

modern
fiction
studies

v. s. naipaul
autumn 1984
volume 30
number 3

mfs

THE CURSE OF MARGINALITY: COLONIALISM
IN NAIPAUL'S *GUERRILLAS*

For David,
Who has the blessing
of being centered —
Hana

mfr

Hana Wirth-Nesher

FEW WRITERS OF FICTION HAVE DOCUMENTED marginality as well as V. S. Naipaul. His originality lies in his denial of any originality to his characters, his insistence on derivation as the essence of culture born of colonialism. Behind his settings and characters is the curse of Caliban for the conquerors of his island—"The red plague rid you for learning me your language." Among his works, *Guerrillas* occupies a special place in his contribution to colonial literature for its exacting portrayal of derivative culture.

Naipaul returns to an imaginary Caribbean island, presumably Trinidad, for the setting of this work, which is loosely based on the life of Michael de Freitas, a West Indian Black Muslim celebrity also known as Michael X and Michael Abdul Malik, who spent a number of years in London, was charged under the England's Race Relations Act for incitive language, and was eventually hanged in Trinidad for the murder of two people, one of them a white Englishwoman. Malik, like the character of Jimmy Ahmed who is patterned on him, was sponsored and encouraged as a revolutionary leader by London liberals but also ridiculed

by some of his own compatriots as a playboy and hustler.¹ In *Guerrillas*, Jimmy Ahmed, just returned from London, where he has been accused of sexual assault and forthwith abandoned by many of his white supporters, is the leader of what purports to be an agricultural commune populated by a handful of slum youths. Part Chinese and part black, Ahmed lives at a remove from the commune's huts in a house that mimics English middle-class suburbia.

The novel concerns itself with the interaction among three characters: Ahmed and two recent English arrivals on the island, Peter Roche and Jane. Tortured for his anti-apartheid work in South Africa, Peter has written a book about that experience and is at present a public relations and welfare worker for a firm that attempts to make up for its tainted past as slave traders by financing Ahmed's commune. Jane has followed Roche to the island as part of her search for commitment and action through affairs with men; she believes him to be an engaged doer. Her disillusionment with Roche leads her to Ahmed, and, after sexual encounters with him that are more political than personal, she is offered by Ahmed to his male lover, Bryant, in a ritual murder. This takes place against a backdrop of gang rioting and frenzied reggae music. Jimmy is abandoned by both the white firm that finances him and by the black movement he supposedly represents, just as American military helicopters take over the island to insure American bauxite investments.

When Naipaul's detailed journalistic account of the Michael X story, published in the London *Sun Times* as "The Killings in Trinidad," is compared to the fictional treatment in *Guerrillas*, bold changes indicate the author's central concerns. The major changes are in the cast of characters. He rids Malik of his entourage of race-obsessed cohorts of various backgrounds and complexes and introduces two characters—Roche, the white European liberal, and Bryant, the barely articulate black homosexual slum youth. In so doing, he broadens the scope of his theme, marginality, first by having Jimmy's "master" present as a force on the island, thereby emphasizing the native's delusions of power and independence and, second by giving Jimmy a powerless, pathetic alter ego. Each of these fictional characters underscores Jimmy's inauthenticity and pretensions, while also casting him more clearly in the role of the victim, as both victimizer and victimized appear as actual characters. Roche is the person Jimmy secretly wishes to be, and Bryant the person Jimmy feels he has not yet escaped being.

In another critical change in characterization, Naipaul eliminates the presence of a wife and child for Jimmy and makes Jane Jimmy's lover, rather than the lover of his "partner" on the commune, as was the case

¹According to D. A. N. Jones in a review of *Guerrillas* (*Times Literary Supplement*, 12 September 1975, p. 1013), among some London West Indians, Malik was seen as a "comic rogue." That Naipaul judged Malik in even harsher terms is evident in his journalistic account of the Trinidad killings. See Naipaul, "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad," in *"The Return of Eva Perón"* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp. 9-92.

with Gail Benson and Hakim Jamal, a Boston "Black Power man." This revision from journalism to fiction foregrounds the theme of marginality, for both Jane and Jimmy are types of the "other" in a white male-dominated society, and each is the other's slave, depending on whether the context is race or gender. The fictional Michael X, Jimmy of *Guerrillas*, is a more sympathetic character than is Michael X of "The Trinidad Killings" because Naipaul places him in a social and psychological context that focuses on his victimization. With Michael X, Naipaul portrays a man who could make money out of race; with Jimmy, Naipaul portrays a man who can't construct a coherent self.²

Naipaul's work marks a turning point in English literature that concerns itself with colonialism, for, in addition to depicting its effects on the imperialists and colonizers, he also portrays the effects on the native civilization. For Conrad and Forster, Naipaul's predecessors, the Empire consists of dark places on the earth that call into question the norms and conventions of their own civilization. Whether it be the drumbeats at the heart of darkness up the river in the Congo or the echo in the Marabar Caves of India, the outer reaches of the Empire touch an inner darkness, and journeys to these outposts become journeys within. Both of these writers are deft at portraying the compulsive displays of European behavior in an alien environment, although Conrad's displaced characters are considerably more obsessive than anything in Forster's purview. But each, in his own way, portrays the native as a "symbolic other" whose sole function is to shake the heretofore solid foundation of Christian European Enlightenment, of, in short, civilization.³ As the white outsiders become local deities, in the mystical invocations of Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India* or in the tribal rites of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, they lose their own footing in a divinely sanctioned universe. They have nothing left to live by.

When it comes to depicting the colonized society in English literature, the line that begins with Kipling, Conrad, and Forster leads to Naipaul. For Conrad, the native never becomes more than a shadowy presence, a vaguely defined alter ego. He is not seen as part of an alternative civilization as much as of an anticivilization. For Forster, Moslems and Hindus are seen within the context of alternative cultures, but it is the amorphous and inclusive quality of the latter, in its indifference to orderly distinctions and hierarchy, that so unnerves the European.⁴

²"Malik's career proves how much of Black Power—away from its United States source—is jargon, how much a sentimental hoax. . . . It is, in the end, a deep corruption: a wish to be granted a dispensation from the pains of development, an almost religious conviction that oppression can be turned into an asset, race into money" ("The Killings in Trinidad," p. 73).

³For analyses of Conrad's imagery from the perspective of colonial and racial bias, see Frances Singh, "The Colonialistic Bias of *Heart of Darkness*," *Conradiana*, 10 (1978), 41-54; and Hana Wirth-Nesher, "The Stranger Case of *The Turn of the Screw* and *Heart of Darkness*," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 16 (Fall 1979), 317-325. See also Linda Anderson, "Ideas of Identity and Freedom in V. S. Naipaul and Joseph Conrad," *English Studies*, 59 (1978), 510-517.

⁴For an up-to-date bibliography of literary criticism dealing with colonialism and a fine summary

With the emergence of Naipaul, the romantic edge of colonial literature has disappeared entirely. In dealing with a much later stage of colonialism, Naipaul is no longer concerned with that first traumatic encounter of the European with what he judges to be other than what he has known, non-European. Instead, Naipaul writes about the persistence of colonialism in the era of political independence. He depicts what Frantz Fanon has termed "false decolonization," legal independence without breaking down the colonial social and political structures.⁵ Naipaul's native characters' self-awareness is derived entirely from the culture that perceives them as "other." Knowledge of themselves as objects in society brings about a feeling of shame and self-contempt. Naipaul has brought colonial literature to a new phase marked by a sense of derivation, of identity permanently blighted by being entirely derived from the culture that oppresses it.

The description of the island on the novel's opening page is one of a sprawling midden:

The sea smelled of swamp; it barely rippled, had glitter rather than color; and the heat seemed trapped below the pink haze of bauxite dust from the bauxite loading station. After the market, where refrigerated trailers were unloading; after the rubbish dump burning in the remnant of mangrove swamp, with black carrion corbeaux squatting hunched on the fence posts or hopping about on the ground; after the built-up hillsides; after the new housing estates, rows of unpainted boxes of concrete and corrugated iron already returning to the shanty towns that had been knocked down for the development; after the naked children playing in the red dust of the rags from backyard lines; after this, the land cleared a little.⁶

The setting for the novel is one of rubbish dumps, black carrion corbeaux, deteriorating shantytowns, and swamp. The description begins with the sea, a reminder of insularity, and with bauxite dust, a reminder of dependence on the powers across the sea. The theme is introduced rhetorically by the six parallel introductory phases with their repetition of "after"—"after the market," "after the rubbish dump," "after the built-up hillsides," "after the new housing estates," "after the naked children," "after this." *Guerrillas* is a novel about *after* "independence" and political freedom. In the description, "after" is a spatial term, designating a sequence of urban landmarks before reaching a minimum of open land. But "after" is also a temporal designation marking the stages of colonialism—becoming a part of the Empire's market, being discarded by the colonizers, constructing housing projects as part of national independence, and being left with the omnipresent naked children

of literary theories about the colonial encounter in fiction, see Abdul R. JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1983). Also useful for the study of the connection between literature and colonialism are Jeffrey Meyers, *Fiction and the Colonial Experience* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield), and M. M. Mahood, *The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels* (London: Rex Collings, 1977). One of Mahood's chapters analyzes Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*.

⁵Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

⁶V. S. Naipaul, *Guerrillas* (New York: Vintage, 1975), p. 1. All further quotations will be cited from this text.

despite the promising straight new avenues heralding the new age.

This is the path to Jimmy Ahmed's commune. The road is strewn with billboards advertising black nationalism—"Basic Black," "Birth Control is a Plot against the Negro Race"—along with notices for the commune, each with a clenched fist and the slogan "For the Land and the Revolution" (p. 4). These signs are sponsored by the firm of Sablich along with the local bottlers of Coca-Cola and the American Bauxite Company. When the land clears somewhat, these symbols of neocolonialism, of economic control, are abundant.

The name of Jimmy's commune, Thrushcross Grange, is the first indication of English cultural presence on the island. It is fraught with irony. Taken from *Wuthering Heights*, that romantic nineteenth-century novel, Thrushcross Grange is the elegant estate of the Linton family, the refined contrast to rustic Wuthering Heights, home of the Earnshaws. The character Ahmed most likely identifies with in this novel, and who seems to have impressed him, is Heathcliff, the swarthy male slum child excluded from English society who takes revenge by acquiring the properties of those who snubbed him. Thrushcross Grange is the site of Heathcliff's shame, as he is denied entry as a child and loses his beloved Catherine to Edgar Linton of the Grange. Even the ending of that work, in which Heathcliff's spiritual heir and Edgar Linton's daughter are united, reinforces his exclusion, as he has no biological heir and has therefore never actually gained access to the genteel English world. Heathcliff's plan of revenge against the society that had rejected him fails. It is tempting to believe that Jimmy appropriated the name of an upper-class estate for his agricultural commune of poor black slum youths as an ironic revenge against English society. But the text will not support this because Jimmy gives the narrator in the novel he is writing Catherine Earnshaw's childish romantic notion about Heathcliff—"Your mother was an Indian Princess and your father was the Emperor of China" (p. 65). The choice of name actually becomes an indication of how uncritically Jimmy accepts the images of English culture, in part because of his misreading of the book already mentioned and in part because he models his own home on the commune on the original Thrushcross Grange.⁷

Jimmy's home mimics English middle-class suburbia.

A square of English carpet, electric blue with splashes of black and yellow, almost covered the floor. The furniture was also English and had a similar innocent stylishness; it was of a kind seen in the windows of furniture shops on the main streets of English market towns. A three-piece suite, square and chunky, with fat cushions, was covered in a tiger-striped synthetic material, thick and furry. On the fitted bookshelves a number of books in the

⁷For a sociological analysis of *Wuthering Heights* that identifies Heathcliff as the "conventional face of bourgeois man" without his mask, see Arnold Kettle, "Emily Bronte: *Wuthering Heights*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Wuthering Heights"*, ed. Thomas A. Vogler (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 28-43.

same magenta binding stood solidly together: The Hundred Best Books of the World; there were also some paperbacks and a neat stack of records. (p. 18)

The tiger-striped synthetic material undoubtedly appeals to Jimmy's concept of male strength. The set of books is Jimmy's deference to the wisdom of English civilization. He seems totally lacking in awareness of the irony inherent in his leaving to England the choice of what constitutes *world* literature, just as it does not seem odd to him to have that nation dictate his interior design. "But it's like being in England," is Jane's comment upon entering the room. "All the stuff here comes from England," Jimmy replies. "You know what they say. You may not be able to make a living in England, but England teaches you how to live" (p. 19). The ambiguity of the word "they" in Jimmy's maxim about English superiority, in that it can mean "one" as well as someone other than himself, reveals Jimmy's conflicting attitude toward English values.

The degree of Jimmy's grounding in white English society becomes evident in the pages of the novel he is writing. He writes with a white mask, the narrator of his novel being a white Englishwoman on a West Indian island recording her meetings with a local hero named Jimmy. Through this mask, Jimmy can vent his disgust toward the blacks as well as fantasize about his own image in the eyes of whites. The narration progresses from distant admiration and awe of Jimmy to meetings between the two that end with his verbally abusing her and her seeking him for protection on one of the beaches as she flees from the hatred of the island's blacks and an impending gang revenge. This last scene blends into Jimmy's favorite boyhood memory and fantasy: the story told to him of the gang rape of a white girl on a beach and the romantic action of one of the black youths who tried to revive the unconscious girl with water from the nearby creek, which he brought back cupped in his hands. To Jimmy, this is the most moving part of the story:

and it had stayed with him, in a setting that had grown as stylized as a tourist poster: the soft light and blurred shade below the coconut palms, the white sand, the sunlit breakers, the olive sea and blue sky beyond the crisscross of the curved gray coconut trunks, the bleeding girl on the front fender of the old Ford, the cupped hand offering water, the grateful eyes, remembering terror. (p. 69)

In that scene, Jimmy can see himself as both the perpetrator of sexual revenge and the benevolent protector, as member of the brutal gang and as one set apart from it by his gallantry and kindness.

By the choice of his narrator's name, Clarissa, Naipaul has again drawn on the English literary tradition, specifically the eighteenth-century novel. Richardson's *Clarissa* can be said to have died of sexual assault, but within the context of polite, genteel society. To the male rake, Clarissa's virginity is a challenge; to the virgin, it is her only independence, the only thing over which she exercises any control in a world that oppresses her at every angle. In *Guerrillas* Clarissa's "milk white thighs"

(p. 42) are a challenge not to manhood in general but specifically to black manhood, as the white woman is traditionally the most forbidden terrain of the black man, the symbol of the white man's most sacred property in relation to which the black man symbolizes the profane, that which can defile the white race through miscegenation.⁸

By employing these two landmarks of English literature in *Guerrillas*, Naipaul signals the effect of literacy in the experience of colonialism. According to recent studies, one of the primary effects of literacy is that it leads to the development of historic consciousness, to perceiving a fixed past, and that it tends to "valorize individual experience over the efficacy of a traditional collective view of the world; it encourages specificity and particularism; and by sharpening the historical sense, it allows personality to be defined through its past and present self-awareness."⁹ Literacy, therefore, encourages the production of authentic accounts of individual experiences. Having acquired his literacy under English rule, Jimmy's literary tradition is the English novel, through which he clearly traces his own cultural past. Because *Wuthering Heights* is a work that appeals to the popular imagination, it is plausible that Jimmy would have read it as part of his English acculturation. But *Clarissa*, a far less accessible work, would be outside Jimmy's range, and Naipaul's allusion to it is a gesture toward a community of readers that excludes Jimmy; the device of irony, which is at Jimmy's expense, here further reinforces the tenuous bond between the colonized and the colonial culture.

Furthermore, as literacy familiarizes Jimmy with the novel, the genre that chronicles the nuances of individual experience, he turns to novel writing when he tries to articulate his own relationship to that literature. But he does not write in his own voice. He projects a self that exists only as it is reflected in the eyes of the arbiters of civilization, and he writes in the voice of one of its representatives, Clarissa. It later becomes apparent that his choice is appropriate for reasons of which he is unaware, for the white woman who adores the masculine principle and who is willing to be enslaved by it is another victim of another kind of social oppression. But from his marginal position with regard to European society he cannot see her marginality. Indeed, she seems to him the very emblem of centrality.¹⁰

In the novel that Jimmy writes, his self-image waivers between black

⁸Michael X was, in fact, writing a novel in which the narrator is a thirty-year-old Englishwoman. Naipaul's idea of introducing the name of Clarissa (with its thematic implications) may have been inspired by the name of Michael X's narrator, Lena Boyd-Richardson. Naipaul also changed the male protagonist's reference to Flaubert (to impress the Englishwoman with his knowledge of world literature) to *Wuthering Heights* so that he could weave the Brontë references into his work. The fantasy of the gang rape is entirely Naipaul's invention.

⁹This is JanMohamed's paraphrase of Ian Watt and Jack Goody, "The Consequences of Literacy," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 27-68. The quotation appears on p. 280 of JanMohamed's *Manichean Aesthetics* (see note 4).

¹⁰One of the most powerful literary accounts of the similarity of the plight of the black man and that of the white woman is Ralph Ellison's battle royal, in *Invisible Man*.

man and white, according to how he is perceived by Clarissa. First, she clearly sets him apart from the other blacks, the "good-for-nothing natives" who "shit everywhere just like that, just like animals." Jimmy's own contempt for the natives, already evident in his separate English quarters, finds an outlet through Clarissa's voice. She observes that Jimmy is like a "savior" for the common people whom "he understands and loves." Jimmy portrays himself heroically through white criteria—both white stereotypes of blacks and white standards for men of their own race. Clarissa is overwhelmed by his sexual prowess and physical strength, the man "with the naked torso, not black, but a lovely golden color, like some bronze god. . . . I am amazed at the perfection of his form" (p. 38). In depicting Clarissa as awestruck by his physical perfection, he demonstrates his having internalized white stereotypes of the physicality and sexual prowess of the black male. Yet when she goes on to admire him for his impeccable taste and intellect, he gives himself the refined traits of the white English male as he perceives them in the literature he has read. But the actual language of Clarissa's admiration discredits her as an arbiter of taste:

I can scarcely believe my eyes when I enter, wall to wall carpeting, everything of the best and everything neat and clean and nicely put away. And what a collection of books, no skimping there. He's obviously a man of considerable refinement rare for these days. (p. 38)¹¹

Jimmy's notion of "making it" in English society is of someone who can display a set of the best books on his shelves and can cover his floor with wall-to-wall carpeting.

What is worse than his deriving his self-esteem entirely from the judgment of the colonial power is that he misunderstands the code by which he is judged. "What a strange idea he must have of England" (p. 26), remarks Jane after her first visit to his home. The most damning moment from the point of view of the lack of a personal self derived from one's native culture is the "fictional" Jimmy's remark about English literature. When Clarissa reaches for a volume of *Wuthering Heights* (he has reassured her that they are real books and not "dummies"), he makes a remark that is surely intended to be casually urbane, "You are looking at that great work of the Brontes. What a gifted family, it makes you believe in heredity. Would you like some tea?" (p. 38). That Jimmy would link cultural tradition with heredity at this point ironically underscores his status as an outsider to that world and undermines his attempts to gain admission to English society. The very moment in the novel within the novel when Jimmy most clearly wills the success of his own integration into English society is the moment in Naipaul's novel when Jimmy most clearly demonstrates his marginality.

¹¹Mike, the character described by Lena in Michael X's novel, has a gigantic bookshelf with copies of "Shake peare [sic] Shaw Marx Lenin Trotsky Confucious Hugo." He tries to impress Lena with "Salamambo that masterpiece of Flaubert's" ("The Killings in Trinidad," p. 63).

The three passages from Jimmy's novel that Naipaul weaves into his book go from Clarissa's adulation of Jimmy to awe and fear of him and finally to his publicly shaming her by denouncing her as "rotten meat." Leaving Jimmy at that moment only makes her the prey of black youths who pursue her. Jimmy's manuscript ends abruptly as she sees an old Ford in the distance, the Ford that figures prominently in Jimmy's fantasy of gang rape and tender paternalism.

Jimmy's writing of his novel in the voice of an Englishwoman, his identification with the white woman, is an ironic parallel to his life on the commune. His degradation in white society, symbolized for him by the arrogance of the white woman, sends him to the arms of a black male for comfort and love. Jimmy's homosexual affair with Bryant, a disfigured slum youth, is both a mark of Jimmy's failure to be accepted in the white world and a secret rebellion against that world. It gives Jimmy the headiness of being worshipped by Bryant, who, as boy of the streets, genuinely adores Jimmy. Bryant is clearly Jimmy's other alter ego, the black, disfigured, abandoned side of himself that crouches in fear and indulges in self-pity rather than in illusions of triumph. Clarissa is what he has been taught to desire and then shamed for desiring (because forbidden); Bryant is his guilt for nurturing desires that amount to a betrayal of his own race, that are the signs of total capitulation to the values of the oppressor. But Naipaul shows that in exchanging the illusory Clarissa for the live Bryant, Jimmy actually replaces one relationship born of his marginality with another, for Bryant is no self-contained "native." He also dreams of a better self—and always in the same form, Sidney Poitier. Addicted to Poitier films, which he sees dozens of times, Bryant hopes for a black identity that has been manufactured by the American movie industry and portrayed by the actor often referred to as "Hollywood's Uncle Tom." Poitier's characters are always perfect by white Western standards: black men in skin only who bear no scars of having been victims of racism.¹² Bryant's best self is also a product of the white world; Jimmy's love of Bryant appears to be an affirmation of the black self he otherwise seeks to escape. Yet even in that affirmation he clings to another embodiment of marginality.

Although Jane chooses to come to the island in order to be with her new lover, Peter Roche, and although she represents the colonial power to Jimmy, she also is a character who derives her entire identity from an "other," in her case from men. As a woman in a man's world, she defines herself according to her current mate; indeed, she changes her views on life as often as she changes her partners. Because Naipaul links

¹²"I'm the only one. I'm the only Negro actor who works with any degree of regularity. I represent ten million people in this country and millions more in Africa; I'm the only one for those people to identify with on the screen, and I'm not going to do anything they can't be proud of. Wait till there are six of us; then one of us can play villains all the time" (Sidney Poitier at a press conference, quoted in Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer, *The Movies* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957], p. 478).

her experience as a woman in a man's world with her infidelity and sexual promiscuity, the reader is less sympathetic to her plight than to Jimmy's. But Naipaul does emphasize that Jane is a nonentity, and he does link her nonexistence and her powerlessness with her womanhood.

Jane assumes that action is reserved for men, and her fashionable ideas about England as a decaying Empire lead her to believe that life in London is on the margins of human action, that the center of global activity in her age is in the Third World. When she meets Peter Roche, a man who was tortured for agitation on behalf of civil rights in South Africa, she is convinced that she has found a doer. She is quickly disillusioned, for, when she sees Roche on the island, she realizes that he is not taken seriously, that his work consists primarily of public relations, her own inactive career before she left London. Jimmy appeals to her because despite her perception that the commune is not much more than a good public relations gimmick for a former slave trading firm, she is fascinated with Jimmy's self-proclaimed power. A romantic liaison with Jimmy, a nonwhite doer, would be a test of her radical sympathies.

Jane's role in this book that depicts the dynamics of colonialism is twofold: as a white and as a woman. As a white British citizen, she has the privilege of a passport that will get her away from the island if things get too hot: she counts on this. Her white English identity, then, extends to her the privilege of not having to commit herself to anything, of not being held accountable for actions, of not having to stay for consequences. "She was privileged; it was the big idea, the one that overrode all the scattered, unrelated ideas deposited in her soul as she had adventured in life, the debris of a dozen systems she had picked up from a dozen men" (p. 56). As a white liberal, she feels guilty about the legacy of colonialism. Thus she romanticizes blacks to the extent that she seeks penance or punishment for her complicity in colonial racism. Her white English identity is marked by *shame*. As a woman, she has come to hate herself because, like Jimmy, she measures herself by standards that exclude her: those of the male world. Her female identity is also a source of shame for she recognizes her marginality and powerlessness in a male-dominated society. Her sense of inferiority is not that different from the feelings of a man like Jimmy. Her first awakening to this shamefulness of woman's place is when she is struck down and brutally slapped by one of her lovers. To her disgust, she discovers that it is sexually arousing. She then seeks degradation. Given this dual self-hatred, as white and as woman, it is logical that she should seek revenge and abuse at the hands of a black male.

The terms of her relationship with Jimmy are set even before she meets him, when Roche briefly leaves her in the commune hut with the boys, Bryant among them. When he hisses and calls her "Sister," she doesn't look up. But when he calls out "White Lady," she does. "So you know your name," one of them whispers. She submits to Bryant's

demand: "Give me a dollar" (p. 12). In this situation, he exercises power over her both as a black (the poor slum youth dependent upon the guilt of his white benefactors) and, more boldly, as a male in the company of other males, making a demand on a woman. They will both be loath to admit what they have done. She will lie to Roche, reluctant to reveal her fear and shame as a woman; he will lie to Jimmy, reluctant to bring attention to his shame at regressing into the role of the charity case. Each acts out of a sense of inferiority, yet each plays the role of the superior: he can frighten her with his physical strength; she can patronize him with the dollar, the sign of her political power. Each acts out of a particular sense of vulnerability and marginality.

In the two sexual encounters between Jimmy and Jane, they behave like scarred victims of social forces rather than as individuals. Even the bedroom scenes in this novel are political, the effects of colonialism being profound enough to subvert intimacy. Sexuality in Naipaul's fictions is contrary to that literary tradition in which nakedness implies stripping men and women of their cultural and political roles as well. For Naipaul, power games and political identities are so intricate a part of life that they virtually preclude intimacy.¹³

In the first encounter Jane dominates Jimmy. She is master as the white woman. She seduces him, takes the sexual lead, gives the orders, and belittles him with her mockery—"Do you always make love in your Mao shirt?" (p. 86). He is further humiliated by having their lovemaking interrupted by a telephone call from Roche. In full view of Jane, Jimmy answers the phone "looking absurdly like one of the children of the shanty towns, who wore vests alone, their exposed little penises like spigots" (p. 85). She is also reminded of his ingratiating stance toward Roche, as he addresses his employer as "Massa." The scene ends with his premature ejaculation and her indifference. She has been master, and she will have to pay.

The second sexual encounter occurs when Jimmy is desperate after the death of one of his commune defectors triggers race riots and so inflames Jimmy's enemies that he fears for his life. Only his white benefactors can save him, and he knows that he cannot rely on that. He takes revenge on all of white society by using his superior strength as a male to degrade Jane. Before she is offered to Bryant in a ritual murder in which he atones for his sin of lusting for a white woman, he rapes her in a mock deflowering of the sacredness of white maidenhood. By brutally imposing anal intercourse—"A big girl like you, and a virgin, Jane?" (p. 274)—he can take revenge on her for her privileged white status through denying her womanhood. The ritual murder of Jane is the ultimate

¹³See Robert Hemenway, "Sex and Politics in V. S. Naipaul," *Studies in the Novel*, 14 (Summer 1982), 189-202. Hemenway discusses the three central characters' capacity for romantic self-deception and the lack of mutual benefit in any social contract, including a sexual one: "The relationship between Jane and Jimmy becomes an allegory of the way a Third World nation conceives of its former colonial masters" (p. 200).

perversity engendered by colonialism. One of Jimmy's alter egos murders the other in a self-deluding act that conforms to his recurring fantasy of the rape of a white woman on a tropical beach and of her adoration for her black rapist-protector. The actual scene of Jane's murder blends into the language and images of the secretly desired imaginary one, but reality offers no romantic consolations for depravity. "But the eyes below him were closed. They knew nothing; they acknowledged nothing; they had taken everything away with them. He entered a void; he disappeared in that void" (p. 281).

From Jimmy's point of view, his authentic native self has taken just revenge on the colonial self that takes possession of him. Because he had betrayed the black slum youth with the white woman, it is Bryant's right to exorcise Jimmy's demon, which betrays Jimmy's true self. The text, however, will not allow such a simple reading of the dynamic of colonialism. A return to Bryant does not constitute a return to a native identity divested of colonial influence. Bryant, with his secret reverence for Hollywood idol Sidney Poitier, is not far removed from Jimmy's romanticized Third World image of himself as perceived by his ultimate arbiter of heroism, a white woman. Neither is free of the need for validation by the colonial presence; each is marginal in his own way. Jimmy's identification with Bryant as a return to an indigenous self is as misguided as his naming the commune Thrushcross Grange.

That Jimmy sees the murder as a symbolic act of restoring self-esteem is evident by his reference to the dollar Bryant shamefully exacted from Jane. "Bryant has something for you," Jimmy tells Jane (p. 277). But killing Jane cannot rid Jimmy of his sense of humiliation as a nonwhite man in a white world. Immediately after the murder, he has a vision of a woman returning from the dead, a black Sudanese woman sitting up in her coffin with the "degraded mouth of a French prostitute," holding out her hand and demanding, "Nigger, give me a dollar." Fair-skinned Jimmy, deluded into assuming that it was his privilege to be able to assume his "blackness" out of social conscience, not necessity, is "betrayed, his secret known" (p. 281). The very murder that was to serve as an exorcism of his false pretension to "pass" in the culture that oppresses him is followed by an image that betrays Jimmy's unresolved anger at being black. That a prostitute should extort money from him because she identifies him racially adds the insult of having been humiliated by a woman and reinforces the parallel between his situation and that of Jane and Bryant at the beginning of the novel.

To take revenge on Jane is to substitute a surrogate target for the one that is unattainable, the white male. The colonized native male who has been humiliated by colonialism has only one kind of power left—his greater physical strength as a male to overpower the female. Although Jane may wield power as a white English citizen, she is powerless as a

woman, as one who derives all of her attitudes and ideas from male dominated society. Ultimately she is a scapegoat for colonialism, as Jimmy resorts to abusing her as a means of restoring self-esteem through a brutal proof of virility.

Jimmy can get away with this murder, just as Roche can get away with his abandoning them both, because Jane is literally a nonentity. Upon her arrival at the airport she is whisked past the officials without getting her passport stamped because of her "privilege" as a woman in the company of her American fellow travelers, who own the island's bauxite companies. Having spent the entire flight reading pornographic magazines that portray women as the slaves of men, the Americans exercise their superior rank by gallantly escorting Jane past the controls. As a result of Jane's benefiting from male patrons, in this case the men who represent the neocolonial power controlling the island, her entry is never registered. It is her status as a woman that accords her this ironic privilege, just as it is her status as a woman that makes her the logical victim of ritual murder by men. Jane goes from being merely marginal to being nonexistent.

Roche alone has the "privilege" of leaving, of not being held accountable for any of the horror that has swept across the island, including the murder of Jane of which he is aware. If Jimmy's addressing Roche as "massa" has been ironic at other moments in the book, it is a perfectly straightforward whimper at the end—"You must come, massa. There's no one else I can ask. They've left me alone, massa" (p. 292). But Roche, despite his personal failure as a doer whose life, in his eyes, has been built on sand, has enough residual power from his status as a white male to remove himself at the end. By burning Jane's belongings, he participates in erasing her presence. Just as Roche fled from England to escape threats resulting from publication of his views on race, he flees the island to escape any responsibility for racial violence.

Although *Guerrillas* focuses on the dismal symbolic relationship between England and her former colonies, Naipaul introduces two other elements: a native movement on the island and a new outside power. At the center of the book is the incessant reggae music, anarchic in its impulse, expressive of religious hope and imminent apocalypse. Framing the narrative, at the beginning and at the end, is the power of American neocolonialism in the form of Coca-Cola billboards that sponsor and manipulate Black Power movements. It is literally power from above, the bauxite executives arriving with Jane on her flight at the beginning and the helicopters swarming in to impose order at the end. When Jimmy turns to Bryant after degrading Jane, symbol of his colonizer, he is replacing one form of cultural hegemony (England) with another (America). Bryant's adoration of Sidney Poitier is a more popular variant of Jimmy's identification with Heathcliff, American movies replacing the English novel as a cultural force.

The dynamic of colonialism in this work is best expressed by the only other documents in the work apart from Jimmy's novel: the correspondence with an English acquaintance named Roy and an Englishwoman named Margorie. The former letter, which Roche and Jane find on Jimmy's desk, is a friendly refusal to publish a series of articles by Jimmy about events on the island. It is a flattering rejection, the writer pleading personal interest in Jimmy's work, which he finds "fascinating," but powerlessness to help him: "We are not in that league." It goes on in a congenial self-flagellating vein: "We are an incurably frivolous people and as a nation we seem resigned to giggling our way to oblivion" (p. 187). It is riddled with clichés. "I personally feel that the time has come to batten down the hatches and ride out the storm." Roy and Marcia's only news is that they have become "enfeoffed of a ruin at enormous sacrifice" due to "the staggering increase in property prices." Having relegated their own lives to an antiquated old order ("enfeoffed"), they "scan the newspapers for news of you and your doings, which from this distance seem vastly exciting" (p. 188). In this chatty letter, Roy has managed to be both smug and fawning. Like Jane, Roy sees his existence in England as marginal, away from the center of real action experienced by doers like Jimmy. He romanticizes the center from a safe distance of privilege, just as Jane did.

Jimmy's letter to a woman named Margorie is written during the race riots, with Bryant outside waiting to kill him for his betrayal with Jane. "I feel death is close to me tonight," writes Jimmy. He wants to "clear my heart and wipe the slate clean. You made me a man so late, and I had to behave like a man . . ." (p. 263). He accuses her of having abandoned him, like the others in England. "They sent me back here, to make me nothing again," but "you shouldn't have let me down Margorie, you shouldn't have sided with the others. . . . You made me and then you made me feel like dirt again, good only for dirt" (p. 264). In an ironic parallel of Roy's letter to Jimmy, this letter to Margorie is Jimmy's admission that the source of his self-esteem lies elsewhere, in England. That is where he was "made," and the making of Jimmy, from his point of view, is entangled with his sexual acceptance by an Englishwoman. Thrushcross Grange, at that moment, is darkness—"in England you don't know how black night can be here" (p. 261). Jimmy lives for approval from what he identifies as the center of life—and he sees himself eternally at the margins.

Naipaul's vision of colonialism in *Guerrillas*, then, is a dynamic in which each partner, in this case the former colonist in his waning Empire and the former colonized in his so-called independent state, sees himself on the margins of energy and power, each identifying the center with the other. The guilt and shame that result from his entanglement are so deeply embedded in the psyche of these individuals that they permeate

every aspect of life, sexual politics being yet another dimension.

The novel's title is rendered supremely ironic by Naipaul's treatment of colonialism. The mark of a genuine guerilla movement is the clear distinction it makes between the rightful, native culture and the illegitimate power of an occupying "other." The novel's epigraph belongs to Jimmy—"When everybody wants to fight, there's nothing to fight for. Everybody wants to fight his own little war, everybody is a guerilla." Naipaul demonstrates that the result of colonialism is the inability to draw these lines of self and "other" with certainty; hence, he reveals the pathological dimension of the colonial encounter. Naipaul's "guerillas" in this work—Jimmy, Bryant, Jane, and Roche—are decentered human beings, each suffering from his or her own version of the curse of marginality.

In Heaven there'll be no algebra,
No learning dates or names,
But only playing golden harps
And reading Henry James.

—Anonymous