody else sees, and you think things nobody else think, and that sort of thing can take you far, far; boy, You'll get so lonely it would be a shame...(142 to 143).*

Boy Blue's explication of the paradoxical brine of transfiguration which alters one's identity permanently is so apt. In Boy Blue's long talk, the journey motif, the transmutability of identity unfolding through the phases—childhood/innocence to adulthood/maturity is resonant.

His discovery of his own identity as he further hints comes from what his mother earlier told him about the need to develop his own mind. It is instructive that G discovers his own identity through the experience of the buried pebble. Boy Blue and G's mother put him on this path of retrieval of self.

The pebble is a representation for distinct individuality or the self. The buried pebble depicts the loss, the change and the phasing off of the old self for the present awareness of the “new” metamorphosed self. The pebble brings to resolution the conflict G feels from within, about his journey away from Greighton to Trinidad. The buried pebble is connected to the hero's endurance of Trumper's departure and movement into America, while Boy Blue and Boy remain in the village to join the police force.

What symbolises the different directions is the disappearance of the pebble which further hints at the brevity of the gang. The two crabs, intercourse in Lamming's fictional universe acquire a heightened

signification. It unwittingly questions human institution of marriage as disrupting the natural flow of human life.

Marriage is seen as fraught with hypocrisy. Crabs as against Bambi and Bamina affair stands as a reference point. For the crabs evince "absolute togetherness". This is an iconic mockery of social hierarchy that exists in the West Indian society.

Apart from coming to terms with their society, the boys now understood the beauty of crab's eyes from the outside:

*"We would find no colour for the eyes. They were so pretty. Not ready. Not red or green..."(128).*

What this serves to suggest is that the scale of unawareness has fallen off their eyes and the resultant effect is a vision of beauty in objects surrounding them.

This illustrates that Red Indians see beautiful things if their mind's eyes are not shut to see the pleasant in a sordid environment of repression of self will. G. perceives a new identity in Trumper when he returns from America.

This feeling makes him anticipate the privileges of adult life. Trumper reveals the rather transformational exigency of his journey to America, where he seeks self-discovery:

*'My people,' he said again, or better, my race. 'Twas in the states I find it, an' I'm gonna keep it 'til my kingdom com. "... if there be one thing I thank America for, she teach me who my race was. Now I'm never going to lose it: Never, Never!" (295).*

Trumper's self-revelation and re-phrasing identity impose on G the longing for exile as exile comes with cryptic footsteps of refinement and stability in the character of Trumper. The common denominator in the foregoing character analyses is a motion from innocence to self-awareness.

### **Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: The stifling web of racial violence and the ironical trajectory of self-absenteeism to self-reconfiguration**

The novel *Invisible Man* is mapped into twenty five chapters with a prologue and an epilogue. It chronicles the physical, psychological and spiritual journey of an unidentified African American youth from the cloud of innocence to the light of discovery.

The journey motif of the novel is orchestrated on the existentialist pursuit of inscribing self-essence and attaining "knowness" in the midst of a society that questions the humanity of the Blackman. To negotiate a critical axis of the novel, it is apt to cite Bell (1987) who avers:

*Its complex, time, structure, spacious setting, anonymous ethnic hero, allegorical and ethnic characters, ironic theme and ceremonial use of varieties of language all*

*suggest that Ellison (1965) has drawn on Afro-American folklore...and the epic tradition to render his double vision of America (194).*

The nameless protagonist is symbolic and it approximates to one whose other worldview and pernicious deeds strip him of his humanity. Everyman is a matter; occupies as such a space and one only turns on Ellison's concept of invisibility if the human essence is impugned like the main character that synecdoches black anonymity in a world where the white man is the "visible".

Invisible, in a pejorative sense, gravitates to the reader as the quintessence of Wolfgang Von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* relates the character's progressive education from apprenticeship through journeyman-ship towards the ideal of "mastery" that manifests up in his name. It is thus pertinent to examine the novel as chronicling the de-stasis and kinesis of life from innocence through knowledge. It is a panoramic exposition of the quest of the young blackman to attain recognition in a harsh climate of downing of self-image.

As Raji-Oyelade (1993) contends, Ellison relays the question that forms the idea of the novel as the life changing possibilities of man; these questions are:

*How does one in the novel (the novel which is a work of art and not a disguised piece of sociology) persuade the ...reader to identify that which is basic in man beyond all differences of class, race, wealth, or formal education? How can one give the reader that which we do have in abundance, all the countless untold and wonderful variations on the themes of identity and freedom, necessity, love and death, and with all the mystery or personality undergoing it with endless metamorphosis (91).*

It is undisguised following the question belied in the aforementioned quotation that the evolving trend is ubiquitous in the plot characterization of the novel. This line of thought has equally been delineated by scholars like "Michel Fabre and Robert G.D'Meally" (Raji-Oyelade, 1993: 84).

The novel attests to ironical plot unfolding. It thus rests on the epic-oriented media with a moving reminiscence of the past twenty years. The story of unidentified author takes the reader through a tortuous macabre of life as experienced by the narrator. The narrator eases us into ironical portraiture:

*I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasm. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids and I might even be said to possess a mood. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me (1).*

The notion of invisibility as inferred is not that the

character is a ghost as he possesses all the human possibilities, physically rooted but absent in the eyes of teeming racially biased others. This way, it is apparent that the invisibility is artificial and largely a socially constructed one; contrived by politics of identity-racial segregation.

In the prologue, we have the end of the protagonist that begins in earnest the story and the epilogue as the beginning. He provides the rationale for this distorted quotient of plot:

*In spite of myself, I've learned something. Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labelled "file and forget", and I can neither file nor forget (Invisible Man, 467).*

His learning or awareness, albeit, starts in the first chapter of the book where the narrator is a Greenwood in the South. The narrator begins earnestly in telling his panoramic story with the assertion that he is an invisible man.

His invisibility, he clarifies, is not a material one; he is thus, not literally invisible, but is rather invisibility, perhaps, of self in a world that considers him insignificant and shrunk of individuality. He says that his invisibility accrues some benefit to him. He has been hiding from the world, living underground and stealing electricity from the Monopolated Light and Power Company.

He burns 1,369 light bulbs and on the same breath, listens to Louis Armstrong's What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue on a phonograph. He says that he has gone underground in order to write the story of his life and invisibility. As a young man, in the late 1920s or early 1930s, the narrator lives in the South. Being a gifted public speaker, he is invited to give a speech to a group of important white men in his town. The men only compensate him with a scholarship to a prestigious black college, but only after subjecting him to a humiliating duel in a "royal battle" in which he is made to fight other young black men all blindfolded in a boxing ring.

After the royal battle, the white men force the youths to scramble for fake coins on an electrified rug. They are delighted as the boys moan of pain. The narrator in his dream figures that his scholarship is actually a piece of paper reading "To Whom It May Concern . . . Keep This Nigger-Boy Running."

At the college, the narrator listens to a long, impassioned sermon by Reverend Homer A. Barbee on the subject of the college's Founder that the blind Barbee adulates in poetic language. After the sermon, the narrator is chastised by the college president, Dr. Bledsoe, who has learned of the narrator's escapades with Norton at the old slave quarters and the Golden Day.

Bledsoe rebukes the narrator, saying that he should have shown the white man as an idealised version of black life. He dismisses the narrator, giving him seven letters of recommendation to the college's white trustees in New York City, and sends him there as he seeks a job.

The narrator travels to the bright lights and bustle of 1930s Harlem, where his effort at getting a job proves abortive. The letters of recommendation do not bring him any employment. At last, the narrator goes to the office of one of his letters' addressees, a trustee named Mr. Emerson.

There he meets Emerson's son, who opens the letter and tells the narrator that he has been betrayed: the letters from Bledsoe actually portray the narrator as dishonourable and unreliable. Through the assistance of the young Emerson, the narrator gets a small wage job at the Liberty Paints plant, whose trademark colour is "Optic White".

The narrator temporarily assists Lucius Brockway, the black man who makes this white paint, but Brockway suspects that the narrator is involved in union activities and turns on him. The two men fight as they abandon the paint-making; consequently, one of the unattended tanks explodes, and the narrator is knocked unconscious.

The narrator is roused to life again in the paint factory's hospital. During his black out, he loses his memory and capacity for speech. The white doctors seize the arrival of their unidentified black patient as an opportunity to conduct electric shock experiments.

After the narrator recuperates with memory restored in the hospital, he collapses on the street. He is consequently taken to some black community members to the home of Mary, a kind woman who lets him live with her for free in Harlem and helps him to develop his sense of black heritage.

One day, the narrator witnesses the eviction of an elderly black couple from their Harlem apartment. Standing before the crowd of people gathered before the apartment, he gives an impassioned speech against the eviction. Brother Jack having observed his speaking prowess; his speech offers him a position as a spokesman for the Brotherhood, a political organization that allegedly works to help the socially oppressed.

Initially rejecting the offer, the narrator takes the job in order to reward Mary for her hospitality. But the Brotherhood insists that the narrator takes a new name, breaks with his past, and moves to a new apartment.

The narrator is inducted into the Brotherhood at a party at the hotel and is placed in charge of advancing the group's goals in Harlem. On completing his education in rhetoric with a white member of the group named Brother Hambros, the narrator goes to where he is assigned to work in Harlem.

There, he meets the handsome, intelligent black youth leader Tod Clifton. He also becomes intimate with the Black Nationalist leader Ras the Exhorter, who opposes the interracial brotherhood and believes that Black Americans should demand their rights over and against all whites. The narrator delivers speeches and becomes a high-profile figure in the Brotherhood. He relishes the task.

One day, however, he gets a note warning him to remember his place as a black man in the Brotherhood.

Not long after, the black Brotherhood member Brother Wrestrum accuses the narrator of trying to use the Brotherhood to propel a selfish desire for personal distinction.

While a committee of the Brotherhood investigates the charges, the organization moves the narrator to another post, as an advocate of women's rights. After he gives a speech one evening, he is seduced by one of the white women at the gathering, who attempts to use him to the lure of her sexual fantasies about black men.

Later, the Brotherhood sends the narrator back to Harlem, where he discovers that Clifton has left. Many other black members have left the group, as much of the Harlem community feels that the Brotherhood has betrayed their interests. The narrator later reconnects with Clifton on the street where he sells dancing "Sambo" doll; dolls that invoke the stereotype of the lazy and obsequious slave.

Clifton apparently does not have any license to sell his wares on the street. White policemen accost him and, shortly after some arguments, he is shot dead as the narrator and others look on. In his arrangement, the narrator undertakes a funeral for Clifton and gives a speech in which he portrays his dead friend as a hero, galvanizing public sentiment in Clifton's favour.

The Brotherhood shows displeasure at him staging the funeral without permission, and Jack harshly castigates him. As Jack rants about the Brotherhood's ideological stance, a glass eye falls from one of his eye sockets. The Brotherhood sends the narrator back to Brother Hambro to learn about the organization's new strategies in Harlem.

The narrator leaves one definitely feeling furious and anxious to gain revenge on Jack and the Brotherhood. He arrives in Harlem to find the neighbourhood in ever-increased agitation over race relations. Ras confronts him, deploring the Brotherhood's failure to draw on the momentum generated by Clifton's funeral. Ras sends his men to beat up the narrator, and the narrator is forced to disguise himself in dark glasses and a hat.

In his dark glasses, many people on the streets mistake him for someone named Rinehart, who seems to be a pimp, bookie, lover, and reverend all at once. At last, the narrator goes to Brother Hambro's apartment, where Hambro tells him that the Brotherhood has chosen not to emphasize Harlem and the black movement. He cynically declares that people are merely tools and that the larger interests of the Brotherhood are more important than any individual.

Recalling the advice given to him by his grandfather, the narrator determines to undermine the Brotherhood by seeming to go along with them completely. He decides to flatter and seduce a woman close to one of the party leaders in order to obtain secret information about the group. But the woman he chooses, Sybil, knows nothing about the Brotherhood and attempts to use the narrator to fulfill her fantasy of being raped by a black man. While still with Sybil in his apartment, the narrator receives a

call asking him to come to Harlem quickly. The narrator hears the sound of breaking glass, and the line goes dead. He arrives in Harlem to find the neighbourhood in the midst of full-fledged riot, which he learns was incited by Ras. The narrator becomes involved in setting fire to a tenement building. Running from the scene of the crime, he encounters Ras dressed as an African chieftain. Ras calls for the narrator to be lynched. The narrator flees only to run into two policemen, who suspect that his briefcase contains loot from the riots.

In his attempt to evade them, the narrator falls down a manhole. The police mock him and draw the cover over the manhole. The narrator says that he has stayed underground ever since; the end of his story marks its very locomotive beginning. He states that he finally has come to the decision that he must honour his individual complexity and remain true to his own identity without sacrificing his obligations to the community. He says that he finally feels ready to come out from the underground.

For the most accounts of the plot movement of the novel, the reader negotiates a symmetrical movement as the black protagonist does in his confirming self-negotiation until a given identity and awareness suffices.

### **Searching the 'self' within the encircling 'others': Richard in Richard Wright's black boy**

Richard Wright was the grandson of former slaves who was born on Rucker plantation in Dam County, Mississippi in 1908.

Wright grew up in a poverty stricken environment. He was enrolled at public high school. His first story is entitled the Voodoo of Hell's Half Acre which was published in Southern Registers local newspaper.

Reed Club, the group he joined in 1933 played a significant role in his literary achievements. The publication of *Native Son* in 1945 brought him recognition as a significant voice in African American prose tradition.

*Black Boy* subtitled *American Hunger* is an autobiographical recreation of Richard Wright's childhood and young adulthood. He informs us of the background of *Black Boy*:

*I wrote the book to tell a series of incidents strung together through my childhood but the main desire was to render a judgment on my environments because I felt the necessity to. That judgment was this: the environment the south creates is too small to nourish human being...I wanted to lend, give my tongue to the voiceless (3).*

It is apparent that Wright fulfills the idea that writers are the chroniclers, the visionaries, the mirrors, seers through which societal injustices are recreated for corrective purpose. Ellison who is believed to have been inspired by Wright also attests to the self-narrative that *Black Boy* typifies. The novel is structured into, "Southern Night-detailing his childhood in the south" and "The Horror and

the Glory" (which as well reflects his early adult years in Chicago).

The novel starts with a four-year-old Wright setting fire to his grandmother's house and continues in it. Wright is an unusually inquisitive child, living in an environment of strict, religious women and edgy irresponsible men.

His recalcitrant nature occasionally puts him in trouble; he recalls the day, and he gets beaten merciless by his mother:

*I was lashed so hard and long that I lost consciousness. I was beaten out of senses and later found myself in bed, screaming, determined to run, and tussling with my mother and father trying to keep me still (BB 4).*

He is shown to get easily upset with everything around him; he settles for reading instead of playing with other children, and rejecting the church in favour of a life of atheism at a young age.

He feels even more withdrawn as he grows older and comes in contact with tense racial violence of the 1920s south. He does not only find it unjust but he is especially bothered by whites' and other blacks' desire to stifle his intellectual hunger and his will to configure for him a distinct identity.

The mother's frequent illness makes the orphanage home a second shelter for Richard. While he still likes his mother who genuinely loves him he reserves some shade of hatred for his father whom he views as morally decrepit and irresponsible. We catch a glimpse:

*Again I was faced with choices I did not like, but I finally agreed after all, my hatred for my father was not as great and urgent as my hate for the orphan home... (27).*

After his father abandons the family, young Wright is taken back and forth among his sick mother, his extremely religious grandmother, and various aunts and uncles. This phase of his life prepares him for a more conspicuous awareness of his society. As he forays into the white world to find jobs, he encounters growling racism and brutal violence, which has a permanent scar in his psyche forever. The family goes through frequent hunger.

They have always perceived the north as a place of opportunity; so as soon as they can gather together enough money, Richard and his aunt went to Chicago and pledge to bring his mother and brother. But before Richard can go to Chicago, he takes to stealing money and lying.

Most times he must do things he does not want to do in a bid to find meaning in a supposedly meaningless and suffering fraught life. He finds the north less simmered in racial discrimination than the south: this becomes a reassessment of his ideas about American race patterns. He gets into many jobs and these fetch meagre earnings. He scrubs floors during the day and settles down with

Proust and medical journals by night. His family still lives in great need, poverty still looms large upon this, a stroke cripples his mother, and his relatives constantly eroded his mood. They upset him always particularly about his atheism and his unnecessary reading.

He finds a job at the post office and meets white men who share his sentiment of the world and religion in particular. They invite him to the John Reed Club which is founded to promote the arts and social change. He becomes involved with a magazine called Left Side. He slowly becomes immersed in the Communist Party, organizing its writers and artists.

At first, he sets his mind in connecting with acquaintances within the party, especially among its black members, but he finds them to be just as livid to cause change as the southern whites he had left behind.

The communists fear anyone who questions their ideas and as a result, they soon disregard Wright, who has always been inclined to question and speak his mind. When he tries to leave the party, he is accused of trying to lead others away from it. After he encounters the trial of another black communist for counter-revolutionary activity, Wright decides to abandon the party. He was still seen as a detractor in communism, and party members threaten him away from various jobs and gatherings.

Nevertheless, he does not square up with them because he believes they are in a sense driving towards unity, tolerance and equality which he sees as ideal.

He eventually rationalises the deeply-ingrained reformer's ideals and finds writing as a tool for the revolutionary changes for he firmly believes that everyone has a "hunger" for life that needs to be filled, and for him, writing is his way to the human heart.

His self-chronicle comes on the heel of ambivalent crises of identity. The repatriation he undergoes brings him to the crucial artistic armoury, a tool for identity reconfiguration and satiric swipe.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that through texts analysed in this study the psycho-kinetic network of black in its literature, the Black Diaspora is affirmed. Thus, drawing from two major traditions of prose writings, the authors examined in the essay employ similar aesthetic rendering of the story of the self; that is, their ordeals in the excruciating environment where their colour confines them to the receiving side of the yoke of second citizenry.

As shown in the examined bildungsroman and kuntlesroman, that are conspicuous in them, we come to Terms with the kinesic dimensionality of reader/protagonist transformation in the two phases earlier espoused by Raji-Oyelade in his seminal dissertation.

A plot characterology reveals the transmutability of the characters in the texts examined. Apart from such

reconstructive ideology couched in the self-writings of these authors, the network of transformation is occasioned by the reader-characters' analytical mapping to awareness. What this does is to in short note that as the reader proceeds on the mission, Raji-Oyelade rightly calls "a pathfinder", there is a seeming negotiation of the space through self-dissolution to resurrection that is temporarily or never achieved after identity repatriation.

Hence, the black protagonist completes the circle of self-journeying which ultimately allows for another self, a transformed individual.

Critically, the same character in his movement reaffirms and accomplishes the complete image of the self but he is still not disentangled from the flux of the complexes of hybridity, no matter the transformation he claims from the self-journeying to discovery that takes place in his life.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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