



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

English Language and Literature Programme

**BEYOND VICTIMHOOD: EXPLORATIONS OF TRAUMA IN  
NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVES OF ANDREA LEVY'S *THE LONG  
SONG*, BERNARDINE EVARISTO'S *BLONDE ROOTS*, AND  
MARLON JAMES'S *THE BOOK OF NIGHT WOMEN***

Alican ERBAKAN

Ph.D. Dissertation

Ankara, 2024



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*To my son, the joy of my life, Kuzey Erbakan. . .*

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## ABSTRACT

ERBAKAN, Alican. *Beyond Victimhood: Explorations of Trauma in Neo-Slave Narratives of Andrea Levy's The Long Song, Bernardine Evaristo's Blonde Roots, and Marlon James's The Book of Night Women*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara, 2024.

Published around the year 2010, three neo-slave narratives, namely Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010), Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2008), and Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* (2009) take their readers to the traumatic past of British slavery. The expansion of trauma studies in the 1990s brought to the foreground the role of literature in the representation of trauma. The strand of trauma studies in literature maintains that literature can imitate the processes of trauma and its symptoms through experimental methods of narration and narrative devices. In line with varied nature of symptoms of trauma, the three novels depict the traumatic stories of their protagonists' lives under bondage and their equally turbulent roads to freedom. As these are neo-slave narratives, freedom is not represented to be the ultimate goal in these texts as opposed to the original slave narratives. Accordingly, it rarely brings any sense of fulfilment to the protagonists who are psychologically burdened by their experience by the time they are free. *The Long Song*'s July finds herself unable to leave the grounds of Amity plantation after losing her two children and love interest. *Blonde Roots*' Doris realizes that her former lover is a changed man and cannot be together with him after she is free. She lives a quiet life confined to the Maroon town until emancipation. Finally, *The Book of Night Women*'s Lilith refuses to take part in the revolt orchestrated by the Night Women in order to free herself from the cycle of violence she experiences both as victim and perpetrator. All three novels have women slaves as protagonists because they represent the most disadvantaged group to depict both sexual and systematic violence inflicted on them during slavery. Moreover, slavery is part of a traumatic past which impacted a large number of people and still has impact on how cultural identities are formed in the contemporary world. The three novels form an empowering voice for the inheritors of that traumatic past by stylistically avoiding forming victim narratives.

### Keywords

Trauma Studies in Literature, Neo-slave narratives, *The Long Song*, *Blonde Roots*, *The Book of Night Women*, Slavery, Postcolonial Novel

## ÖZET

ERBAKAN, Alican. *Mağduriyetin Ötesi: Andrea Levy'nin The Long Song, Bernardine Evaristo'nun Blonde Roots ve Marlon James'in The Book of Night Women adlı Yeni Kölelik Anlatılarında Travma İncelemeleri*, Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

2010 yılı civarında yayınlanan Andrea Levy'nin *The Long Song* (2010), Bernardine Evaristo'nun *Blonde Roots* (2008) ve Marlon James'in *The Book of Night Women* (2009) adlı yeni kölelik anlatıları okurlarını Birleşik Krallık'ın travmatik kölelik geçmişine götürür. Travma çalışmalarında 1990'larda yaşanan gelişmeler, travmanın temsilinde edebiyatın oynadığı rolü ön plana çıkarmıştır. Edebiyatta travma çalışmaları akımı, travma süreçleri ve belirtilerinin edebiyatta anlatım yöntem ve teknikleriyle taklit edilebileceğini öne sürer. Ana karakterlerinin köle olarak geçirdikleri süreci ve zorluklarla dolu özgürlük yolculuklarını anlatan bu üç roman, travma belirtilerinin çeşitliliğini de ana karakterleriyle yansıtmaktadır. Yeni kölelik anlatıları, orijinal kölelik anlatılarının aksine, özgürlüğü ulaşılması gereken, karakterlerin tüm sorunlarının çözümü olacak nihai bir amaç olarak ele almazlar. Ana karakterler, özgürlüklerini elde edene kadar köle olarak yaşadıklarından psikolojik olarak olumsuz etkilenmişlerdir. Dolayısıyla özgürlük onlara bekledikleri tatmini yaşatmaz. *The Long Song*'un başkahramanı July, Amity topraklarından ayrılacak cesareti kendinde bulamaz. Çünkü iki çocuğunu kaybetmenin üzüntüsü ve sevdiği adamın ihanetiyle zihnen çökmüştür. *Blonde Roots*' un kahramanı Doris özgür olduktan sonra tekrar bulunduğu eski sevgilisinin artık o bildiği adam olmadığını ve onunla olamayacağını anlar. Kölelikten kaçanların oluşturduğu Maroon kasabasında kölelik yasa dışı olana kadar sessiz bir hayat sürer. *The Book of Night Women*'ın ana karakteri Lilith, Night Women grubu tarafından düzenlenen isyana katılmayı hem kurbanı hem de faili olduğu şiddet döngüsünü kırmak için reddeder. Üç romanın da ana karakteri köle kadınlardır. Çünkü kadın köleler kölelik dönemlerindeki hem sistematik hem de cinsel şiddeti gözler önüne sermek açısından en etkili grubu oluşturur. Buna ek olarak, kölelik günümüz toplumlarında kültürel kimliklerin oluşmasında hâlâ önemli bir rol oynayan travmatik bir geçmişe sahiptir. Bu üç roman karakterlerinin yaşadıkları travmatik olayları anlatırken mağduriyet hikâyeleri anlatmaktan kaçınarak köleliğin travmatik geçmişinden hâlâ etkilenmekte olan çağdaş okurlara güçlü ve yeni bir bakış açısı sunmaktadırlar.

### Anahtar Sözcükler

Edebiyatta Travma Çalışmaları, Yeni Köle Anlatıları, *The Long Song*, *Blonde Roots*, *The Book of Night Women*, Kölelik, Sömürgecilik Sonrası Dönemi Romanı

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## INTRODUCTION

The British literary scene witnessed a resurgence of neo-slave narratives towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. While refreshing the memories of the traumatic history of slavery through historical re-imaginings, these neo-slave narratives maintain the relevancy of their overarching themes such as violence, racial discrimination and inequality in the contemporary world. This dissertation will focus on three such novels by Black British writers, namely; Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010), Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2008), and Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* (2009). This dissertation will analyse how these three contemporary neo-slave narratives handle the grand theme of freedom, which is the ultimate goal presented in original slave narratives. For neo-slave narratives, freedom itself does not guarantee the protagonist with fulfilment since the underlying ideologies of slavery persist beyond slavery, even in the contemporary world. Moreover, the stories of three slave protagonists will be evaluated through the lens of the representation of trauma, violence, and emotional erosion. Questions of ownership of the story and agency will be inspected with comparison to narrative formulations of the original slave narrative genre. The narrative methods employed by individual authors will be analysed separately in conjunction with the overall thematic similarities and genre-defining characteristics.

Forceful dislocation of millions of Africans through the Transatlantic Slave Trade from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, over the course of geographical discovery and imperial expansionism of European powers to meet the growing need of manual labour as slaves throughout the colonies remains to be one of the most traumatising experiences in all of human history. The expansionist policies of the European empires such as the British, the French, the Spanish, and the Dutch opened up new horizons for the entrepreneurs of these nations. Accordingly, agricultural products such as sugar, cocoa, and tea, which were previously considered to be luxuries or delicacies, could make their way to the mainstream European consumer's market. Thus, the demand for these

products increased, which, in turn, resulted in more people investing in plantations on the colonies. Overseas colonies of the aforementioned empires span over South and North America and the West Indies. Considering the range and size of these colonies, settlers alone could not maintain the flourishing industry. In addition, agricultural production of such crops required intensive manual labour. Increasing demand and production at the same time forced the empires to transport the required labour force from overseas, especially from Africa in the form of slaves. With all the competing European powers taking part in the slave trade, it grew exponentially within a short span of time, as Black suggests,

[G]reater European demand for plantation led to an increase in the number of slaves imported into the Americas in the seventeenth century. About half a million slaves were imported in the first half of the century, but a million in the second half, including over 600,000 in the last quarter. The slave trade had initially been dominated by the need to supply the Portuguese and Spanish colonies with labour, but, as Dutch, French and English expanded their colonial presence, so they played a more direct role in the trade, selling to their own colonies. (*A New Global History* 84)

According to Black's data, the number of slaves transported doubled within the seventeenth century itself. As the industries in the colonies grew, the numbers kept multiplying well into the nineteenth century.

Such a phenomenon paved the way to the slave narrative genre. Original slave narratives, in essence, are records of the experiences and lives of formerly enslaved people. They are also referred to as "captivity narratives" or "freedom narratives" among critics (Pierce 83). They are put down on paper either by the former slaves themselves, if they were lucky enough to have learned how to read and write, or by third persons who act as a medium to convey the former slave's story. Thus, slave narratives are strictly autobiographical or biographical works. Considering that literacy was an offence punishable by death by the plantocracy, most slaves did not know how to read or write. At the height of anti-slavery movement, its representatives sought out formerly enslaved people to record their stories and share them with the general public to raise awareness of the inhumane conditions of slavery. Although the involvement of abolitionist editors in the publication of several early slave narratives brings the authenticity of their contents into question, most surviving slave narratives, including the key ones telling the stories

of Mary Prince (1788-1833) and Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), are considered to be original and authentic. Furthermore, the questions regarding the authenticity of slave narratives are beyond the scope of this study.

Considering that slavery is an oppressive, capitalist system fuelled by aggressive racial profiling towards non-whites, it is important to note that there needs to be an ideological shift in the community for slave narratives to find voice. Early slave narratives started to appear in the late eighteenth century. Gould lists three important factors, which enabled the publication and distribution of slave narratives as follows:

One was the rise of secular social philosophy, based on humanitarian principles and contractual terms for human association and government, found in such thinkers as Baron Montesquieu and John Locke, which drastically narrowed the traditional Christian rationale for slavery as the natural extension of the “slavery” of human sin. Another important development was the rise of sentimentalism in the eighteenth century, which, related to evangelical religion, popular fiction, and urban cultures of refinement, raised the importance of the virtues of sympathy and benevolence as well as the cultural refinement accompanying them. A third development, especially important in the 1790s, was the proliferation of more radical and revolutionary ideas about natural rights vis- a-vis state and social forms of authority. (11)

It can be argued that the Enlightenment and the humanitarian values that it brought enabled the members of societies, such as the British, who participated in slavery and slave trade to adapt an empathic perspective towards the experience of slaves. This signalled a move away from the previous racist ideology that regards blacks supposedly as a sub-human race, even if it was for self-refinement or religious reasons. The same shift also paved the way to abolitionist movements across the empires that participated in the practice of slavery. There was a growing anti-slavery sentiment towards the end of the eighteenth century owing to the efforts of Evangelical movements and abolitionist groups. These groups actively sought such narratives to record and publish them for the consumption of the general public. Gould claims that

[E]vangelical Christian groups often sponsored and oversaw their publication. By the 1780s, new political organizations, like the English Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1787) and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (1775/1784) [. . .] also played a role in encouraging and publishing these narratives. (11)

Considering that the majority of the enslaved Africans lacked both the education and the agency to convey these stories to the general public, the role of such organisations in

conceiving the genre was crucial. They aimed to spread the anti-slavery sentiment among the crowds to accumulate enough political influence to end the slave trade and the practice of slavery. In order to do so, both physical and emotional sufferings of the enslaved person were foregrounded and backed by religious sentiment to increase their effect. As a result, it was not uncommon to see pious and lordly persons as the main figures in slave narratives. Religious teachings and virtues were juxtaposed by the practices of slave-owners to highlight the sinful ways of slavery. Instances of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse were both told and implied to show the derogatory effect of slavery on both its victims and practitioners as human beings.

Since slave trade and slavery were practiced across the superpowers of the colonial era, examples of slave narratives appeared on both sides of the Atlantic and in the colonies. Therefore, slave narratives can be hard to categorise. Slavery brings about the dislocation of masses across large territories to meet the growing demands for labour in the colonies. Therefore, variety in slave narratives was inevitable. Carretta explains the complexity of their categorisation by giving some examples:

[H]ow should one categorize authors of sub-Saharan African birth or descent like David George (1743? – 1810) and Boston King (1760? – 1802), who were born into slavery in what would become the United States, emancipated themselves by joining the British forces as black Loyalists during the American Revolution, were evacuated to Canada by the defeated British, and who chose to move from there to settle in Africa? (11)

The enslaved people vary greatly in terms of their origins. They might be brought from different parts of Africa, or could be born into slavery. The destinations of captured Africans sold to slavery could include the lands of all the empires participating in the slave trade, as well as their colonies. Moreover, it was not uncommon for the enslaved Africans to move from one colony to another if they were sold from one trader, or slaveholder to another. Such mobility turns slave narratives into a transnational genre. Therefore, the end product transcends the origins of its author and the borders of its publication area in terms of its representative value. Furthermore, it can be argued that slave narratives adapt an inductive approach to convey the sufferings of all enslaved people while condemning the practitioners of slavery, while ironically giving voice to an essentially personal story, in the form of a biography or autobiography.

Among the vast number of slave narratives, Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, the African. Written by Himself* (1789) stands out as a well-known and influential one, because it depicts an extraordinary tale of an enslaved man earning his freedom, supporting the anti-slavery movement, and even writing a petition to Queen Charlotte, the wife of George III on behalf of all mistreated and enslaved people. It is an autobiographical work, published in 1789 in London, depicting Equiano's life journey as a slave taken from Nigeria to the West Indies and then to North America. However, it also depicts how he saves enough money to buy his freedom and how he works as an abolitionist to help all enslaved people as much as he can. Therefore, it is an inspirational story of success for all the enslaved Africans and supporters of the anti-slavery movement. Carretta explains how it works as an exemplary text as follows:

*The Interesting Narrative* is universally accepted as the fundamental text in the genre of the slave narrative. Equiano offered his own life as a model for others to follow. Equiano's personal conversions and transformations from enslaved to free, pagan to Christian, and pro-slavery to abolitionist, anticipated the changes he hoped to make in his readers, as well as the transformation he called for in the relationship between Britain and Africa. (18)

Equiano's success is extraordinary considering his former position as an enslaved African. Therefore, by publishing his autobiography, he proposes that it could be replicated as long as self-reformation is desired. However, as inspiring Equiano's life story is, Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831) is a better template for the novels to be studied in this dissertation in that it is one of the few examples originating from the West Indies by a female former-slave. The story revolves around the abuse and violence Prince experiences at the hands of slave-owners, one after the other, constantly moving from one household to another. She finally finds herself in London streets after being thrown out of the house by the mistress. Unlike Equiano, she is neither well equipped nor destined for success after she is free. She can only survive with the help of abolitionists, who record and publish her story as well. Two of the novels to be analysed in this dissertation are written by women writers while all three novels have women slaves as protagonists. Therefore, her journey reflects the lives of the female protagonists of the novels, which will be analysed in this study.

Even though slave trade was abolished in 1807, slavery itself was outlawed in Britain in 1833 by the Slave Emancipation Act, and in the U.S. in 1865 by the Emancipation Proclamation, its and the slave narratives' legacy continue to this day in different forms (Black *A New Global History* 130-35). In terms of literature, slave narratives evolve into fictional narratives with neo-slave narratives. Coined by Bernard Bell, neo-slave narratives take up the general schematic of a slave narrative and incorporate postmodern techniques to reshape, and in some aspects, reconstruct them. According to Dubey, the emergence of neo-slave narratives coincides with movements against racial discrimination originating in the U.S. in the 1960s (333). He claims that

[A]lthough it seems logical to assume that the genre of the neo - slave narrative emerged in response to historical amnesia about slavery, in fact it was preceded by a heightened public attention to slavery during the late 1960s. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, slavery erupted onto the national scene as a matter of intense public interest and debate. Conflicts over how slavery should be represented in the realms of historiography, literature, and popular visual culture were clearly inflected by the militant black politics of the 1960s. (Dubey 333)

Although the practice of slavery is no longer in effect legally, its underlying ideologies, especially racial discrimination, has plagued contemporary societies even to this date. Therefore, the revolutionary movements are reflected in literature as the revival of slave narratives with new forms of agency given to the narrators. Most strikingly, the Evangelist and abolitionist undertones of the slave narratives are discarded completely. Thus, the humanitarian morality that enabled the original slave narratives is dismissed, indicating that the narrators (former slaves) have all the agency over their own stories. As a result, there can no longer be any question of authenticity or authorship. Instead of editors or scribes, the stories are narrated either by the protagonists retrospectively, or by their children (or descendants by the extension of writers). Secondly, linearity of the narratives is broken by non-linear narration, flashbacks, metanarration, and unreliable narrators (Dubey 344-45). This indicates that such stories are personal, subjective, and shaped according to the perception of their narrators. Thus, the inductive approach of original slave narratives is abandoned, resulting in a shift from clear-cut, almost stereotypical representation of both the enslaved people and the slaveholders. Accordingly, there is more room for grey areas in neo-slave narratives in that they include personal rivalries, intra-black and intra-white violence, and blurring of boundaries in the master-slave dichotomy. The protagonists are handled as individuals rather than being representatives

of an oppressed group. The reconstruction of the old form of the slave narrative with varying methodologies reflects the idea that slavery and its effects still linger today as Dubey suggests, “the conviction that slavery is not yet a matter of history lies behind the various time-rapturing devices found in post-1970s novels of slavery, including rememory, time travel, flashbacks, flash-forwards, and possession” (344). In conclusion, neo-slave narratives strip the formula of original slave narratives off of any loss of agency on the part of the narrator to turn it into a subjective and personal story belonging only to them.

The emergence of the neo slave narratives coincide with the emergence of postcolonial literature. The year 1960 marked an important turn for colonial history in that a large number of African states declared themselves independent. 1960 would be known as the Year of Africa. Among the countries were two British colonies Somalia and Nigeria. Moreover, the Caribbean was soon to follow the wave of independence with Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago becoming independent in 1962. Other colonies one by one left the rule of the Empire in the following decades. This wave of decolonisation sweeping through the Empire also brought social, cultural, and academic attention to history, legacy, and literature of the formerly colonised nations. A new movement of postcolonial literature emerged as a result of these interests. In literature, artists, historians, and academia of former colonies started to write back to the imperialist narratives which defined them from a Eurocentric perspective. It was time for the marginalised to raise their voice to re-iterate their own culture and history. Hence, starting from the 1960s to the following decades, postcolonial literature started to flourish. This was further supported by the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. happening at the same time. The emergence of neo slave narratives into mainstream popular culture and literature happened during this period. Considering that they tackle the same cultural, social, and racial issues, neo slave narratives are part of a sub-genre of postcolonial literature.

The aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s in the U.S. increased the interest in Black history. Remembering the times of slavery, the American Civil War, the inter-racial power dynamics of the past echoed the outcries for social justice. Although slavery

did not exist anymore, the mistreatment of black people in social, political, and economic spheres required critical attention and awareness. The sufferings of the past could become an anchor for solidarity. Therefore, slave narratives both in the form of original slave narratives and in the form of emerging new-slave narratives grew in popularity in the 1970s. The publication of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976) by Alex Haley (1921-1992) and its serialisation as *Roots* (1977), along with the serialisation of Bernardo Guimarães's (1825-1884) *Escrava Isaura* (1865) with the same name between 1977 and 1978, sparked popular interest in the lives of slaves and the plantocracy. The two series appeared in the same year and the names Kunta Kinte and Isaura became household names because the popularity of these series far exceeded the borders of the countries they were released in, namely the U.S. and Brazil. The series became so popular that *Roots* and *Escara Isaura* were both remade in 2016 and 2004 respectively.

The popularity of the series was also followed by the publication of new and experimental slave narratives. In *Kindred* (1979), Octavia Butler (1947-2006) brings her contemporary world and the times of slavery together by having her protagonist travel back in time. She breaks the traditional biographical and linear narrative style of slave narrative by introducing the concept of time travel and flashbacks. This opens up new possibilities for the evolution of the neo-slave narrative genre. Similarly, Toni Morrison's (1931-2019) *Beloved* (1987) introduces gothic elements to the genre in the form of a haunting. The protagonist Sethe's murder of her daughter in order to save her from going back to a slave ends up with the ghost of the daughter coming back to haunt Sethe and her family in her old age. The novel was a big success for Morrison as she won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. With *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1998), *Beloved* forms a trilogy, before the end of which, Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Morrison is believed to have taken the already-blooming neo-slave narrative genre to new heights of popularity with her *Beloved*. While the genre spawned many literary works in American literature, it also spanned to Britain even into the twenty-first century. The novels to be studied in this dissertation are published in the twenty-first century. They are Andrea Levy's (1956-2019) *The Long Song*, Bernardine Evaristo's (1959-) *Blonde Roots*, and Marlon James's (1970-) *The Book of Night Women*. Levy was already a prominent figure in British postcolonial literature by the time of the publication of *The Long Song*, and her novel was



shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2011. Similarly, Evaristo and James are emerging Black writers whose works have received critical acclaim in recent years. James has won the Booker Prize for Fiction in 2015 for his *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014). Evaristo, on the other hand, has shared the Booker Prize with Margaret Atwood in 2019 for her *Girl, Women, Other* (2019). Both original slave narratives and neo-slave narratives expanded onto the big screen as well. Historical movies both new ones and adaptations have been produced since the 1970s. Some movie examples dealing with the historical experience of slavery include *Mandingo* (1975), *Beloved* (1998), *Amazing Grace* (2006), *Case Départ* (2011), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *The Birth of a Nation* (2016), *Django Unchained* (2012), and, most recently, *Emancipation* (2022). *The Long Song* and *Kindred* were adapted into miniseries as well in 2018 and 2022 respectively. Even a short list of examples such as this shows that the interest in the literary and cinematic representation of the history of slavery has continued to be point of interest over the decades.

Due to their subject matter, neo-slave narratives tap into the traumatic history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In doing so, they enable their reader to reflect on this process of traumatization from a contemporary perspective. Although they are fictional narratives, they re-create the original slave narratives through the lens of the enduring legacy of slavery and the cultural trauma it has initiated in the generations to come. Trauma studies in literature, a strand of trauma studies, has expanded over the years to include colonial and postcolonial trauma in order to analyse the inner workings of this process of traumatisation of both individuals represented in these works and cultures by extension. It also provides the necessary understanding to identify symptoms of trauma in their literary representations and the ways to decipher the ways of repression, alienation, and dissociation trauma entails in its victims.

To be able to analyse the inner workings of trauma and how they are represented in these works, it is crucial to map out how it has become a field of study in medicine and psychology. Davis and Meretoja explain that the word “trauma” itself is of Greek origin, and it refers to a physical wound inflicted on the patient’s body (1). In this version of the word’s historical process, it does not include the emotional or psychological wounds.

Rather, it encompasses the complications that arise after a wound is received. This type of terminology is still being used today in the field of medicine. However, since the second half of the nineteenth century, the term has been expanded to include medical cases in which a physical wound is not present on the patient. Davis and Maretoja assert that some of the early example cases that indicate symptoms of trauma, or rather post-traumatic stress disorder, date back to the 1830s, when the expansion of railways brought about railroad accidents (2). The survivors of such accidents experienced delayed psychological responses to their experience such as behavioural changes and the inability to “work or function normally, even if they showed no signs of physical injury” (Davis and Maretoja, 2).

According to Sütterlin, the advancement of research on trauma was greatly accelerated by psychoanalytical studies of Freud and his contemporaries especially after World War I (13). Increasing number of “shell-shocked” soldiers, who were traumatised by the horrors of the Great War, required investigation on events that left psychological symptoms long after physical recovery (Sütterlin 13). The increase in scientific interest in the subject and more than enough cases to study resulted in the first formulations of what is called post-traumatic stress disorder today. These studies also “laid the groundwork for present-day trauma therapy” (Sütterlin 13).

However, the recognition of trauma as a cause of mental disorder was not until 1980. Sütterlin regards the inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1980) by American Psychological Association as a “a revolutionary new diagnosis” (15). This led to the acknowledgement of PTSD as a diagnosable disorder with a series of varied symptoms. Moreover, this development also enabled the studies on trauma to branch off to other fields of study, such as literature, in the decade to follow, leading to the formation of trauma studies in literature. General scope of trauma studies in literature is suggested by Balaev as follows: “[p]sychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies” (360). Traumatic experiences play a crucial role in identity formation on both personal and

cultural levels. Their representations in literature in forms of narration and performativity constitute the fundamental subject of trauma studies in literature.

Trauma studies in literature can be divided into two sections from its inception to its branches in terms of their critical approaches to trauma and its representation. The first wave of academic studies in the field was pioneered by the works of critics such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman who were associated with the Yale School of Poststructuralism (Balaev 363). This school is very formulaic in its approach to traumatisation and its delayed symptoms in that it is highly loyal to Freud's formulation of the process of traumatisation. In their view, trauma avoids representation within language, as Balaev suggests,

[I]n the traditional trauma model pioneered by Cathy Caruth, trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation. The model draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting the traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche. Trauma is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation. (363)

Hence, the damage done to the individual's psyche by the traumatic experience is regarded as permanent in this approach. Moreover, the initial formula focuses on a singular traumatizing event or experience in the past. Continual exposure to traumatizing agents, such as in the case of living under bondage through the practice of slavery, is not stressed. Therefore, the initial approach within the trauma studies is limiting in analysing the culturally transformative effects of trauma.

The second wave of trauma studies in literature challenges and expands the critical approach of the first wave. Balaev calls the second wave "Pluralistic Trauma Theory" and indicates that the critics no longer maintain the view that traumatic experience avoids all linguistic representation (366). Balaev, who is also one of the representatives of this critical approach, explains the new approach as follows:

The pluralistic model of trauma challenges the unspeakable trope in seeking to understand not only the structural dimensions of trauma that often develop in terms of trauma's dissociative effects on consciousness and memory, but also the cultural dimensions of trauma and the diversity of narrative expression. By moving away from a position that centralizes pathological fragmentation, the pluralistic model

suggests that traumatic experience uncovers new relationships between experience, language, and knowledge that detail the social significance of trauma. The study of trauma within this approach provides greater attention to the variability of traumatic representations. [. . .] The pluralistic model of trauma includes perspectives that argue traumatic memory, though disruptive, may not necessarily cause pathological symptoms that prevent its retrieval and assimilation into identity. This shifts the focus to the external, cultural factors that influence the meaning of a traumatic event because the recollection process in the present moment is influenced by cultural and historical contexts that impact narrative recall and create knowledge of the past. (366-67)

Thus, the pathological repression of the traumatic experience is no longer an essential part of the process of traumatising. The context and cultural environment can play an enabling role for the representation of past trauma. The contribution of the Civil Rights Movement by African Americans in the 1960s to the emergence of the neo-slave narrative genre and its representation of slavery can be given as an example for this point. This also envisions the role of shared collective historical trauma in how cultures shape and identify themselves as well as how they see others.

In relation to the cultural impacts of past trauma on groups or societies, Madigan and Meretoja argue that there are two approaches to cultural trauma: traumatising events and traumatised societies (46). These two approaches differ from one another on the impact they have on the collective identity as Madigan and Meretoja assert:

The theory of traumatic events answers by asserting that it means an indelible mark on the group's collective memory, while the theory of traumatized societies answers by asserting that it means not only an indelible mark on the group's collective memory, but also a significant revision of its collective identity. The former understanding is quantitative; it augments collective identity by adding another memory to the store. The latter understanding is qualitative; it transforms the nature of the entire collective identity. (52)

Slavery and imperialism fall under the category of the latter in that they and their underlying ideologies have shaped how people of former colonies and black people of contemporary societies identify themselves and how racial dynamics of the contemporary world are formed. Therefore, the emergence and continual production of neo-slave narratives can be regarded as an organic result of the process of defining and re-defining the contemporary black identity in response to the residual cultural effects of traumatic past of slavery.

Literature, in that respect, reconstructs the past trauma in two aspects. On the surface layer, in accordance with the pluralistic approach in trauma studies, it can be a medium of recollection through the narration of the past cultural trauma. It enables access to the unspeakable past within new contexts, while also reaching into the personal level of trauma through the life stories of its protagonists. These stories constitute “testimony” to the traumatic past as well as triggering “emphatic unsettlement” in their audience (Sütterlin 19). On a more complicated level, literature can perform trauma and its symptoms through literary devices “that resemble traumatic processes such as flashbacks, re-enactments and dissociative states” (Sütterlin 19). The symptoms of the traumatised individual and their dissociative and intrusive nature can be replicated within the narration with the use of these literary devices which have a similar effect on the narration.

Slavery in the West Indies, which is the setting for the novels to be analysed in this dissertation, was the result of the expansionist policies of the growing European empires and the profitability of valuable products such as sugar, tobacco and rice, for the cultivation of which, the West Indies was perfect. Thus, plantations grew in numbers as many British and European settlers arrived in the colonies seeking their fortune. This resulted in an inevitable rise in demand for workforce, which was to be met with the slave trade. According to Black, in Jamaica alone, the black population had reached 42,000 as early as 1700, far exceeding the number of whites settled there, who were approximately 7,300 (*Slavery: A New Global History* 81). From that point on, the gap in the ratio between the white and the black population would continue to grow. Considering the vast disproportion of numbers, as the treatment of slaves got harsher, unrest among enslaved Africans brought about many slave revolts varying greatly in scale in the eighteenth century.

The three novels to be analysed in this dissertation choose this period as their setting with slight differences. Levy’s *The Long Song* depicts the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, which saw the abolition of slavery with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Evaristo’s *Blonde Roots*, on the other hand, provides its reader with a panoramic view of the slave trade and slavery through the non-linear narration of its protagonist’s

memories. She creates a mirrored image of the history of slavery by reverting the roles of the Europeans and the Africans in the slave trade. In her re-imagining, a great African Empire enslaves white European races. Her narration is more likely to correspond to the early and the mid-eighteenth century. Finally, Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* takes the early nineteenth century as its setting, which can be deduced from the constant references to the successful slave rebellion in the French colony of Saint Dominique, which took place between 1791 and 1804.

Set in the past, the novels provide a closer look at the history of slavery in the West Indies from the point of view of the slave. Such historical reconstruction enables the authors to explore the life and working conditions of the slaves, their personal experiences living under the system of slavery, the dynamics of race and gender in this context and their implications for the contemporary reader. The unique quality of *Blonde Roots* compared to the other two novels is that, it also turns the history of slavery upside down by writing an alternative history in which the greatest empire of the world is the United Kingdom of Ambossa, an African empire which captures and enslaves the Europeans. Thus, in Evaristo's novel, the slaves are captured white people from across Europe, while the protagonist, Doris, is a slave Englishwoman.

The most striking common point for the three novels is that they all employ female protagonists. While most of the suffering caused by the system of slavery affect men and women alike, having a female protagonist lets the authors to further explore one of the most common ways of slave exploitation: sexual exploitation. Sexual assault is a common occurrence for slave women, and if it is conducted by the white man, it is unavoidable. It might come in the form of straight up sexual assault or as a punishment for unruly behaviour. However, the novels take this topic one step further by indicating that it was not uncommon for slave women to be assaulted by other slaves as well. *The Long Song*'s July and *The Book of Night Women*'s Lilith are both mulatto girls whose mothers were raped by the overseers of the estates. Similarly, it is revealed in *Blonde Roots* that the sister of the protagonist is raped by the owner of the plantation while she was still a child and later kept as a mistress. This dissertation will analyse the strategic choice of female

protagonists of the authors and its implications with relevance to the broader context of slavery and oppression.

While vividly describing the destructive aspects of slavery and the inhumane conditions under which the slaves were forced to live and work, the novels also add another layer to the hierarchical systems of slavery. The obvious hierarchical dichotomy between master and slave is maintained in all the novels. However, the novels also explore the rankings, rivalries and mistreatments among the slaves themselves. First of all, it is important to note that all three protagonists, July, Doris and Lilith, are house slaves who work in the estates of the masters. Thus, they already possess a station that is relatively safer and more comfortable compared to those of the slaves who work the fields. Moreover, all three are literate, which is a luxury from which a slave is intentionally exempted by the masters. These conditions lead the young protagonists of *The Long Song* and *The Book of Night Women* to the disillusionment that they are better than any common slave. Therefore, the constant threat of being sent to the fields as punishment remains as a control mechanism over any possible unruly act of house slaves. For July and Lilith, their relative comfort at the estate constructs a false sense of safety which, in turn, creates a ranking among the slaves. This division brews spite and resentment among the slaves to the point of forgetting the fact that they are object to the same cruelty of the masters. The house slaves are also awakened from their disillusionment through sudden bursts of anger and violence from the masters upon any mistakes that they might make while carrying out their duties. The division can also be seen in Evaristo's novel. After the failure of her first attempt to escape, Doris is banished from the estate to the plantation, where she, for the first time, has to live in the crowded slave quarters. The fact that she has to hide her previous duty as a house slave from her new friends indicates that she might not be accepted among them if they knew. Finally, all three novels present the hierarchy among slaves as a hindrance to their ability to form a unified community. Hence, it is also a source of disappointment and disillusionment on the personal level as the protagonists continuously compare themselves to other slaves in terms of status and even the shade of the colour of their skin. Extreme and uncontrolled violence, betrayal of the slaves by the slaves, romance between slave and master, between black women and white men, the failure of

such relationships, and naming as exertion of power are other key concepts that recur in the novels that are under scrutiny.

Finally, it is important to note that all three of the protagonists achieve a certain state of freedom at the end of the novels. However, this does not bring about any sense of fulfilment to the characters. In *The Long Song*, July narrates her own story through retrospective narration when she is an old woman. This narration is an autobiographical novel, which forms *The Long Song*. Yet she intentionally tries to prematurely end her narration twice, from which she is dissuaded by the insistence of her son. Both attempts to finish the novel with happy endings for the character, which are immediately refuted or disrupted by the following section, suggesting that both endings, which are marked firstly by the abolition of slavery and secondly July's romantic union with the Overseer Robert Goodwin, do not provide the fulfilment, freedom and stability they indicate at first glance. On the contrary, as the narration continues, July constantly experiences tragic losses as she loses her love and child. In fact, by the time her lost son finds her, July has become an old homeless woman. Thus, freedom does not exactly mean equality or better life standards for her. Similarly, Doris, in *Blonde Roots*, succeeds in her second attempt to escape with a handful of fellow slaves that she takes with her only to find out that the man she has lost and thought to have regained has moved on with his life. He is with another woman now and has children. Also, as runaway slaves, they are confined to their hidden settlement in the mountains. Therefore, by the time she is officially free, she is a lonely old woman who has lost all her family and the love of her life. Thirdly, in *The Book of Night Women*, Lilith, plagued by the guilt of the murders she committed before, refuses to take active part in the rebellion plotted by Night Women. She simply does not see any hope for the future even if the rebellion succeeds and she realises that Homer only wants blood and revenge, not freedom. By the time the rebellion fails, all the rebellious slaves are dead and Overseer Robert Quinn, Lilith's lover, has died in the rebellion as well. As the master of the estate leaves for England, Lilith is left in the great house to live as a free slave pregnant with Robert Quinn's baby. The melancholic ending of the novel implies that Lilith has lost more than what she has gained from the uprising as new slaves are purchased and the plantation will be up and running soon enough.



The fact that the endings of the novels lack self-fulfilment on the parts of the protagonists is suggestive of the cautionary quality of these slave narratives. It is implied that freedom alone is not enough for the slave to lead a decent life as long as the ideologies and the discourses that give birth to slavery outlive their brainchild. The psychological damage caused by the experience persists just like the scars left by the lash on their backs. Moreover, reimagining these slave narratives in the twenty-first century by Andrea Levy, Bernardine Evaristo and Marlon James functions as eye openers to their readers in that they warn against the fact that those same ideologies live on even today just in different shapes and forms. They also shift the victimhood of the slave from the focal point of their narration as opposed to the original slave narratives. Unlike their counterparts in slave narratives, the protagonists of these three slave narratives do not need sympathy from their white readers, as was the case in the abolitionist era. Therefore, Christianity hardly plays any role in their characterisation. Instead, they are represented to be either non-religious or sticking to their original beliefs and even superstitions. The same shift can be observed in the use of language as well. Taking the command of the narration and telling the slave's side of the story by the slaves or their close relatives, the narrators, who are the protagonists in *The Long Song* and *Blonde Roots*, and the protagonist's daughter in *The Book of Night Women*, stray from the standard use of English to use patois especially in the speech patterns of character dialogues. This can be considered as a way of fictional enabling of slaves, who mostly could not read or write, to tell their side of the story.

With references to the historical context, each of the three novels will be analysed in their dedicated chapters. The first chapter will provide an overview of the British slave trade in the Caribbean, and important historical events in colonial Jamaica according to their relation to the novels to be studied. The island has a complex history of rebellions, which is further complicated by the presence of Maroon communities. The dynamic political alignments of the Maroons, fluctuating military presence of the British, and the news of slave insurgences from nearby French colonies meant that an outbreak was always a possibility. The high ratio of blacks to whites loomed as a constant threat to the plantocracy while being a source of encouragement for the enslaved. Important dates and

uprisings are referenced in the novels that are to be analysed in this dissertation. Therefore, events such as Tacky's Rebellion, Maroon wars, the Baptist War, and the islands history of Maroon communities provide important historical background, contextualisation, and a further insight into the novels themselves.

The second chapter will focus on *The Long Song*, as a coming of age novel of a slave girl, with relation to trauma and its representation. It includes both the life story of a slave girl in the early nineteenth century and the challenge of the representation of such a traumatic past retrospectively through autobiographical fiction. The problems July face during the writing process of her novel provide an understanding of her attempt at working-through her past trauma. Levy's play with metanarration will be related to the overarching theme of recurrent trauma, memory, and recollection. Also, being the writer of her own story, July's command over how events unfold and her silences grant her the feeling of empowerment through storytelling. However, the contests with her son, who is the editor of her book drive the narrative forward by forcing July to change the course of the story to her true life story as Thomas demands. July's dissociation with her own life story by disowning it and her attempts to hide her biggest traumatic experiences with screen memories will be an integral part of the chapter.

The third chapter will be dedicated to *Blonde Roots* and its subversion of history of slavery through a mirrored reflection of the British Empire. Evaristo turns history upside down by telling the story of an African Empire which kidnaps and enslaves whites from around Europe. The novel's fragmented narration, use of flashbacks and multiplicity of voices will be analysed in relation to the conventions of slave narratives and supposedly scientific narratives based on Social Darwinism, which promote the enslavement of the black races. Flashbacks are intrusive resurfacing of past memories, some of which gradually uncover the protagonist's traumatic memories. They are triggered by what happens in the current narrative. The intrusive flashbacks and the fragmented narration will be analysed in relation to how literature can perform trauma and how it unfolds through flashbacks.

Finally, the fourth chapter will be devoted to *The Book of Night Women*, and James's idea of cycle of violence and counter-violence, which creates an inescapable vortex for the black slave who is trapped in it. Violence, which is a daily reality in the life of a plantation slave, breeds further violence in search of revenge. Being the victim of extreme violence and abuse, the slaves, and especially the protagonist, are driven to an initial understanding of self-righteous, violent vengeance. However, trauma through violence is not limited to its victim, but its perpetrator as well. Differing from the other two novels, *Lilith* will provide a new perspective on trauma through perpetrator trauma as on how trauma affects the identity making process of a young woman.

In the conclusion, this dissertation aims to demonstrate how the neo-slave narrative, with their focus on the different ways to represent personal trauma, relates to the contemporary world by pinpointing the roots of the transgenerational cultural trauma that slavery has embedded in descendants of former slaves. In counter, the novels propose new and empowering narratives, which represent their characters as more than just victims. Considering how historical trauma can shape collective identities, the novels explore beyond victimhood to see their protagonists in a new light as individuals rather than allegorical representations of collective suffering. They are fictional counterparts of the original slave narratives in that they give voice to the suffering of people within the system of slavery, with a larger, communal goal in mind. Owing to their complex stories and narrative devices, these neo-slave narratives devise ways to perform trauma as well as providing the grounds for empathic witnessing. In doing so, they shy away from becoming victim narratives to enable the readers to see history of slavery, and its traumatic past in a new light.

This dissertation aims to uncover what methods each novel makes use of to undermine the grand aim of the original slave narratives: freedom. The protagonists of the three novels long to be free and get rid of the miserable conditions of slavery. Moreover, they do succeed in obtaining freedom or a status close to it. However, all three novels suggest

that such conditions do not really bring a sense of fulfilment to the protagonists, which suggests that escaping the life of a slave alone does not suffice as long as the constructed system of thought behind slavery/ racism/ colonialism/ imperialism persists. Freedom alone, unlike in the original slave narratives, is not a magical solution for all the traumatic years the protagonists experience under slavery. Considering that neo-slave narratives emerge as a genre with the developments of movements against racial discrimination, it is safe to assume that the underlying ideologies of slavery still linger in contemporary societies. Therefore, the novels focus on the journey rather than the destination of freedom on a personal level to have an insight into the psychology and emotional development of individuals living under the conditions of slavery. Accordingly, the protagonists of these novels are not just simple representatives of a communal struggle, but also individuals who have agency in the choices in their lives and their narration. They are survivors of such a brutal system as slavery rather than freedom fighters. The appreciation of these characters lies in their ability to struggle on however traumatised they may be. They are testaments to keep moving forward, which relate them, and these neo-slave narratives, to the contemporary world. The emergence of Black Lives Matter movement in the past decade as a response to police violence against black people in the U.S., which was already a point of hot debate in the 1990s, and the refugee crises shed light on the fact that race is still a determining factor on how much someone's life is "worth" in the western world. The imbalanced allocation of both violence and compassion depending on race remains a looming threat that racial discrimination, which made slavery possible, might be just as strong still. Therefore, neo-slave narratives such as *The Long Song*, *Blonde Roots*, and *The Book of Night Women* create a fictional space in which blacks and whites are not confined to the historical victim-perpetrator dichotomy. They either empower the victim by giving them more agency or invert the roles. In doing so, they provide a negotiation ground where understanding the other, by all parties, might be possible.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SLAVE TRADE, PLANTATION ECONOMY, AND SLAVE REVOLTS IN COLONIAL JAMAICA**

Since all three of the novels share colonial West Indies, Jamaica in particular (or a fictional reflection of it) as their setting, it would be beneficial to look first into the role of the British Empire in the Transatlantic slave trade, its routes to the West Indies, especially Jamaica, the plantation economy, sugar monoculture, and the intricate dynamics of British colonisation in Jamaica. The historical events and infrastructures related to slavery in colonial Jamaica mark important milestones in the country's colonial history and history of slavery in general. They will also serve as historical reference points in the narratives of the three novels in terms of contextualisation and analysis. All three novels reference at least one of the events above with varying degrees of narrative contribution. Therefore, understanding them first enables the reader to understand the characters and their immediate surroundings better. This chapter aims to provide enough historical background related to the novels without going into extreme details.

Transatlantic slave trade refers to a complex of trade routes used by the European empires to transport slaves from the African continent to their colonies in the new world. Colonies in South America, North America, and the Caribbean were settled by colonial entrepreneurs and thrived on the production and exportation of raw materials like cotton and refined products such as sugar. The slave trade was the solution to meet the manual labour need of these colonies. Pioneered by Portugal and Spain, which were followed by Britain, France and Netherlands, the Transatlantic slave trade moved millions of Africans within the span of three centuries starting from the sixteenth century and continuing into the early nineteenth century. Practice of slavery itself outlived the slave trade. The participation of the British in the slave trade was heightened in the early seventeenth century by the acquisition of the colonies in the West Indies such as Bermuda (1616), Barbados (1627), Nevis (1628), Antigua (1632) (Black *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World*

*History* 44). The plantations producing tobacco, sugar, cacao, and the like were introduced to these colonies, which resulted in a demand for slave labour. According to Black, the eighteenth century was the peak of British slave trade, whose primary destination was the British West Indies, followed by the British North America (*The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History* 80). However, the situation started to change towards the end of the century as the profitability of plantation products lessened and anti-slavery movement led by Quakers started to expand in Britain. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) became the voice of the anti-slavery movement in the parliament. In conjunction with their efforts, the loss of profitability and humanitarian concerns led to the abolishment of slave trade in 1807 by the British Parliament.

Throughout the Transatlantic slave trade, the British Empire maintained her position as the one with a large share of the market. Pettigrew states that if only the official institutions are taken into consideration, the Royal African Company, chartered by the Crown to be the monopoly in the British slave trade, “shipped more enslaved African women, men, and children to the Americas than any other single institution” (11). The Royal African Company, formerly known as the English Company, was reformed and appointed by the monarchy in 1672 to singlehandedly maintain and regulate the British slave trade from its bases, forts and manors along the western coast of Africa to the British colonies in the Americas and the Caribbean (Black *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History* 84-85). Since the demand for slaves grew higher, and the company could not meet it, they commissioned private slave ships to keep the trade flowing. Shortly after the formation of the Royal African Company, the British Empire held a substantial share of the slave trade as Pettigrew argues, “from its foundation in 1672 to the early 1720s, the African Company transported close to 150,000 enslaved Africans, mostly to the British Caribbean. [. . .] In 1673, soon after the company’s foundation the English had a 33 percent share in the transatlantic slave trade. By 1683, that share had increased to 74 percent” (11). This sudden growth in slave trade by the British can be explained by sugar becoming the top product to produce to sell in European markets and the acquisition of Jamaica as a British colony. Rawley states that “From about 1660 the value of sugar always exceeded that of all other colonial products. The unceasing cry for Africans to cultivate sugar in the English West Indies, with the small islands of St. Kitts, Nevis,

Montserrat, Antigua, and huge Jamaica entering production, stimulated the traffic in slaves” (130). In order to transport such large numbers of Africans to the colonies, the companies maintained local supply chains in Africa, which usually consisted of local chiefs who sold prisoners, criminals, outcasts, and captured enemies to the slavers. These slaves would be brought to the coastal manors and forts to be shipped away.

Although the number of slaves arriving in the colonies appeared to be vast, the number of slaves that departed in the slave ships was even higher because of the harsh and unsanitary conditions in which they were transported. Many Africans would die during the voyage due to disease, lack of hygienic living quarters, and lack of enough sustenance. Accordingly, Black claims that in the 1680s, when the British slave trade was booming, the average death toll of a slave ship was about 23.5 percent (98). Furthermore, Black also explains the typical conditions of a slave ship as follows:

The slaves had already been weakened by their generally long journey to the Atlantic coast, while there was also an unwillingness on the part of their captors to spend much on provisions. This situation exacerbated the serious health problems already caused by the severe impact of malnutrition, disease and conflict among those who became enslaved. As a result, the slaves were more vulnerable in their journeys. Most died from gastro-intestinal illnesses, such as dysentery, which were a reflection of the very crowded nature of the ships and the dirty conditions in the holds. (*The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History* 98)

Considering the general number of slaves transported, the Atlantic Ocean is the final resting place of tens of thousands of Africans who died throughout the Transatlantic slave trade.

Since the West Indies proved to be the destination of a big portion of the British slave trade, it can be argued that Jamaica’s acquisition as a British colony escalated the British involvement in the slave trade. British occupation of Jamaica did not immediately bring about the settlement of a plantation-based economy. When the British took over Jamaica from the Spanish, the island had been a small Spanish colony for over a hundred years, during which period the island’s inhabitants, an Indian tribe called the Arawaks, were wiped out by diseases, conflicts with the Spanish, and slavery (Gardner 10-15). Britain was under Cromwell’s rule at the time, who sent the fleet to take over the island from the

Spanish in 1655. Since the Spanish presence was low and unfortified, the British conquest took place fast and without much resistance. Gardner states that when the remaining Spanish left Jamaica, the island's population was only made up of the British garrison and the freed slaves of the Spanish, who later formed the Maroon communities (35-37). These early stages of colonial expansionism focused primarily on the gathering and transporting of valuable tradable goods, raw materials, and especially precious metals like gold. Moreover, colonial settlements were not yet at their highest in terms of their appeal to colonial entrepreneurs and planters. Therefore, at this stage Jamaica did not have a lot to offer to the British. Accordingly, as Gardner suggests, Cromwell's initial strategy was to transport white British settlers to populate the island, which crashed due tropical diseases and the lack of medical infrastructures (35-36). Jamaica remained a colonial outpost with small agricultural investment until sugar plantations started to emerge and the slave trade reached the point of being able to supply the said plantations around the turn of the eighteenth century.

Introduction of the sugar cane to the island marked a milestone in the history of Jamaica. With the influx of opportunistic planters and enslaved African labour, the island's population grew exponentially in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. According to Black, the black population far exceeded the white population by 1700, with 42,000 to 7,300 as the colony's structure switched from "smallholdings to plantation monoculture" (*Slavery: A New Global History* 81). The ratio gap only widened with the arrival of more planters and enslaved Africans. As Higman asserts, "In 1750 the population was 142,000, with enslaved people of African origin making up 90 per cent of the total and whites 9 per cent" (2). Even though the population of the island consisted of predominantly black slaves, power belonged to the privileged 9 percent who ruled with an iron fist. Jamaica was the British Empire's biggest producer of sugar at this point in history. It is important to note that the switch to sugar monoculture in Jamaica was a result of the island's lack of moveable wealth to offer, and coincided with the increasing capitalist colonial policies. Therefore, while Jamaica's strategic geographical position provided the British Empire with a valuable outpost to connect to her other colonies, the agricultural policy transformed the colony into a profitable one as planters, who sought to improve their fortunes and gain financial and political power back home, started to



invest. In accordance, the number of medium to large sugar estates grew very fast in number. The system of plantations was unique in the sense that the colony itself did not offer much to its development. It thrived on means that were not generated in the colony itself. Burnard and Garrigus, who dub the plantation economy as “the plantation machine” suggest,

[t]he plantation economies were peculiar and distinctive in that they were not based on community production opening up opportunities for trade. Rather their plantations were specialised producers that relied on exchange systems developed elsewhere, in Europe and especially Africa. The plantation system was quintessentially colonial, barely using local resources while depending heavily on goods from elsewhere- capital from Europe and labor from Africa. (2)

As a result of the dependence of the plantation economy on outside resources and markets, the net profit margin needed to be satisfactory enough for the planters to invest in plantations. The accessibility of sugar due to the plantations in the New World made it so that it could replace any traditional sweetener in the European cuisine, which, in turn, multiplied the average sugar consumption. Therefore, sugar provided the necessary income margin to attract the capital from the mainland, while the labour need was met by enslaved Africans. Accordingly, what the island itself offered for the plantation system locally was just the land to grow sugar cane on and the suitable climate to do so.

The business opportunities and financial improvements offered by the plantation industry also enabled the planters to re-invest their profits. While some of the profit stayed in the local economy through investment in sugar estates to improve efficiency and capacity of the plantations, many planters used their newly-found financial power to set themselves up with better living standards back in England, as well as buy their way into politics or expand their existing political influence. Higman explains the planters’ desire to go back to England stating,

[h]aving struggled to establish their plantations as profitable enterprises, and having wound up the mechanism that would produce regular and reliable income, the British returned without regret to their home places. Jamaica was understood to be an unhealthy environment, lacking culture and opportunities for social advancement. The idea that the island was the proper site for a colony of English settlers was quickly abandoned, overtaken by slavery and plantation. The home country was irresistible magnet, with chances for investment, gentrification and aristocratic status. (17)

Considering that the planters regarded their plantations as a way to generate income even after they went back to their homes, proved that the plantation system was a temporary business investment for English capital, which could only last as long as the sugar prices and the profit margin remained high. Thus, the island's population of settlers never reached very high numbers even at the peak of the plantation business. Having a small community of settlers also meant that there was little room to climb the social ladder in these communities. The highest political position a planter could hope to achieve was to be a part of the governing councils under the governor of the colony. Even then, it would mean that the planter had to spare his time from the plantation to attend any legislative duties. Overseeing the work on a plantation and managing its day-to-day operations were very complex and time-consuming for planters. Therefore, they would often have some form of hired white workforce in managerial positions. The nature and variety of jobs a planter had to oversee in a sugar plantation resulted in a need to employ white staff members in administration and accounting. "It was complexity that created managerial hierarchy and the problem of monitoring. It was these demands that shaped the tasks of the attorney and gave him power and control" (Higman 17). If the planter made sure that operations were run smoothly by his white staff, it would enable him to avoid staying in the estate permanently. Hence, most of the biggest sugar estates had absentee owners. Higman argues that 81 percent of the large estates in Jamaica were run by overseers or attorneys (18). According to Phillips, the extremely high-end plantations made so much money for their owners that these planters could buy themselves seats in the Parliament, as he gives the example of Lord Chesterfield, who wanted to buy his son a seat in the Parliament, only to find out that "rich East and West Indians" had filled all vacancies (4). However, deteriorating efficiency because of absenteeism, in conjunction with the decline in sugar prices and depletion of the island's soil, led to the gradual collapse of the sugar plantation economy in Jamaica starting in the second half of the eighteenth century. The Slave Trade Act of 1807, which proclaimed slave trade unlawful in the British Empire, and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which emancipated all slaves within the Empire, became the final nails in the coffin of the sugar plantation economy in colonial Jamaica.

A typical sugar plantation not only grew the sugar cane in the fields, but also processed it to crystallised sugar and rum within its confines. Therefore, full-fledged sugar estates

would have the manor, the fields in which the sugarcane was cultivated, a mill, a distillery, slaves' quarters, and barns for cattle. The number of slaves working on a plantation depended on the size of the plantation and how many acres of land the planter owned. R. B. Sheridan's data show that half of the landholders in Jamaica by 1754, a time of profitability of sugar plantations was at its peak, have from 100 to 1000 acres of land (299). Nonetheless, not all of the land was suitable for cultivation. Similarly, Philipps uses one of the larger plantations in Jamaica, the Worthy Park, as an example. According to Philipps, the Worthy Park, which had over a couple of thousand acres of land, had 560 acres of sugarcane fields, and needed 528 slaves to maintain it (6-8). The sugarcane that was harvested from the fields was taken to the mill where it was crushed to extract its juice. After a process of purification, the juice was stored and left to crystallise. The leftovers of this process, along with bad harvest, were used to distill rum as a secondary product.

The field workers constituted the majority of the slaves in sugar plantations. For perspective, 272 of 528 slaves of the Worthy Park in Phillipps' example made up the field "gangs" (8). The field workers were divided into groups called "gangs" which worked in tandem with one another for efficiency. Each gang was supervised by slave drivers as they worked in order to push them to their limits and made sure that they worked as hard as they possibly could. AS Burnard and Garrigus claim,

West Indian planters divided slaves by physical capacity rather than by sex. They insisted that the "stoutest and most able slaves . . . without any regard being had to their sex" should do the hardest work, such as digging cane holes, dunging, and cutting and harvesting cane. [. . .] The hallmarks of the large integrated plantation were discipline, coordination, and coercion. Planters were determined to make slaves work as hard as they could. They concerned themselves little about the deaths such demands produced. Our best data on the workload of Jamaican slaves comes from late in the eighteenth century. At Prospect Estate in the developing parish of Portland, slaves worked twelve hours a day for an average of 272 days, with sixty days off. (41-42)

Overworking, malnutrition, violence and death were realities of the sugar plantation. The whip was commonly used to keep the working slaves in check or punish them when they did not conform to the demands of their overseers. As pointed out by Burnard and Garrigus in the quotation above, efficiency was the main principle in the fields so much so that even children were formed into their own gangS to be assigned less physically-

intensive tasks. The field slaves did the most demanding work in the plantation and tended to be the most overworked ones, which left them weak and more susceptible to diseases. Infectious diseases were the most common cause of death of slaves. Therefore, the field slaves were also the ones who needed to be replaced most often by the plantation owners. Young and able-bodied men and women were chosen and assigned to this group.

Household slaves constituted another group among the slaves of the sugar plantations. This was a smaller group, which tended to the day-to-day operations and maintenance of the estate including housekeeping, cleaning, cooking, nursing, and the like. Again in Phillips' example of the Worthy Park plantation, this group consisted of 22 people between the ages of 14 and 60 (6). Another interesting fact about the household slaves is that mulattoes and quadroons were commonly assigned to these jobs. Although they were punished as severely as field slaves in case they made mistakes or disobeyed orders, the house slaves could be considered to have a slightly more privileged position due to the nature of their work, relative to that of the field slaves. The illegitimate children born after the sexual assaults of the white staff members, which was not an uncommon occurrence, could be assigned to this group. Such occurrences can be observed in the novels that are to be studied in this dissertation as well. Interestingly, all three of the novels employ protagonists who are assigned to household duties. *The Long Song's* (2010) July, *Blonde Roots'* (2008) Doris, and *The Book of Night Women's* (2009) Lilith are attendant, office worker, and housekeeper respectively. Moreover, Lilith and July are mulattoes whose biological fathers, the overseers of their plantations, sexually assault the female slaves that they specifically targeted. Consequentially, it can be argued that household slaves provided a better opportunity for the novelists for character development and variety because they had just more freedom and a lot more contact with the white people in the plantation compared to the field slaves. This hierarchy is represented by the novels as a cause of discrepancy among slaves, leading to the mistreatment of household slaves by field slaves. It also portrays a lack of solidarity among slaves. Moreover, field work is often used as a threat, a deterrent, and a punishment by the plantation owners and overseers in the novels to keep the unruly house slaves in check.

In accordance with the high profitability of the sugar industry in Jamaica, and with the principle of efficiency adopted by the plantation owners, the enslaved Africans were forced to work in inhumane conditions. The wealth of the plantation owners grew only through the hard work of the slaves. Therefore, to push the slaves to their limits, the plantation owners employed increasingly brutal and violent methods. While whipping was very common for smaller offences, mutilation, torture, and death were punishments for the bigger ones, such as escape, disobedience, assault, or mutiny. Burnard and Garrigus claim that in some cases the brutality of the plantation owners was so extreme that “even planter’s defenders admitted that they used abnormal levels of cruelty against slaves. Indeed, they reverted to punishments, such as castration and burning by slow fire, which had lost favor in Britain since medieval times” (39). Considering the fact that the slaves far outnumbered the whites, it is important to note that the fear of a conspiracy against the whites by the enslaved Africans enhanced the severity of the punishments. Furthermore, the law was extremely biased against the enslaved as well. Helg states that

in 1696, the Jamaica Assembly approved a decree stipulating that, for one or more enslaved individuals, “imagining the death of a white person” was a crime punishable by death. In 1744, the same assembly confirmed that decree while specifying that the imaginary crime should be judged as “a crime of as high nature as the crime of murder, and should be punished as such.” Since British slave laws did not allow testimony by slaves, it sufficed for a white prosecution witness to convince the judges in order for a slave to be subjected to torture, judged guilty, and sentenced for conspiracy or revolt. (85)

In the light of this, suspicion alone was enough to torture or condemn a slave to death. The planter’s aim was to prevent even the slightest idea of assaulting whites from entering the minds of slaves, which was backed by law.

Even under such circumstances, colonial Jamaica experienced its fair share of slave rebellions and wars between local free Africans and whites. In fact, conflict between black and white populations began even before the British brought their own slaves to the colony after their conquest. When the Spanish fled “under the onslaught of the invading English soldiers, 1,500 slaves formerly belonging to the Spaniards suddenly found themselves with a precarious though avidly grasped freedom” (Patterson 294). As these former slaves grasped their chance of freedom, they formed small independent communities at the interior, mountainous parts of the island, which constituted Jamaica’s

Maroon communities. Therefore, the British shared the colony with Maroons from the very start of their colonisation of Jamaica. Botkin asserts,

[i]n their first decade of occupation, Anglo-Jamaicans dealt with at least four groups of maroons living in “palenques,” stockaded mountain farms. Juan de Bolas led a group of free black people and agricultural slaves in the mountains in Lluidas Vale. Juan de Serras led the second group, the Karmahaly, hunter-warriors who lived on the northeast of the island and eventually became known as the Windward Maroons. The third group probably lived in the mountains on the borders of Clarendon and Manchester, avoiding contact and conflict with the other residents of the island. Finally, some Spanish maroons allegedly lived in the Blue Mountains with Taino people. (27)

These Maroon communities engaged in skirmishes with the British and employed guerrilla warfare tactics to strike plantations. They inhabited the mountains and forests of the island. Hence, they could commence sudden raids on the plantations and retreat to their territory. Their knowledge of those parts of the island made it hard for the British forces to trace and capture them. Furthermore, the idea of the existence of free black communities alongside a slave-driven economy threatened the British in that the slaves could rebel in order to join them. Two major conflicts between the Maroons and the colonials went down in history as the First Maroon War of 1739-1740 and the Second Maroon War of 1795-1796. The descendants of Maroon communities still exist today.

What further complicated the power balances inside colonial Jamaica was the shifting loyalties of the Maroon communities. Especially between the two Maroon wars, the independent communities allied themselves with the British to the extent that they invoked fear among the enslaved African communities, as Geggus states: “For over fifty years Maroons had had interests not simply separate from those of slaves but (as slave catchers) in direct conflict with them. In every rebellion and alarm since 1740 they had turned out to support the slaveowners. Some were slaveowners themselves” (284). Considering the fact that the Maroons continued their existence in freedom owing to their knowledge of the geography, their participation in catching runaway slaves meant that the runaway, who did not know any place other than the surroundings of his plantation, did not have any chance of escaping them.

The duality of the Maroon's attitude towards the slaves is also represented in Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* and James's *The Book of Night Women*. In the latter, the Maroons are a constant threat and a deterrent for the slave women conspiring a rebellion, and the slaves gathering around them. Maroons are known to capture escapees, keep the women they want for themselves while selling the rest back to their owners for one pound. Therefore, getting caught by Maroons resulted in certain death for runaways, which proves to be true by the end of the novel. Most of the slaves, who do manage to escape the plantation grounds, are captured by the Maroons. In *Blonde Roots*, however, joining a Maroon community in the mountains is the only possible way of escape for Doris. Even then, she can only escape after finding a contact with them and ensuring that she will not be given back to the plantation.

When it comes to revolts started by enslaved Africans, Tacky's rebellion of 1760 marks a significant milestone in the history of the island. "Between April 1760 and October 1761, Jamaica saw the eruption of a series of slave revolts, known collectively as Tacky's Rebellion, after one of the leaders of the initial uprising" (Helg 101). The series of rebellions is named after the Akan slave Tacky, whose initial revolt resulted in a chain reaction of rebellions for nine months. It proved to the planters how volatile the plantation system with its vast number of slaves was if large crowds of slaves were mobilised against them. Geggus also comments that such a rebellion was made possible due to the diminishing number of military forces garrisoned in the colony stating that the rebellion happened after "the dispatch of militia and military forces to occupy the French colony of Guadeloupe" (295). Nevertheless, the chain of rebellions came to a halt with military action and help from the Maroons in 1761.

While small-scale uprisings continuously took place in Jamaica, the news of the most successful slave revolt in history came from the French colony of St. Domingue in 1791. The chaos ensuing slave revolts and multiple factions fighting gave way to the independent state of Haiti as

a colony of coerced and exploited slaves successfully liberated themselves and radically and permanently transformed things. [. . .] Socially, the lowest order of the

society- slaves- became equal, free, and independent citizens. Politically, the new citizens created the second independent state in the Americas, the first independent non-European state to be carved out of the European universal empires anywhere. (Knight 105)

It held particular importance for Jamaica in that St. Domingue's plantation structure and dependence on large number of slaves to meet the labour need were very similar to the situation in colonial Jamaica. Considering the proximity of the two colonies and their similarities, it can be deduced that echoes of the Haitian revolution could be heard in Jamaica. Nevertheless, it did not spawn a similar reaction there, which historians find enigmatic. While it alerted the population of planters, the slave population did not show much reaction in the way of any tendency to revolt. Geggus explains that there were rumours that some slaves were conspiring to revolt at Christmas of 1791, but it did not prove to be true as it never came into fruition (276-277). In contrast with this reality, in *The Book of Night Women*, the rumours of the Haitian revolution spark encouragement among the slaves in Jamaica. The counsel of Homer and her rebellious women begin to conspire their plot to start an uprising in their plantation in tandem with slaves from other plantations, which they do accomplish by the end of the novel.

The year 1832 marks a milestone in Jamaica's history and slavery in the British West Indies because of the Baptist War. It is the last and the biggest slave rebellion that took place in Jamaica right before the end of slavery in Britain. Anti-slavery movement in Britain had been going on since the 1780s. The first step to end slavery was taken by proclaiming slave trade illegal in 1807. However, it did not change the conditions of the people who were already slaves or were born into it. The Baptist War of 1832 was sparked by Samuel Sharpe, a preacher of the Baptist Church. Blouet claims that missionaries were held responsible for the rebellion because they preached freedom to the slaves (638). What started as a protest quickly evolved into a widespread slave rebellion as Blouet argues:

The Baptist War was a most important development toward free- dom. It speeded up the process of abolition by underlining the insecurity of the slave system. It emphasized the dangers of continuing slavery indefinitely, despite attempts by the West India interest to use the rebellion in order to illustrate that slaves were vicious barbarians, unsuited for freedom.<sup>74</sup> It helped convert the gradualist approach to abolition into an immediatist one. (638)



The timing of the rebellion was crucial in that it accelerated the ongoing debate to abolish slavery. Although there were not major rebellions in the British West Indies, the colonies were not stable. A year after the Baptist War, Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 would pass, making slavery illegal. However, the rebellion itself did not turn into revolution. It was suppressed by the British forces and slave-owners resulting in “the deaths of 540 slaves, 14 whites, and the destruction of numerous estates and property” (Blouet 638). Samuel Sharpe was also hanged for his role in the rebellion. Sharpe is accepted as a national hero of Jamaica today.

This is by no means an extensive overview of the colonial history of Jamaica. The overviews of the slave trade, the Middle Passage, and the plantation economy of the island are intended to set the historical background of the novels. As all three protagonists, namely July, Doris, and Lilith, are house slaves in sugar plantations, such contextualisation is required to understand their circumstances better. Moreover, the important slave rebellions, which took place in the island, and the Maroon establishments provide the political background for the novels. They indicate the volatility of the system of plantocracy and slavery in terms of the instability of the British rule in colonial Jamaica. Key historical moments such as the Maroon Wars, Haitian Revolution, and the Baptist War are also points of reference within the novels. They are used as exemplary events that inform the characters’ course of action. Thus, the selected background information establish the basis for understanding the contexts of the novels.

**CHAPTER 2**

**THE POWER OF WORDS: DISSOCIATION AND SCREENING IN  
ANDREA LEVY'S *THE LONG SONG***

In “The Writing of *The Long Song*” section of her novel, Andrea Levy tells an anecdote about a conference she attended in London where a young black girl asked how she could be proud of her ancestry if they were all slaves (405). Clearly the question suggests that she felt ashamed because her ancestors were not strong enough to end their subjugation through slavery in the Caribbean. This is a sentiment that Andrea Levy herself does not share as she believes surviving in the system of slavery alone is a testament to their strength and they still have a “rich and proud heritage” (405). She suggests this anecdote as the inspiration to write *The Long Song*. She feels that a story like July’s can be instrumental in counteracting the misconceptions on which the young woman formulates her ideas about her ancestry. However, the anecdote also reveals that the violent history of slavery and its legacy still linger, to psychologically affect the new generation of black people even almost two centuries after emancipation. Slavery remains as one of history’s biggest sources of collective trauma transmitted through generations. Levy recognises the issue and wonders if storytelling can be an answer to the problem. She says “[i]t was at that moment that I felt something stirring in me. Could a novelist persuade this young woman to have pride in her slave ancestors through telling her a story” (405)? That “stirring” paves the way to the publication of *The Long Song* in 2010.

Motivated by the urge to narrate the story of the life of a slave to her readers, Levy published her neo-slave narrative, *The Long Song* in 2010. Through the life story of July, Levy takes her readers to the turbulent dawn of slavery in Jamaica. The outcome is a humorous, witty, yet sad and tragic coming-of-age novel set in the Amity Sugar Plantation during the final years of slavery in colonial Jamaica. The novel was critically acclaimed as it was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2010.

*The Long Song* presents the story of July through a complex narrative structure. The novel consists of sections which are presented as excerpts from the narrator's novel about a slave girl named July. These sections are formulated as a coming-of-age novel. However, about halfway through the novel, it is revealed that an older July herself is the narrator, writing the story of her own life, which, in turn, provides the readers with a new perspective and a point of view to her story. Even so, the complexity of the narration is taken a step further by smaller sections where the reader is taken to the present time of writing July's story, in which July and her son share hot debates over the content, authenticity, and historical quality of the story that July is writing. These sections also provide metanarrative episodes through which July's own stance towards the story of her life and relationship with her past are brought to attention. It is within these sections that July's alterations to her life story are revealed through contests to the narration by her son Thomas, who urges her to write truthfully. July's life has highly traumatising periods in which her sense of self is challenged by her status as a slave and the losses she experiences, especially the losses of her two children. July shows an unwillingness to narrate her most painful memories in order to avoid re-living them mentally. Yet, Thomas argues that the readers and the world need to know all the details, however painful they are. In fact, it is the duty of the narrator to include them because according to Thomas, this type of stories has power over people.

The novel is set in the first half of the nineteenth century when drastic political changes regarding the practice of slavery took place. Abolishment of the slave trade in 1807, the Emancipation of Slavery in 1833, and the apprenticeship era that followed it all took place during this period. The novel makes references to both the Emancipation and apprenticeship within July's narrative. The social and economic changes in a slave's life are represented through the downfall of the Amity plantation. Moreover, during the writing process of July's narrative, her relationship with Thomas and her granddaughters implicate how a free black family, who is prosperous due to Thomas's successful entrepreneurship in printing, would live as free people in Kingston, Jamaica, after slavery. Fleeting comments on the lives of the family members and the conversations between July and Thomas provide a stark contrast to how July's youth is presented in her narration. July is a member of the generation who suffered through slavery. Therefore, her narration

is a testament to history. Thomas, although he experiences his share of racial prejudice after leaving his foster parents, represents the next generation who does not experience slavery but shows interest in how that history should be preserved as a cautionary tale for generations to follow. Finally, Thomas's children, who are members of the following generation after Thomas, are represented to be oblivious to the horrors of slavery. This can be due to their ages at the time of July composing her work. However, it can also be indicative of how life goes on and social circumstances change.

The central theme of the novel is the search for identity of a young girl born into slavery. July's journey of self-discovery is highly characterised by her losses of loved ones and how she deals with loss. The losses of her mother, her companions from Amity estate, her children, and love interest deeply impact July's character development. Through her silences and changes to her life story, it is evident that she still finds it hard to cope with the memories of her losses. She is still traumatised by some of the more violent stages of her past. Therefore, July's approach to writing about her past is shaped by how much she can endure remembering and to what extent she is willing to share the details. The stories of how she lost both her children are especially hard to revisit for July. Accordingly, she chooses to avoid talking about them by writing premature endings to her story. The trajectory of the story follows a gradual unfolding of how July loses everything she has in terms of her relationships and children just to sink into a deep depression. Her inability to leave Amity after it is completely abandoned paints a gloomy future for her. However, the novel counters the pessimistic end in two aspects. First of all, writing her life story provides a new-found agency to shape her own fate, which she did not have as a slave at Amity. Her traumatic experiences were mostly inflicted on her by others, to which she had no power to respond. Now that she is in charge of the story, she can reshape a happier journey for July, in which she revels in her small victories against her rival characters. Even though she is contested by Thomas to revert to the truth, her attempts to alter the story remain testaments to July's perception of her own past. Secondly, the novel presents a hopeful picture at the end by having July reunite with Thomas through a twist of fate. Moreover, Thomas's final addition to the text at end of the novel, which prompts the readers to convey any information they might have about Emily Goodwin, introduces the possibility of another reunion with July's other lost child. Emily was kidnapped by Robert

Goodwin and Caroline Mortimer when they left for England. The kidnapping was the straw that broke the camel's back for July. Consequently, foreshadowing a reunion can be regarded as a saving grace for July in terms of psychological healing.

The novel's protagonist is July, who is both a complex and a dynamic character. In fact, the changes in July's character shape the narration of the story. She is initially portrayed as a cheerful, mischievous, and intelligent girl. Through witty dialogue, jokes, and a humorous tone in general, the narrator highlights July's life until the Baptist War as one that is gleeful even though she is a slave. Through her relationships with other slaves at the estate, her rivalries with Miss Clara and Caroline Mortimer, who is the mistress of the house, the narrator shows admiration for young July, who was not yet traumatised by misfortunes and losses. However, July gradually loses her cheerful nature as the story progresses. The events of the Baptist War, its aftermath, and the losses of her two children turn July into a depressed, gloomy, and melancholic character. As the narrator, July revisits her past to witness her transformation and possibly come to terms with it. The implied reunion with her daughter might indicate further character development by July, in that, she might recover her lost happiness to a certain extent.

Apart from July, Robert Goodwin and Thomas can also be considered round characters in that they show a certain degree of depth of character. Goodwin's character development is especially interesting, because its trajectory is a metaphorical representation of the declining functionality of the sugar estate itself. As the overseer of Amity, Goodwin's perspective on black people changes from compassionate to cruel. He is initially introduced as a man who feels compassion towards the status of the slaves seemingly due to his religious upbringing and his father's vision. However, his initial stance on this as the overseer drastically changes when he becomes the master of the estate through his marriage to Caroline Mortimer. When he is the master, the financial success of the plantation is to increase his personal finances as well, which was not the case as he was paid a wage as the overseer. The gradual change from compassionate overseer to cruel master is clearly observed in his romantic relationship with July. He creates a homely space within the estate which he shares with July as almost husband and

wife, yet when the plantation goes bankrupt, July is indistinguishable from the rest of the black crowd for Goodwin. When he almost strikes July with a machete, the master-slave relationship is completely reinstated even though July is a free woman as slavery was abolished. The dynamic characterisation of Goodwin could also be open to debate in that his correspondence with his father through letters. His initial vision can also be analysed as a disguise for his lustful and greedy nature. Thomas is a different case compared to Goodwin, because he clearly has internal struggles, especially about being abandoned as a baby by his mother. It is obviously reflected on how critical he is of the narrator in their discussions about writing the past in full truth. However, he does not show any development throughout the novel; therefore, he is a static character. With their hidden motivations and internal struggles, Levy's characters feel real and believable.

Levy's realistic approach can also be observed in her use of language. Considering that Levy employs a former slave as the narrator of her own story, the language she uses reflects the narrator's identity. Having been born on the plantation, July's primary language is English. However, her English is not the King's English, but a creole version of it. Therefore, Levy uses a creolised English closer to Jamaican patois. Even so, her patois is not as strong as the one Marlon James uses in *The Book of Night Women*. Syntax and grammar changes which are common in contemporary Jamaican patois cannot be seen in the novel's language. Nevertheless, many Jamaican words such as pickney, and spellings such as "massa" are used. This makes it possible for a reader who is not familiar with Jamaican patois to easily read and understand the language. The narration overall adopts an English closer to standard English, while dialogues, especially among slaves, reflect the character's creole speech. Consequently, Levy's overall use of English can be situated as a hybrid form in between standard English and patois. As the bulk of the novel consists of the narration of a former slave, the use of language is appropriate to the narrator.

July's novel within the novel spans from the imaginary recounting of the night of her conception, to her re-union with her lost son Thomas Kinsman as an old woman. Within this span of time, she grows up in Amity as a slave girl, experiences the events of the

Baptist War and its aftermath, observes first-hand the gradual downfall of Amity after the emancipation of slavery, lives a life of hope, happiness, and loss to a traumatic end. The book is to be published by her son Thomas Kinsmen, who is a successful businessman when they re-unite. Therefore, her interactions with her son about her novel, her feelings and attitudes towards her content constitute the sections which take place in the time of the writing of the novel. These also reveal how much July was traumatised by certain events through what she outright narrates and what she cannot bear to write. The two most traumatic moments are strategically omitted by the book's two alternative endings. However, the metanarrative sections drive the narrative forward as Thomas, sometimes overenthusiastically, demands that the story should continue in full honesty. The mother-son tension, driven strongly by Thomas's issues with childhood abandonment by his mother, pushes the narrative back and forth between July's life story and the present time where it is being recorded. Therefore, different sections of the overall narrative fit together like closely-tied puzzle pieces that gradually reveal the whole picture to the reader by unfolding on themselves. It also covers the turbulent days of the Baptist War and its reception in Amity, the manhunt following the death of the master of the plantation, her two love affairs with Nimrod and overseer Goodwin, and the loss of her two children. Her story focuses on the joys she could find even in her circumstances as a slave while consciously avoiding the traumatising events for as long as she was able to. Yet, the sections narrating her current struggles in writing her work and Thomas's interventions counterfeit the shortcomings of her efforts to repress certain time periods in her narrative, thus driving the narrative forwards and revealing the secrets that it hides.

July's decision to omit certain parts of her history and her overall unwillingness to narrate the saddest parts of her life along with the initial guise of fictionality of her work indicate a partial dissociation on July's part from her past. Dissociation can be defined as "disconnections between thoughts, feelings, behaviours, sensations, and other mental processes that would normally be connected. It is a human phenomenon, experienced by all to varying degrees on a continuum ranging from benign to problematic" (Boyer, et al, 79). Memory, in its essence, is restored information of the past that can be recalled on demand. In this respect, July's autobiographical work, written in retrospect, is a chronological reconstruction of her life from early childhood to adulthood. Therefore,

apparent dysfunctionalities which disrupt full remembrance, or the narration of these memories can be analysed as symptoms of dissociation. At this point, it is important to note that although dissociative experiences “can become entrenched over time and impair overall functioning” (Boyer, et al. 79), they are usually “benign and under the individual’s control” (Boyer, et al. 79). July, as the narrator, demands to be in control of her own story. As a result, the changes to her story and her silences within the linearity of the narration can be read as conscious attempts to distort the story stemming from the dissociative stance she presumes from the beginning of the narration. In fact, she tries to establish and maintain that stance very early on in the novel. First of all, she distinguishes her work from the accounts of white ladies that live on the plantations or in Jamaica in general by talking down the historical accounts about Jamaica written by them. She writes,

[T]hat white missus will have you acquainted with all the many tribulations of her life upon a Jamaican sugar plantation before you have barely opened the cover. Two pages upon the scarcity of beef. Five more upon the want of a new hat to wear with her splendid pink taffeta dress. [. . .] And as for the indolence and stupidity of her slaves (be sure you have a handkerchief to dab away your tears), only need of sleep would stop her taking several more volumes to pronounce upon that most troublesome of subjects. (Levy 8)

By criticizing the vanity and triviality of these accounts, July is making an implied statement that she is to bring a new and different voice to the scene and tell the other side of the story. Considering that these accounts are accepted as non-fictional accounts of the times, July possibly unintentionally has a claim to the historical truth about her subject matter. This paradoxically undermines her other claim that her story is “a tale of [her] making” (Levy 9). Before even starting to tell the story, except for the short passage at the beginning that imagines the day of her conception, July tries to do away with any possibility of anyone considering her story as a true life-story. If one takes into account that her work is published as a novel, her readers would not be predetermined to approach it as a true story. Therefore, there should not be any functional requirement on her part to make it clear that her work is, in fact, fictional. So, it can be argued that this claim functions as a cover for herself rather than a forewarning for the reader. Even though she emphasises fictionality by saying this is “a tale of my making” (Levy 9) to ensure that the readers think her work is fictional, it can also be read as a *double entendre*. It can also be interpreted to refer to a tale of how July, as the older narrator, is made, in other words the path that has brought her to where she is at the time of her writing her novel or simply



her life. This is easily lost within the initial pages of the novel, but it is made possible by Thomas's revelation that it is the story of her own life later on in the novel. Fictionalising her life story enables July to take a step back from the realities of her life and assume the position of a storyteller who constructs the story, and an observer through the third person omniscient narration. Boyer, et al., argue that a similar type of dissociation can be observed in trauma victims who were sexually assaulted as "it is not uncommon for survivors of rape to report experiencing themselves as being outside of their body (i.e. depersonalization) during the assault. Individuals may also have thoughts and feelings that appear disconnected" (79). July as the narrator who claims the story is completely fictional can assume such a depersonalised state while writing. In other words, it enables July to form a narrative dissociation from the contents of her work.

Giving multiple accounts of her birth circumstances at the beginning of the novel indicates that July tries to establish her authority over the story. It is also suggestive that she chooses to do it in the most straightforward way at the part of the story when she does not have any memory of her birth. In accordance, she provides a version where Kitty gives birth to July in a cane field while doing slave labour, which also has alternate versions listed with fantastical details (Levy 11-13). Then she paints a more realistic picture in which the childbirth takes place in a hut where Kitty is attended by another slave woman (Levy 13-14). Öztapak-Avcı comments that the former account "draws a romanticised portrait of her mother" (126) while it "highlights Kitty's determination to continue working without any suggestion of the actual plight of her slave labor" (126). If this version is compared to the latter, it is safe to assume that the latter account is more likely to portray the actual birth circumstances of July. Even so, it can be argued that the former account, though fictional, is clearly an informed imagining. Considering Kitty's loving and protective approach to her daughter and her eventual sacrifice to save her life, Kitty's portrayal in the former account is obviously consistent with Kitty's character and reflects the qualities July appreciates. Therefore, it can be argued that even in the fictional sections, July's traumatic loss of her mother seeps through to shape the supposedly non-autobiographical sections of her narrative. As a result, July's attempt to fictionalise her story still symbolically carries aspects of her true life story. As trauma often does, it hides itself symbolically within the surrogate story. Such surrogate stories can even expand into

screen memories which are coping mechanisms that function to repress the traumatic experience behind an alternative memory, all the while sharing a connection to the traumatic experience. July's two attempts to write early endings to her story provide prominent examples of how screen memories can functionally be replicated by narrative devices in literature.

Screen memories, by basic definition, are relational surrogate memories which act as a cover for other memories including traumatic ones. They were first conceptualised by Sigmund Freud in 1899 and revolutionised the understanding of memory as Lansky argues:

[I]n a word, the revolutionary discovery posited that memory was not bedrock. Instead, memory was itself subject to further psychoanalysis. All of Freud's previous assumptions about memory as the end point in psychoanalysis had to be re-thought. What is more, the entire idea of bedrock was challenged and soon abandoned. As of this watershed contribution, no bedrock remained in psychoanalysis, no time at which one can be certain that one has fully analyzed the material at hand. This 1899 paper definitively dethroned the retrieval of memory, though always important, as simultaneously the presumed center and the sought-for goal of psychoanalysis. Memory joined other analyzable ideas—obsessions, compulsions, phobias, delusions, and conversions—as material for analysis. (91)

Accordingly, remembering a certain memory could be related to other underlying factors rather than the content of that particular memory, and the screen memory could be analysed in order to uncover what is hidden by that particular remembrance. In other words, the screen memories symbolise within themselves repressed experiences or feelings. It suggests that a memory and its retrieval can no longer be considered a constant and a standalone act. Similarly, Silverman asserts that “[s]creen memory is, then, a performative act in the present; it paves the way for thinking of memory as a creative process of ‘assemblage’ rather than simply as the retrieval of forgotten moments in the past” (124). According to Silverman's definition, the process of remembering a certain memory from the past might not be limited to what that memory contains alone. During the process one might retrieve multiple memories which are coded together. However, one is suppressed while the other one is recalled. The relation between the two memories might not be obvious or might be symbolic. In relation to the concept of trauma and traumatic memory, screen memories, which on the surface level might be irrelevant to the source of trauma, serve as proxies that replace the memory of the traumatic

experience. Therefore, memories that are screening trauma are essentially its symbolic representations that require analysis to be dissected to reach the traumatic experience. In accordance, they can also function to auto-censor the traumatic experience as a defence mechanism, as well as hiding it from others.

To clarify how screen memories function through selective memory and projection, Lansky presents three different case studies within his article. His clinical examples include memories and nightmares, which can be deciphered to uncover underlying traumatic experiences reflected within the memories or projected onto nightmares, to prove that “[i]f memory is reconceptualised radically as a constructed mental product, more like a dream than a photo, what we call memories partake of all the dynamics of wishing and fantasy” (98). Therefore, screen memories can construct alternate scenarios, symbolic projections, or altered reconstructions of the traumatic experience as a defence mechanism to protect the ego. One of the clinical studies Lansky presents as an example is as follows:

A twenty-five-year-old, single Latino professional man came specifically requesting psychoanalysis. His discussion of his family history soon revealed that he very much idealized his background. His immigrant parents—born “dirt poor”—both worked their way through school, earned doctorates, and became professors. Both sets of grandparents lived close to the parents’ home. The analysand’s eldest brother was married and he too lived close by. The ideal and loving family background that he portrayed seemed somewhat incongruous with the fact that, although there were many women in his life, he had had no lasting relations with them. Although he hungered for a lasting relationship, he soon left each girlfriend: hungering for closeness, he always pushed it away. This seemed quite discrepant in the face of such secure-seeming attachments within the three living generations of his family. (93)

As the quotation suggests, the patient seems to have an idealised extended family setting where parents, grandparents, and a brother is present. Moreover, the patient’s parents enjoy academic success, which is cherished considering that they come from a poor background. However, his inability to maintain a healthy relationship as an adult is indicative of an underlying trauma. Lansky states that it took years to reveal a family history that completely contradicts the initial description given above saying “The previously idealized recollections now gave way to the depiction of a bleak and depressing ambience in a household composed entirely of physically present but emotionally absent people” (95). While having his extended family close by, the patient

was in fact emotionally neglected as a child. The trauma of isolation was screened by hyper-focusing on the pride he feels for the success of his parents. The example clearly indicates that the patient formed his view of his own family around only one aspect of his relationship to them while repressing his isolation. However, the emotional absence in his relationship with the people closest to him manifested in his relationships with his girlfriends. His story does not necessarily suggest he had amnesia about the source of his trauma. Yet his memory of that past is selective and exclusive. The formation of the idealised family image by this patient is functionally similar to July's screening attempts with alternative endings to hide the most insecure times of her life from her reader as long as possible. Although they seem abrupt and unrelated at the first glance to the overall trajectory of her story, they cannot be analysed separately from the events they are preceded with at the point of their injection to the narrative, and events that are revealed after July decides to continue her story.

In order to analyse the first alternative ending, it is important to look at the series of events that build up to that point in the narrative from the aftermath of the Baptist War. The Baptist War is a milestone within the history of British slavery in Jamaica in that it is the largest slave revolt in colonial Jamaica. However, July makes it clear that its part in her narration will not be similar to any conventional historical account of the revolt. On the contrary, it is a personal history and limited to the revolt's impact on July's daily life. July is not interested in creating an objective historical retelling of the events of the Baptist War which correlates to her writing as a self-conscious narrator. In that respect, July's approach parallels Levy's to the history of slavery and its representation. Munõz-Valdivieso claims that "Andrea Levy has openly discussed her intention to recreate Jamaican history in a way that empowers enslaved black people by focusing not on their suffering as victims, but on the possibly humorous aspects of their lives and their survival and development as agents" (47). July, and by extension Levy, challenges the traditional supposedly-objective documentation of history writing by a shift of focus that is experimental and empowering at the same time. In order to make that stance clearer, Levy introduces the countervoices to this approach in the novel as well. Mainly, Thomas Kinsman urges July to write an account that details the suffering of the slaves in Jamaica for the generations to come. He perceives his mother's story as one that can be influential

in raising awareness in future readers as a truthful testimony. Before July even starts writing her story, he warns her about the power of words:

My beloved son did caution, when first I set out to flow this tale upon the world, then although they may not be felt like a fist or a whip, words have a power that can nevertheless cower even the largest man to gibbering tears. (Levy 25)

It is clear that Thomas has a clear purpose for his mother's tale. The warning is to make sure that July understands the potential effect of her story on her readers. Accordingly, Thomas's intrusion to expand on the story to include parts that he perceives crucial can be seen throughout the novel. The Baptist War is no exception. Upon realising that July is relating the time period of the revolt, Thomas demands that certain information be included within the story:

'But this is the time of the Baptist War, Mama,' he tell me. 'The night of Caroline Mortimer's unfinished dinner in your story is the time of Christmas rebellion, when all the trouble began.' He then commenced to blast me with fierce commands.

I should tell, he said, whether the firing of plantations started in Salt Spring when the negro driver refused to flog his own wife. Or, whether it began at Kensington Pen, up near Maroon Town. I must write all I know of Sam Sharpe, the leader of this rebellion—of his character and looks. (Levy 101)

He demands that as much information about the rebellion as possible is relayed to the reader to inform them of an event that represents black empowerment within the history of the island. It is clear that these are prerequisites to talk about that time period. She not only resists Thomas's demands to shape her narrative, but also brings the authenticity of historical accounts into question by referring to two different accounts of the Baptist War written by others. She proposes two example texts written about the Baptist War, which provide two completely contrasting accounts. She suggests,

should you desire a fuller account of what happened during this time, then perhaps you could peruse the pamphlet that my son of late brought to me. It is written by a Baptist minister named George Dovaston with the title, Facts and documents connected with the Great Slave Rebellion of Jamaica (1832). (Levy 103)

As it was suggested by Thomas to her, the pamphlet is clearly in line with his idea of writing history. Although July does not abide by the same approach to writing, she does not condemn such writing for those who need to learn about the event. However, she completely denotes writing history which is limited to the point of view of the plantation owners. She suggests that if the readers find themselves agreeing with the author of *Conflict and change: A view from the great house of slaves, slavery and the British*

*Empire*, she does not even want them as her readers (Levy 103). Accordingly, it can be argued that July shares with Thomas the desire to speak the truth about the past, but she purposefully limits its narration to her perspective. Hence, she refuses to talk about the details which she had no way of knowing at that time. Her stance is further established by her assertion that “news did not travel as it does today. Most was carried upon the breath of ragged little boys who once having run far with the tale then struggled to recall it while you fed them some yam” (Levy 102). In line with her approach to history writing, even the authenticity of the news reaching her at those times is scrutinised by the fact that they are dependent on the memory of the boys carrying them. Therefore, it is natural that she relies only on her own memory to recount those times without adding more information. As a result, while the atrocities during and after the rebellion were taking place, the only thing July could hear was “Miss Hannah gnawing upon the missus’s discarded ham bone” (Levy 104). Stuck at Amity, next to Caroline Mortimer, July did not have the means to be knowledgeable about the ongoing rebellion, so she only knew that there was trouble brewing. At this point in the novel, she makes that clear to her readers in her characteristically humorous way.

Unreliability of Levy’s narrator and the credibility of slave narratives as historical sources further complicate the idea of writing about past collective trauma. However, the contemporary conditions of racial discrimination and the continuous redefinitions of cultural identities necessitate new approaches to talking about traumatic history. As Lima argues,

for a long time, slave narratives were considered unreliable as a historical source, mainly due to the nature of history writing itself (top down) and ideological differences (to put it mildly). However, as more slave narratives were discovered and republished, mostly in the late sixties and seventies in the United States, the rewriting of such stories has become central to a contemporary effort to re-imagine that history from the point of view of the subaltern. More importantly perhaps, (neo-)slave narratives still need to be written to expose systemic inequality and the unjust treatment of black peoples everywhere. (135)

The underlying ideologies that facilitated a system like slavery still persist in the modern world in different shapes and forms, which require further analytical investigation. Writing about the past can have transformative effects for the present in that it can enable the readers to reassess the present. In this respect, it can be argued that history of slavery,

just as the question addressed to Levy mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is still a point of reference in the identity formation process of descendants of the slaves. In line with this, Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), proposes “the Black Atlantic” as a cultural formation which brought about the shared history of geographies which are tied together by slavery and the slave trade. In other words, it is an amalgamation of cultures, which continuously evolves, brought together as a result of slave trade and stands out as a testimony to the past which white modernity turns a blind eye to (1-29). His concept of the Black Atlantic represents a common ground for the intermingling of different cultures after slavery, thereby putting the history of slavery and the trauma it entails at the cultural centre of contemporary black identity in these geographies’ post-slavery cultures. Accordingly, referring back to the past within the process of identity making becomes inevitable, drawing more attention to the accounts of those times. Such bridging between the past and the present in a topic as crucial as identity formation requires inquiry into how past trauma can be represented in ways that can bring about ways of dealing with it. According to Kurvet-Käosaar, life writing, as a representation of past trauma can facilitate such ways towards

coming to terms with and coping with traumatic experience on individual and collective level and the healing that writing autobiographically about traumatic experience can bring about, reassessment and revision of historical knowledge and cultural memory and the relationship between the private and the public and participating in social action concerning legislation and policymaking. (305)

In the light of this, writing about the traumatic past through personal histories or life writing opens up the possibility of potentially healing the long-lasting effect of cultural trauma and creating new spaces to reformulate their representation. In line with this argument, but within the context of trauma studies in literature, La Capra uses the term “limit event” to refer to sources of cultural trauma in history, such as slavery, the Holocaust, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and claims that their representation opens up spaces for the survivors, their descendants, and descendants of the perpetrators to negotiate (6). Considering that the traumatic past of these “limit events” are not limited to the past and that they play a crucial anchoring role in the identity formation of societies who are related to them, it is important to determine and maintain methods to represent them and enable the contemporary participants’ work through the trauma of their past collectively. La Capra asserts:

In traumatic memory the past is not simply history as over and done with. It lives on experientially and haunts or possesses the self or the community (in the case of shared traumatic events) and must be worked through in order for it to be remembered with some degree of conscious control and critical perspective that enables survival and, in the best of circumstances, ethical and political agency in the present. How to work through the experience of these events in viable, ethically and politically desirable ways is one of the greatest challenges in coming to terms with personal or collective traumas for their survivors, intimates of survivors, and in certain respects all those living within a freighted heritage or responding empathically to a living past and those within it. (56)

Relationship between “the haunting past” and contemporary identity makes it necessary to foreground ethical concerns regarding how the trauma of the past is handled within the space of their representation to ensure the best possible chances for all parties included to work through that trauma together.

The ethical concerns over how historical and cultural trauma are represented tie back to the concept of victimisation. Onega argues that the socio-political climate of the Western society is leaning towards an apologetic approach to those affected by cultural trauma. At first glance this might seem to be a move in a positive direction, however it also leads to the formation of “victim societies”, which reduce the affected to a passive role of victim lacking any agency, and be essentially detrimental to the possibility of working through (Onega 93-94). Positions of victim and perpetrator attributed to communities in general posit a polarising approach which can create further resistance to face the actual roots of the problem. Forming the collective identity around victimhood prevents the cultural negotiation to happen on equal grounds and empathy. Therefore, July’s personal history and life writing are centred around the moments of empowerment for her rather than emphasising her victimhood.

The time period of her life during the Baptist War reflects this approach clearly. Considering that the white men of the plantation including the master and the overseer are away to join the attempts to subdue the rebellion, Caroline Mortimer, July’s arch rival and the overall antagonist of her narration, is left alone at Amity. Caroline’s insecurity is fuelled by the fact that she does not have any white company during the rebellion. However, the ambiguity over what her servants might do if the rebellion ever reaches



Amity is a looming threat as well. Obviously, they might turn on her if the opportunity presents itself. Highlighting her cleverness and wit, July makes a mockery of Caroline's situation. First of all, she claims, "'No big black bigger gonna get past me, missus,' July said, holding up her fists so her missus might see those two fearful weapons" (Levy 105). While claiming that she would protect her in case Amity was taken by the rebels, July is emphasising Caroline's helplessness straight to her face. She even locks Caroline in her room with the guise of protecting her saying "'Just till the nigger be gone missus,' she said softly. 'Then me soon come back and set you free'" (Levy 107). At Caroline's moment of powerlessness, July subverts the whole concept of master-slave relationship to the point that she now strips Caroline off of her freedom. Although they are presented in a humorous tone, moments such as these carry serious undertones. With Caroline locked away, July and other house slaves are now free to experience the luxuries of the manor. They momentarily surpass the victim status and have agency over even the fate of the lady of the manor.

The turning point that leads to the first screen memory takes place when the master of the plantation, John Howarth, commits suicide while July and Nimrod are hiding beneath his bed. July experiences a reversal of fate after having the manor for themselves when Tam Dewar and Caroline Mortimer frame Nimrod and her for the murder of John Howarth, which ensues a manhunt for the two. This downward trajectory of July's short-lived moment of freedom reaches a climax when Tam Dewar murders Nimrod and July's life is saved by her mother at the last second. In a very short period of time, July loses her first lover, is almost killed by her biological father, and witnesses her mother brutally murder him, which can individually be traumatic events. The readers can observe that the story is getting harder and harder for July to narrate. This especially manifests itself in the narration of Kitty's attack on Tam Dewar. July intentionally adds further ambiguity to the story by saying:

What happened next has been told in so many ways by so many people—some who were not even in the parish at the time, some who were not even born into the world yet—that is hard for your storyteller to know which version to recount. That Kitty grabbed Tam Dewar before he could strike July once more, is one thing that is certain. (Levy 172)

Although it is not revealed yet that July is the narrator herself, the fact that she adds further mystification to the story by relating the source of the story to the others implies that she is not comfortable speaking directly about the incident. In accordance, she drops the direct narrative style, which she has used from the beginning, to narrate what happened that night through rumours and what other people recount. She suppresses her own direct narrative voice, taking up a passive role in that particular section. Driven by the instinct to protect her daughter, Kitty's attack on Dewar is so ferocious that it breeds versions of the story where she possesses almost superhuman strength. By intentionally shrouding the incident in mystery, July forms another layer of dissociation from it. While not recalling it completely and narrating indirectly how Kitty attacked Dewar, July can clearly remember the state he was left in:

All that is known is that Tam Dewar was found, not yet dead, but spread upon the ground of the mill yard with a broken collarbone, a fracture in his skull, two broken ankles, two broken arms and his ribs mash up. (Levy 173)

Witnessing such a violent confrontation between her parents in combination with the death of Nimrod and Kitty's execution for the murder builds up to a breaking point in July's narration as she tries to end her story.

The series of traumatic events starting with the Baptist War and ending in the death of Kitty unexpectedly and abruptly transition to the symbolic funeral of slavery after Emancipation. The scene depicts a congregation of former slaves celebrating the end of their bondage as the coffin of slavery is lowered into the ground:

The coffin was borne through Falmouth, high upon the shoulders of six men July and Molly walked within this procession in the company of black negroes and fair-faced coloureds [. . .] This motley crowd were led in muffled solemnity by a white Baptist minister and his family. At the chapel yard all came to a stop as the minister raised his pointed finger to the moon, then let out a grave and strident cry of, 'The hour is at hand. The monster is dying.'

Some in this congregation fell upon their knees, others mumbled prayers on halting breath, or rocked within the rhythm of a softly sung hymn. Until suddenly, the minister raising both arms heavenward shouted, 'The monster is dead. The negro is free!' (Levy 181)

Within this ending July, and Levy by extension, is referring to an actual commemorative ceremony marking the end of slavery held in 1838. Brown recounts:

When emancipation finally came, it was greeted by celebrations all over the island. In Falmouth, where the recently returned William Knibb had his congregation, slavery was given a funeral-not as a sign of respect or to mark a sacred spot, but as a countermemorial, a way of fixing fear and hatred upon an unloved thing and tying it to the ground. In a paradoxical inversion of customary ceremonies of respect, as the enslaved claimed their freedom, they used the rites of death, which had been the focal point of so many struggles within slavery, to commemorate its end and determine its future meaning. An hour before midnight on the last night of July 1838, the final evening of enslavement, more than two thousand black men, women, and children gathered at the Baptist chapel to sing a funeral dirge:

The death-blow is struck-see the monster is dying,

He cannot survive till the dawn streaks the sky;

*In one single hour*, he will prostrate be lying,

Come, shout o'er the grave where so soon he will lie.

When the clock struck midnight, William Knibb shouted to the emotional throng, "The monster is dead! The negro is free!" and begged three cheers for the queen of England. The crowd erupted in cheers, its exultation rattling the windows of the chapel with what Knibb called a "strange yet sacred joy." At dawn, a multitude assembled around a coffin containing a chain, handcuffs, an iron collar, and other "hateful ensigns of usurped command." (250)

The ceremony and the words uttered in the funeral dirge match July's re-enactment perfectly. Therefore, it can be argued that July, uncharacteristically, goes outside of the scope that she has established for her story. Considering that she has limited the historical accuracy of her narration to the perception of the character and has focused solely on her experience, the way July is reduced to just another member of that congregation mentioned just in passing contradicts the overall style that has been established up until this point. Moreover, the abrupt transition from the most tragic parts of her story to the celebration scene creates a stark contrast to the flow of the narrative. Taking into account these inconsistencies, it can be concluded that this ending serves a placeholder role for July to cut the story short. This is immediately proven by the fact that July essentially shoos away her readers in the following section saying "I can go no further! Reader, my story is at an end. Close up this book and go about your day" (Levy 183). It indicates an unwillingness on July's part to relate the rest of the story.

The fact that it was only through the demands of Thomas that July continues her story confirms that July intends to screen what immediately follows the death of her mother. It is through her conflict with Thomas when her cover as the narrator is revealed. Thomas

implores, “‘Mama,’ he say to me, ‘do not take me for a fool. This is the story of your own life, not of your creating I can see this” and demands her to tell how she bore a son during that time (Levy 185). Even though July vehemently disputes the suggestion that the story is her own life story, her distressed complaint about her son at the closing sentences of the chapter proves it as she claims that her son “believes that his mama should suffer every little thing again. Him wan’ me suffer every likkle t’ing again!” (Levy 192). This claim is also indicative in that it suggests the ending screens traumatic experiences, narration of which means re-living them. Another reason for screening them, according to July, is to save the readers from the painful truth: “This is my story at an end. For I know that my reader does not wish to be told tales as ugly as these” (Levy 191). Both her reasonings serve a functional purpose. First of all, screening allows July to omit the most traumatic parts of her story to preserve her narrative empowerment as well as saving herself from the pain to relate them. Therefore, it functionally helps July to re-imagine an empowering story to pass on. Secondly, it serves Levy’s purpose of creating an alternative approach to the cultural trauma of slavery without bringing victimisation to the foreground.

When July yields to Thomas’s demands, the style in which she quickly reveals what she has kept from the readers affirms the bitterness she feels to be forced to tell them. As opposed to the detailed style of writing she has used up until this point, the narration of how she was punished at the stocks, how she lost several friends, and how she lied about the death of her son (Levy 190-191) is presented in quick succession without really reflecting on it. This indicates her desire to abide by Thomas’s demand for truth and to be done with it quickly. Her bitterness is visible most clearly in her narration of the birth of Thomas:

His legs did not bow (unlike those of the man who sired him), and up to now, that son has a good head of hair. But still, July, at that time, did look upon this tiny newborn and think him the ugliest black-skinned child she had ever seen. There, these words are true—so does my son find joy within them? He has a mama whose lip curled with disgust when first she saw that a child of hers was as black as a nigger. And even if my son now wishes to beg his storyteller to change this detail, alas, it cannot be done.

July had no intention to suckle this misbegotten black pickaninny. But neither did she wish to leave him mewling upon a mound of trash, nor whimpering within the

wood. She found no strength to smother him, nor will to hold him under the river's swell. After two days of hiding her son from all that was this world, July fixed upon the notion of leaving him to the minister-man. (Levy 186).

She is clearly poking fun at Thomas with this initial account of her abandoning him at the door of the minister's house. She is using the resentment she feels at being forced to speak of these events to thwart under which conditions she decided to leave him to create a pretence that she did not want him in the first place. However, when she revisits the story in the following chapter through an essay written by the wife of the minister, she indirectly reveals that she left Thomas because he would have been taken away to be sold as a slave by Caroline Mortimer and that she was very grateful to Mrs. Kinsman for accepting to take care of him (Levy 194). The discrepancy between the two accounts indicates how hard it is for July to speak openly about what is possibly the most traumatic part of her hidden history behind the screen memory. Finally, she also reveals that this time period is literally character-altering for her saying, "In those dark days our July—that mischievous girl that you have come to know, that could twist her missus to any bidding and tease Molly to tears, that grinning girl [. . .]—that July was forsaken by her ravaged spirit and soon departed. And a withered and mournful girl stumbled in, unsteady to take her part" (Levy 191). The most graceful qualities that July has shown before the ending have been lost after her traumatic experiences. Having uncovered what she has hidden behind the depiction of the burial of slavery, it can be argued that July has replaced the most traumatic part of her personal life with a cultural memory of one the most significant dates within the history of slavery. Therefore, by way of reflection, she reimagines a communal event of celebration as an abrupt yet a seemingly happy ending to her story to avoid revealing her traumatic past.

The continuation of the story brings about a certain level of relapse from July's broken state after the first ending. Growing older, learning how to read and write and being freed from slavery with the emancipation, and regaining some of the power she had over Caroline Mortimer during the period that follows the Baptist War help July recover her self-confidence to a certain degree. However, it is the introduction of the new overseer, Robert Goodwin, and her relationship with him that puts July's life in an upward trajectory in terms of happiness. Goodwin's transformation from a disillusioned and naïve

gentleman with seemingly good intentions towards the black workers of the plantation to a tyrant, reminiscent of the pre-emancipation plantation owners paralleling his romantic relationship with July marks the flow of events that lead up to the second alternative ending of the novel. The hypocrisy of Goodwin's character is revealed to the reader through his double relationships with July and Caroline Mortimer. His pursuit of Caroline's hand in marriage for financial gain by becoming the owner of the plantation while keeping July with the disguise of his true love interest foreshadows the eventual collapse of July's second love affair. As Chifane comments, "[w]hen he asks Caroline to marry him in order to be closer to July, his true nature is revealed. His sordid love affair with Miss July going on under Caroline's eyes in the damp little room under the house is another proof of his mischievous behaviour" (8). Intimacy shown to July by Goodwin instead of his wife Caroline turns this love triangle into a contest ground in which July can overpower Caroline once again. How July enjoys her victory over Caroline is reflected in the anecdote of the family painting Goodwin has a painter made. Upon learning about the painting, July instantly asks to be in it, which Goodwin accepts. In the painting named Mr. and Mrs. Goodwin, July recounts that "[a]fter commenting how Caroline looked strangely sad in the portrait, the next observation from anyone who viewed it, was that her husband, Robert, appears to be gazing firmly upon the nigger" (Levy 292). Not only does July steal the spotlight from Caroline even in her family portrait, she also calls Goodwin husband, shares a homely space with him in the room, which is under Caroline's bedroom, and eventually gives birth to her second child, Emily.

The turning of the tide within July's competition against Caroline in romantic fulfilment coincides with the financial decline of the Amity plantation. Struggling to maintain the functionality of the plantation and the constant conflicts between Goodwin and the black workers reflect the downfall of the romantic relationship between Goodwin and July. The failure of the business evolves into a hatred towards blacks on Goodwin's end from which July is not exempt. Goodwin's turning hostile towards July because of the bankruptcy of the plantation marks a breaking point building up to the second alternative ending. July's ability to defy black/white and master/slave power relations reaches an unexpected end when she meets Goodwin, who is mentally unstable after his unsuccessful attempts to

force workers to stay on the fields, cutting cane all by himself (Levy 333). When she approaches Goodwin, she is caught violently:

[S]he would not let him go. She struggled to hold him—grasping tight at his arm while he twisted and turned in an effort to shake her away. She would not leave him. But then he caught her throat so tight within his hand that her tongue protruded under the grasp. July wrestled to free herself from his hold as he raised his machete high above her. And all at once, July heard herself crying ‘Mercy, massa, mercy,’ as she cringed away from him. (Levy 333).

His violent reaction and July’s calling him “massa” as a reflex suggest a defaulting back to the master/slave relationship between the two even though slavery is no longer in effect. July is not a slave of Amity any longer, yet this scene proves that even after emancipation, slavery’s shadow can still be perceived in practice. The fact that the man she calls her husband can turn on her in such a violent manner is an ego-shattering experience for July, who has been enjoying her victories over Caroline.

Similar to the first ending, the second one is characterised by loss. After losing Goodwin to Caroline Mortimer, July also loses Emily when the Goodwins decide to leave Amity behind and move to England. When July is tricked to turn over Emily for feeding, she does not realise that Goodwin intends to take her for himself until Elias reveals “‘No fear, Miss July,’ he went on with a pride intended to calm her, ‘it be the massa and missus be taking the pickney to England’” (Levy 353). Kidnapping of Emily is the second instance when July loses a child, which results in her writing the second alternative ending to her story and giving it to Thomas.

The second ending is presented to the reader through indirect narration as July continues to avoid talking directly about the most traumatic parts of her life. As opposed to the first one, the second ending is introduced when July submits it to Thomas saying, “Here below, reader, are the very words that my son read that day” (Levy 360). Instead of relaying them directly to the reader in third person as she does for the majority of her narration, she chooses to report Thomas’s reading of and his reaction to it. In line with the first ending, the second ending paints a happy ending for July where she starts a small business similar to her rival Miss Clara, in which she overtakes her and leads a moderately successful life

as a free woman. This time, the ending is very reminiscent of July's previous encounter with Miss Clara where she first introduces how Miss Clara started her small business, found a circle of associates within the city, and had an ongoing affair with a white man (Levy 238-41). Compared to the first one, the second ending is less complex in structure. However, it functions in the same vein in that through projection of the moderate success of Miss Clara, July creates herself a screen memory that represses and hides the years of her life that she spent in the abandoned fields of the Amity plantation. Considering that the second ending is even less convincing than the first, it is obvious that Thomas refutes it through its inconsistency to the flow of the narrative. He argues:

‘Mama,’ my son finally said, ‘you wish your readers to know that after Miss July’s baby had been cruelly seized from her by Robert and Caroline Goodwin and taken to England, that she then went on to manage a shop within town entirely untroubled, and there grew old making first preserves and pickles, before becoming the mistress of a lodging house?’ (Levy 363)

However, the final paragraph of the ending clearly demonstrates that it is intended as a wishful happy ending for July rather than one that is consistent with the story. In the last lines she addresses the reader:

So, reader, do not feel pity for the plight of our July, for my tale did not set forth to see her so wounded. And though other books and volumes (wrapped in leather and stamped in gold) might wish you view her life as worthless, I trust you have walked with her too long and too far to heed that foolishness when it is belched upon you. No. July’s tale has the happiest of endings—and you may take my word upon it. (Levy 361).

The tone of the final lines invokes the feeling that the narrator is trying to convince herself more than she is trying to convince her readers, implying hidden facts about July's ending. The following chapter reveals that July has lived on the Amity grounds for thirty years, half-starved, in poverty, without ever moving on. The information is passed on to the readers in reported speech again. The man in the courtroom recounts the information he has received from July to the courtroom, revealing, “[t]his one [. . .] declares she has no other home but this. Says she had been living upon Amity for all her life. [. . .] She believes, as many of the negroes do in their child-like way, my lord, that there is no other world” (Levy 368). Ironically, the trauma she has experienced in Amity results in thirty years of a state close to non-existence on the same grounds. Just like the passage suggests, July knows of no other world than Amity and continues to stay there until she is brought to the court room for stealing a chicken. In a double irony, her final departure from Amity



to be in the court creates the opportunity for her partial redemption as she reunites with Thomas in that same courtroom.

Consequently, July's alternative endings, screening the most traumatic parts of her story, function in creating an alternative reality to her traumatic past. The silences in her narration are counteracted by highlighting her personal moments of empowerment especially against her antagonist Caroline Mortimer. By devoting the majority of her narration to the formulation of a happy story for July and only revealing the traumas upon the demands of her son, July creates a narrative battleground on which she can work through her own trauma and refrain from the pain of re-living it through screening and dissociation. The technique of novel within a novel enables Levy to alternate between the past and July's current writing process. The tensions and arguments between July and Thomas are used as devices to provide insight into the workings of July's traumatised self and her coping mechanisms. In line with July's self-empowering construction of her story, Levy's novel *The Long Song*, similarly creates a negotiation of past cultural trauma by avoiding to create a story of victimisation. "As such, by working through the traumatic narratives of the past, her aesthetic oeuvre serves as a communal act of recovery for fostering a wider sense of community in modern-day Britain" (Laursen 66). July refuses to have a sad ending for her narration. She does not want to portray July in a decrepit and victimised state at the end. Accordingly, she attempts to adapt seemingly happy endings for her own use. The emancipation, represented in the first alternative ending, is a day of glory for all slaves. Similarly, the second ending is a happy ending for Miss Clara. July uses them as surrogates for her own suffering. Hence, it can be argued that she purposefully avoids depicting herself as a sufferer. In an act of active avoidance of victim culture, the narrative space of personal history enables the contemporary reader to engage with the traumatic past of slavery with the possibility of working through.

**CHAPTER 3**

**RE-LIVING THE PAST IN SEARCH OF EMPATHETIC  
CONVERSATION IN BERNARDINE EVARISTO'S *BLONDE  
ROOTS***

Booker Prize winner author Bernardine Evaristo's 2008 novel, *Blonde Roots*, is an experimental fictional journey to the history of slavery in Britain. Evaristo has been a prominent author of the British literary scene with her unique style. She has creatively experimented with form, syntax, narrative, and history in her works. Recently, her works have attracted more attention, especially after her work *Girl, Women, Other* (2019) won the Booker Prize in 2019. *Blonde Roots* reflects her creative approach to history in that it is a neo-slave narrative in which the history of the slave trade is inverted in terms of racial roles in colonisation. In her reimagining, white people of Europe are colonised by an imaginary African empire, the United Kingdom of Ambossa. She creates an alternative history where the roles of victim and perpetrator are reversed along with all the accompanying cultural implications. She turns the roles of the two races in the history of slavery upside down in order form a fictional space which enables empathetic understanding. The readers are put in the shoes of their other to claim an experience, which is not historically their own. The novel is a retrospective narration of the escape attempts of a white slave, Doris, except for the second book, which is narrated by Bwana, an influential Ambossan figure and the master of the compound Doris works at. The novel also pays homage to two impactful neo-slave narratives that came before it. First of all, the title of the novel is a play upon the title of Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Similar to the twist of the inverted history in the novel, the title is an inversion of Haley's work. Moreover, similar to *Roots*, *Blonde Roots* takes up an expansive approach to enslavement by including Doris's capture, the Middle Passage, and multiple estates where she was enslaved at, and her multiple attempts at freedom. The variety of content within *Blonde Roots* mirrors Kunta Kinte's journey in *Roots*. Secondly, *Blonde Roots* pays homage to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* by naming the sugar plantation after the one in Morrison's novel. Bwana's plantation is called Home Sweet Home,

reminiscent of *Beloved's* Sweet Home. By doing so, Evaristo acknowledges two of the most influential examples that helped define the neo-slave narrative genre.

The novel follows the protagonist Doris Scagglethorpe's journey to freedom as well as the story of her capture and being sold into slavery. At the beginning of the novel she receives a letter informing her that the time of her escape, which will be assisted by an anti-slavery group of Ambossans, has come. As Doris makes her way through hostile streets of Londolo, to the designated rendezvous point, the memories of her capture by slavers in England, the Middle Passage, her enslavement as the playmate of an Ambossan girl Little Miracle, and how she ended up as the personal secretary of Bwana come to her mind in flashes. Although she makes her way to the ship, with guides from the anti-slavery group, she is eventually captured by Bwana, and punished by whipping. In the second section the narrator is Bwana, who tells the story of his rise to prominence from nothing in a self-righteous manner. This section is a reference to the supposed humanistic explanation of the enslavement of European races, and its justification through scientific research. He proposes reasons why the white races are inferior to other races as an answer to their enslavement in evolutionary terms. Hence, this section also implies his insecurities about his masculinity and capitalist greed hidden behind his reasoning. The third book sees Doris returning as the narrator. She is transported to the West Japanese Islands, where she is supposed to work as a field slave, as a punishment for her escape attempt. At the plantation of Home Sweet Home, Doris finds solidarity with her new friends at the slave quarters. She also reunites with her long-lost sister and learns the tragic fates of her family members. Although escaping is no longer a priority for her, the upcoming sales of the two boys of her close friends and the possibility of a reunion with her former lover Frank bring about a final escape attempt. Doris finally escapes with a group of five and finds safety in a Maroon town in the mountains. However, her past hopes of reunion with her family and Frank are left unfulfilled. She lives to see old age confined to the Maroon town only to return to Home Sweet Home as an old woman when slavery is outlawed.

The overarching theme of the novel is the search for freedom which is characterised by a yearning for family and belonging. Both of Doris's escape attempts are fuelled by a desire to go back to her previous life with her family in the English countryside and dreams of her children, who are sold away shortly after birth, and Frank finding her when she is free to live happily ever after. The concept of family and its destruction by slavery are driving factors behind Doris's resolve. Initially, Doris is unaware of Frank and her children's whereabouts. Thus, the first escape attempt is motivated by a possible voyage back to England, where she hopes to find her family waiting for her. This idea is further expanded when she learns about a carpenter-turned-freedom fighter after her transportation to the sugar plantation. She recognises Frank by his depictions from other slaves and she hopes to reunite with him as well. Only the new family she has formed with Ye Meme, Ma Marjani, and their children keeps Doris from attempting to escape again. Therefore, it is no coincidence that freedom comes back to her agenda to protect her new family by saving the boys from being sold. The threat to the unity and solidarity she has become a part of motivates her to attempt a second escape and succeed. Slaves, who are treated as commodities, could rarely form and maintain families within the confinements of plantations. The fact that children were viewed as fresh livestock to be sold for profit posed further threat to the unity of families. This is established in a cruel dramatic irony in Bwana's section within the narrative. While Doris finds strength to carry on in her dreams of a family reunion, Bwana reveals the fates of her family, in passing, to the reader. His encounter with Doris's father is just another encounter with a being who exists in misery according to Bwana. The man relates to Bwana the fate of his family:

You must help me sir! You are my only hope. I am Jack Scagglethorpe, a hard-working, God-fearing, law-abiding citizen from the north. This lady here is my dear wife Eliza and these are my girls Alice and Sharon. Those kidnapping devils came into our cottage while we were at dinner and before I could get up and protect my family I was sent flying to the floor with a blow to my head which knocked me out. They'd already taken my Doris last spring and on the way here they dragged my eldest Madge into the woods. We heard her screams. Oh Lord, we heard her screams. (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 141)

Just like Doris the rest of the family was kidnapped a year later. It is also revealed by Sharon towards the end of the novel that none of them survived except Sharon. The pleas of Jack Scagglethorpe do not mean anything for Bwana, who only comments that the man is mentally incapable of understanding that his newfound servitude is a saving grace for his family. From Bwana's perspective the family "was being removed from Abject

Misery” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 142). Doris spends almost all the narrative dreaming about finding her family, yet the reader is already aware that even if she returns to England, she will find her childhood home empty, creating a dramatic irony. Doris’s hopes continue until her discovery of Sharon very late in the narrative, while the ugly truth is condensed in just a small paragraph in Bwana’s narration.

The contents of the different books of the novel also impact the use of language within them. First of all, due to the inversion of the victim and perpetrator roles, usage of King’s English is actually using the language of the enslaved as opposed to the other two novels, namely *The Long Song* and *The Book of Night Women*. Considering the inversion of roles, English being a common language used by all slaves and the enslavers creates a paradox in the novel. Even Doris’s friends who are from different parts of Europa, speak a creolised English, which should not be their mother tongues. Writing in the language of the oppressor has been a topic of contestation within postcolonial writing. It is hard to reach a definite conclusion as both camps of the debate propose irrefutable evidence to benefits and drawbacks of writing in English. Hybridisation and diasporic identities further complicate the issue as native tongues are gradually lost to following generations. Thus, writing in English does mean writing in the tongue of the oppressor in the context of Evaristo’s novel (as it cannot be inverted). Nevertheless, it is also Evaristo’s own mother tongue. Consequently, English language evades the inversion dynamics of the novel. However, it is also not limited to King’s English. Language used in the novel shows variety according to the person speaking it. Compared to the other slaves around her, Doris is a well-educated slave. She is literate and articulate in her language skills. Having worked as an office secretary for Bwana, Doris handled mostly paperwork and improved her language skills. Considering that the first book mostly consists of Doris’s train of thought and flashbacks as she makes her way to meet her helpers, the language of the first book is standard English with complex grammar, proper syntax, and articulate wording. It reflects Doris’s own command over the language. Similarly, the second book, which is narrated by Bwana, seamlessly integrates concepts, cultural, religious, and scientific terminology belonging to the Ambossans in standard English. Although Bwana is not English, he shows a similar command of the language to Doris’s. However, the tone changes from Doris’s emotional narration, to one that assumes moral and intellectual high

ground in order to justify the enslavement of white races for humanistic purposes. His pseudo-scientific language to prove the biological inferiority of the whites to his reader also mirrors the hypocrisy of his involvement in slave trade to build up his fortune. Finally, the last book introduces a new approach to English. Slaves on the plantation speak a creolised version of English, which contradicts Doris's English. This new creole carries traces of Jamaican patois in terms of its spelling and syntax. For example, in order to integrate Doris to her new surroundings, her new close friend Ye Meme tells her: "Wurk! Iz wurk we hav to do. We nyot here to be happee. We nyot here to rest. We here to make plentee-plentee monee for Massa Nonso. Iz wurk what we do, gyal. Wurk! Wurk! Wurk! Now come!" (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 182). In terms of spelling, words such as "nyot," "gyal," and "massa" are reminiscent of Jamaican patois. Doris instantly recognises the difference between her and Ye Meme's speech as an indication of her status as a "white collar" slave while Ye Meme is a "blue collar" slave (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 182). However, the seclusion Doris experiences throughout the first book leaves its place to a small community in the slave quarters in the final book. She interacts with a lot more people in this final part, and the language used reflects the characters who speak it. Therefore, the majority of the dialogues in the final book are spoken in patois.

In *Blonde Roots* Evaristo reverts Europe and Africa's race relations during slavery by having Africans hold the political and cultural power in order to overpower and enslave European people who are supposedly less civilised. Accordingly, she bases the mainland United Kingdom of Ambossa on Great Britain, which has colonies across the Atlantic. In the map she provides at the beginning of the novel to conceptualise her re-imagined world, the continents of Africa and Europe switch places. Aphrika, modelled after Africa, is in the northern section of the map. It is bordered by Land of Arabian Sands, which is not included in the map. Ambossa is an island near the coast of Aphrika. Europa, which is modelled after Europe, is to the south of the map. England is now a part of the continent rather than being an island. It is located at the cabbage coast. To the west, there is the continent of Amarika, and the West Japanese Islands, which are modelled after the West Indies. The United Kingdom of Ambossa holds colonies in the West Japanese Islands and form the historical triangular shape of the slave trade between Europa, West Japanese Islands and its mainland. The map craftily re-imagines the routes of the slave trade while

inverting the positions of Africa and Europe. Doris's journey takes her through all the routes on the triangle until she finally escapes enslavement in the West Japanese Islands.

Evaristo's interest in personal and collective history is evident in her earlier works such as *Lara* (1997) and *The Emperor's Babe* (2001). The former is a semi-autobiographical journey of self-discovery to generations past of a mixed race marriage. As the family roots of a hybrid girl living in the second half of the twentieth century are revealed to expand all over the world, she tries to find her identity in a society which seems hostile to her because of her skin colour. Evaristo writes *Lara* in the form of a verse novel as an artistic celebration of hybridity and diversity. *The Emperor's Babe* is more similar to *Blonde Roots* in that it is another experimentation thwarting mainstream conceptions of history. In this novel, Evaristo re-imagines a Roman Britain through the eyes of a black heroine, Zuleika. Zuleika is a free black woman living in England during the Roman rule. Through her story, Evaristo brings forward the fact that black people lived in Europe much earlier than the times of slavery, even as free people. Therefore, the idea that black people are part of the history of Europe before slavery is one of the main points of interest for Evaristo in relation to history. She explains this as follows:

If I'm honest, my primary interest in Europe is its black history. The grand and sometimes terrible white European histories have been channelled into every creative medium. The hidden histories, however, are still waiting to be sourced for creative enterprises to enter Europe's collective memory, to become enshrined in our myths. (Evaristo *CSI* 6)

The role of black people in the history of Europe is neglected, reduced, and ignored according to Evaristo. Therefore, she wants to rediscover them. In the same text quoted above, Evaristo lists factual information of black people living in different time periods of history across Europe including a Togolese man living in Greenland, examples from Russia and even Nazi Germany (Evaristo *CSI* 5-6). The black communities of such periods are overlooked, hardly recognised and almost never represented. In *The Emperor's Babe*, she tries to capture such a marginalised existence as the focus of her story. Furthermore, she challenges the anachronistic tendency to extend racial conceptions to classical times. McConnell argues:

In the modern era, it can surprise us that ancient Rome was unhindered prejudice, though it should not.<sup>1</sup> Many have argued—the acclaimed Howard Professor of

Classics, Frank M. Snowden, Jr. most conclusively—that responses to “race” configured differently in the ancient world. What Snowden demonstrates, first in *Blacks Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* and then in *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks*, is that while the ancient Greeks and Romans noticed skin colour and differing physical features, they did not attach prejudicial attitudes to them. Nor was it only darker-skinned peoples that excited their attention: the pale skin and red hair of the Gauls garner just as much comment as the dark skin of peoples from the area that they referred to as Ethiopia (but which covered a far larger and less-defined area than modern Ethiopia). This is notwithstanding the fact that the ancient Greeks and Romans did associate darkness with death and the underworld, and sometimes with ominous portents; nevertheless, there is no evidence that this black-white binary crossed over into people’s thinking about skin color. (103)

The quotation explains that ideological constructions of racial difference were not the same in classical time. Accordingly, Evaristo writes Zuleika’s story from the perspective of a free woman. Even so, she reveals that many readers assume that she is a slave while reading the book (Niven 16). This is the exact notion that Evaristo’s reimaginings of history tackle conceptually. As an author, she assumes the role of her marginalised protagonist and brings forward their story from their point of view. These perspectives are eccentric and against to the grand and mainstream narratives of historical periods which they belong to.

*Blonde Roots* is methodically similar to her earlier attempt in *The Emperor’s Babe*. Yet, this time she assumes the slave narrative as a guise. The slave narratives themselves are texts that challenge the mainstream narratives about slavery, slave trade, and the lives of slaves. Evaristo further complicates that challenge by making the whites, who are called “whytes” or its racist counterpart “wigger,” the enslaved people. In her experiment, black people are the oppressors. She summarises her intention for doing so in an interview with Donnell:

I invented a tragi-satirical alternate universe which positioned Africans as the enslavers of Europeans—an inversion of the transatlantic slave trade. I plan never to do the obvious when approaching history with my books. I simply can’t adhere to someone else’s timeline and hierarchy of key historical moments. (Donnell 104)

European history is not secluded or exempt from interaction with black people. However, it is recorded and written by the Europeans and is informed by their perspective. By changing the roles, Evaristo is inviting her readers to slip into the shoes of the other in a guided tour of their experience for both parties. Her contemporary black readers



experience being the perpetrator while the white readers get a sense of how it would feel to be the victim. In this respect, Evaristo creates a new space for intellectual conversation between the races about key historical periods that contribute greatly to the processes of how contemporary identities are shaped. Therefore, *Blonde Roots* stands out as a playfully created common ground for empathetic understanding. Even though it depicts Doris's traumatic experiences through flashbacks, and her road to freedom which turns into a story of loss, *Blonde Roots* avoids being a traditional narrative of victimisation by turning history upside down and employing voices from both sides of the struggle. In doing so, the novel aims to contribute to solve the identity issues experienced by contemporary Britain's multicultural society. Accordingly, Evaristo explains, "[a]ll of our books, our works, our literature enrich our sense of ourselves and contribute towards the creative and intellectual conversations around who we are as a nation" (Donnell 104). Clearly, Evaristo's approach embraces diversity as a part of British identity instead of focusing on partitioned specific identities within it. In accordance, she states that she dislikes being referred to as a Black British writer and finds it divisive because obviously there is not a term such as White British writer (Muñoz Valdivieso 12). She asserts both her hybrid identity and her British identity in her works. Muñoz Valdivieso argues that this quality forms the backbone of her writing saying:

Bernardine Evaristo was born in London to a Nigerian father and an English mother, and her mixed background is usually seen as a source of strength in her writing. Hybridisation marks her work: she spins tales of a multiethnic world in a hybrid genre that moves skilfully between novel and verse, and her novels remain grounded in the present as they take us back in history. (9)

In line with this, *Blonde Roots*'s satire through inversion invites its readers to reassess the roles of ethnicity and race in the grand narratives of history in order to reach an empathically common ground to alleviate the trauma of the past. Such an impact of empathy in trauma studies can bring about new ways of healing cultural trauma. In the same vein, Garloff claims that "[t]he idea that trauma implicates us in the histories of others still resonates in contemporary trauma studies, especially in theories that posit a transnational connectedness of cultural memory" (212). Re-enactment of the traumatic past in literature can thus overcome national borders and invite people across cultures to a literary witnessing. Similarly, Dominic LaCapra in his *Understanding Others: Peoples,*

*Animals, Past* (2018) defines the desirable form of empathy as opposed to identification as follows:

Transference involving self-implication with respect to the other or the object of inquiry may induce identification. Empathy is often conflated with identification. I think this is a misidentification. Empathy is better seen as form of compassion involving both proximity to and distance from the other. In other words, empathy requires the recognition of the difference of the other as well as mutual closeness or proximity (skewed, needless to say, by differences of power, status, and wealth as well as tempered or modified by judgment—positive, negative, and mixed). But recognizing the difference or “alterity” of the other helps to counteract identification with the attendant tendencies to project or simply incorporate the other in ways that may obliterate differences or at least to ride roughshod over (at times warranted) resistances to one’s own desires, initiatives, interpretations, and explanations, including the desire to make the other an object of as total a “scientific” knowledge as possible. I would relate empathy or compassion to the attempt to work through transference while counteracting but never simply transcending tendencies to act out, compulsively repeat, incorporate, or projectively reprocess that in which one is affectively invested or implicated. (123-124)

In LaCapra’s conceptualisation of empathy, the witness does not identify with the victim of the cultural trauma. This is what differentiates his concept of empathy from sympathy. It is not limited to an emotional response. The reader, as a witness, does not feel for the character, but they feel along with the character. The process is dependent on an understanding, in which the distance is maintained between the victim and the witness. Therefore, further victimisation through the re-enactment of the traumatic past is avoided. This is considered to be one of the pitfalls of the representation of historical, cultural trauma because it raises ethical concerns about second hand trauma transmitted through literature. He proposes empathy which has proximity and distance at the same time as an ideal way of understanding others. Evaristo’s approach to inversion of history serves exactly the same purpose. While the inversion of roles in the slave trade is essentially fictional, the content that the readers see through the eyes of the inverted characters are historically believable. Doris’s experience is realistic in that the series of events that lead to her enslavement, her attempts at escape, the punishments she receives, and her overall experience are representative of real lives under the bondage of slavery. The only aspect that differentiate her story from history is the colour of her skin.

The main strand of narrative follows Doris Scagglethorpe’s search for freedom from bondage with her two escape attempts. She is an Englishwoman, who lived with her

parents and three sisters in the English countryside as serfs of a feudal English lord. Through going back and forth in time with flashbacks and memories, she reveals that she was kidnapped by slave hunters, that she was transported on a slaver through the Middle Passage to be sold in the West Japanese Islands. She was first purchased to be a playmate to the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner. After secretly killing the young mistress, she is sold to Bwana, who is the main antagonist of the novel, to work as an assistant in his office. The first half of the novel narrates her failed escape attempt with the help of the members of the anti-slavery movement of Ambossa. Bwana takes her escape attempt as a personal attack on his pride and hunts her down. The third part of the novel tells the readers how she was punished and sent to the West Japanese Islands again to work on Bwana's plantation, Home Sweet Home, as a further punishment. Being a domestic slave, Doris has never worked on a plantation. Even so, she finds solidarity with the slaves on the plantation and experiences a community life in the slave quarters. In an effort to save herself and the two children of her closest friends, she decides to escape again. With some help from her long lost sister, other slaves on the plantation, and the Maroons of the island, Doris and a small group of associates make their way to freedom in the Maroon town. Although she achieves her biggest desire, which is to be free, Doris's postscript does not talk of a life lived happily ever after. Most members of her group fail to fit in the Maroon community and she never achieves the dreams she had about life after freedom due to the loss of her family and the impossibility of reconciliation between her and Frank, who is no longer the man she knew when they were together.

Structurally, the novel consists of three sections which are called books. The books do not follow a linear progression. Instead, the narration's linearity is broken by depictions, anecdotes, memories, and flashbacks in a stream of consciousness technique as Doris's mind wanders through thoughts initiated and triggered by her current experience. The traumatic experiences of her past such as her capture, the Middle Passage, and enslavement form the basis of the flashbacks which are the dominant highlights of especially the first book. They are scattered throughout the book and presented to the readers at intervals during Doris's first escape attempt. The third book largely follows the style of narration of the first book, but the past no longer resurfaces through flashbacks. Doris's experiences at the plantation take the foreground. And lastly, the second book is

a complete breakaway from Doris's story in that, it is narrated by Bwana himself. In this part, Bwana talks about his humble beginnings, his rise to power, and the reasons why he believes the Aphrikans are rightly enslaving the Europeans. The second book is a collection of essays written by Bwana for a pamphlet titled "The Flame" (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 109). In these essays, Evaristo draws inspiration from social-cultural, pseudo-scientific, and pro-slavery arguments of the whites during slave trade. Ironically, Bwana's vehement praises of enslavement of the white race are presented side by side with how much he profited from that exercise to climb the social ladder to establish himself among the landowning and politically strong elite of Ambossans. This section is strategically situated right after his successful recapture of Doris. He perceives Doris's escape as a direct attack on his masculine, dominant, and patriarchal persona he has created for himself. The shifts in narrative styles and narrators from one book to the other also impact how trauma and its symptoms are represented and performed within the novel.

The first book of the novel is characterised by Doris's flashbacks, which are triggered by her feelings and observations during her first attempt at escape. Intrusive memories of past trauma and its flashbacks are one of the most common symptoms of PTSD. These can consist of recurring unintentional recalling of a traumatic experience or triggered flashbacks of such an event. Usually the person who suffers from such flashbacks has no control over their occurrence. Brewin explains trauma related flashbacks as follows:

Lack of any formal definition of flashbacks or dissociative re-experiencing resulted in uncertainty about whether the term should be reserved for extreme episodes in which individuals completely lose contact with their surroundings for periods of minutes or more, or whether they should include all intrusive memories that are accompanied by a sense of reliving the event in the present, even if only fleeting. Both DSM-5 and the proposed ICD-11 PTSD criteria have now opted for the more inclusive definition in which flashbacks are seen as existing on a continuum between these two extremes. This is an important step forward which will enable researchers to communicate their findings more effectively. (2)

As Brewin suggests, the flashbacks and their effects on the person experiencing them show variety in their severity. From anxiety to temporary complete dissociation, flashbacks can have detrimental impact on the person's daily life and overall cognitive function. The traumatic memory can be recalled voluntarily as well, which enables researchers to analyse its effects on the traumatised person. In a research on twenty-seven

volunteers who were diagnosable with PTSD, Chou et al. found that, when asked to recall a traumatic experience voluntarily, twenty people experienced flashbacks, nine of which also experienced dissociation (7). Their results show that a majority of the volunteers experience flashbacks related to the source of their trauma, while some of them manifest symptoms of dissociation during their flashbacks. During the dissociative states the person manifests an indifference to outside stimuli, heightened emotional responses and anxiety. The memory of the trauma occupies that person's mental space and reduce their cognitive function and awareness. The same study by Chou et al. also shows that the length of flashbacks experienced by the volunteers ranged from five seconds to eleven minutes and thirty-four seconds (7). Considering that the response to trauma as well as its symptoms show great variety from one person to another, the flashbacks show a similar trend. Their range is so vast even in a small test group of twenty.

Flashbacks also differ from the regular memories of the past depending on their effect on the person experiencing them. Brewin argues that the difference lies in reliving the traumatic experience saying that flashbacks "might be a marked sense of a reliving of the traumatic experience(s). Some report complete reliving, whereas others report more momentary or partial reliving of perhaps just one aspect of the original experience" (2). In other words, flashbacks are not simply remembering the traumatic experience, but a triggered, perpetual recurring of it. In line with this, Little claims that with flashbacks, "the victim relives the traumatizing event in a possessing loop of repetitions until the trauma can be successfully assimilated into experience" (49). As a result, it can be concluded that only when the person can start to successfully cope with their trauma, one can observe a reduction in the frequency and severity of the flashbacks.

The narrative structure of the first book of the novel clearly demonstrates how flashbacks as narrative devices can imitate the function of trauma-related flashbacks. Whereas the main strand of narration in this book is Doris's escape attempt, the bulk of the section consists of memories of her enslavement flooding to her mind during her escape. In Bwana's compound, Doris is not an ordinary slave. She even is instructed by Madama Blessing, who is the mistress of the compound, to wear wired and plated hoops in her hair

as “the household’s most high-status slave” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 19). She works as Bwana’s personal assistant in his office, therefore she is made especially presentable. The role was given to her because she was perceived to be more intelligent than an average slave: “I had become so much more than your non-achieving, low-flying slave. I had been elevated to the position of Bwana’s personal secretary because I was articulate and bright” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 24). Although it does not amount to much in the overall narrative of the novel, the disparity of status between Doris and other slaves is recurrently referred to throughout the novel. She even keeps her past role as Bwana’s secretary a secret from her friends in the plantation later on in order to avoid being treated harshly. Interestingly, Doris refers to the other slaves in the plantation as “blue-collar slaves” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 182) indicating that she thought herself to be a white-collar slave. However, both the relatively above-average treatment she receives in the compound and her self-image as a higher status slave turn out to be a flimsy charade which can easily be shattered. She realises that the qualities that she perceives to make her stand out are meaningless, and she is not in any meaningful way different from any other slave:

This was the point when I realised that the gap between myself and blue-collar slaves had well and truly closed.

Slick, sarcastic, sophisticated, opinionated, literate, numerate—no one gave a flying fuck here, I was now one of the anonymous masses on an island in the middle of nowhere where life was cheap and death came easy. (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 182)

The realisation is both a shattering blow to her ego and a wake-up call to adapt and survive in her new surroundings. Although she is essentially the same as any other slave, Doris’s escape has a direct impact on Bwana’s public image, making it proportionately to her status more dangerous to escape. If she is captured in the act, it is clear that she will be made an example of.

The inception of Doris’s escape is brought forward by a note from a group of anti-slavery activists. In order to receive their help, she needs to go to the abandoned subway in a short time. Accordingly, she is required to act fast under an immense emotional strain and fear. As she makes her way through different sections of the city, her mind, thwarted by paranoia, wanders in a free flowing train of thought. The narration is adorned with fleeting comments, anecdotes, and information which seemingly spontaneously pop into her mind

as a response to her emotional state and observations. Her mind wandering off to the past can be first observed when she receives the note. The possibility of freedom overwhelms her and she is instantly taken back to her childhood. The memory of her days before being enslaved and the possibility of things going back to how they were, ignite a longing for England. She announces, “I am proud to declare that I come from a long line of cabbage farmers” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 7). What follows is an almost idyllic depiction of her family life as a child. Although they were a poor family of serfs, her perception of their family life and longing create a juxtaposition between her current condition and the distant past. Nevertheless, Doris’s nostalgia for the life in the English countryside is compromised to a certain extent by Evaristo’s stylistic choices and details. Interestingly, Doris’s past is set in feudal England. In the days of the slave trade, feudalism had already ended. Yet, Evaristo intentionally chooses a time period when people, specifically serfs, were bound to the lands they inhabit like commodities. In this respect, serfdom is comparable to slavery. In accordance, Newman argues,

Evaristo makes it clear that Doris was never really free but a serf to Lord Percy, owner of the Montague estate, who is in cahoots with the slave traders. In other words, Britain was never a land of freedom, and there is nothing idyllic about its history, nor (if we translate the mirror imagery) African history, which includes aristocratic Africans who also sold slaves. (289)

Even though the historical periods do not exactly line up, using the era of feudalism enables Evaristo to draw on the similarities between it and slavery. Feudal lords having deals with slavers, as Newman suggests, is a direct comparison to Africans selling other Africans as slaves. Even so, the past is space for longing for Doris. It is constituted by the memories of her family with all its ups and downs. In line with this, it is no coincidence that the flow of memories of these times happen at the time of the prospect of freedom. The end of this flashback and Doris’s response to it indicate that it put Doris in a temporary dissociative state. Even though the time to get to her destination is short, she finds herself inactively drifting into the past. She claims, “Memories would not get me to the station on time” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 14).

Doris’s careful observation of her surroundings and being on the edge even towards the representatives of the Resistance indicate that she is under intense emotional strain. She even has visions of hunting parties following her footsteps: “I had visions of hundreds of

angry Ambossan men descending the tunnels in loincloths, torch-lights searching, the cracking of muskets, bloodhounds braying” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 44). She is moving with a constant threat to her life, which heightens her train of thought swaying through memories without control. She realises this herself with passing comments on how “thoughts” are “whirring around in my brain” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 19), and how her mind “took off on yet another sprint of its own” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 34). Things she witnesses on her way, and her own thoughts trigger other thoughts and memories in a vortex of emotional turmoil. Rage, fear, and excitement at the face of freedom dictate her mind making her unable to control the direction of her thoughts.

One of the key memories that spring into her mind during this section is the loss of her lover and the children they had together. In such moments of intense emotion, Doris’s narrative style shifts towards verse. Verse novel is a genre which is very familiar to Evaristo, and traces of her earlier stylistic choices resurface in these moments. Doris’s children were taken away from her after birth to be sent away. The fact that each birth drifted Frank away from the idea of them keeping a family together (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 22), indicates how the loss of their children left a dent in both their minds and relationship. Doris still encounters her children in her dreams:

I still dream that my children will come searching for me.

Somehow—they will find their mother.

Oh Lord.

I miss Frank every day.

When he was my lover, I never felt alone. (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 23)

Considering that Frank was also transported to the Paradise Island, a re-imagining of Jamaica, the loss of her lover and children has been a traumatic experience Doris has not been able to overcome. The change in the style to one that is akin to poetry signals the distress Doris feels remembering their loss. Evaristo is no stranger to writing verse novels, so she makes a stylistic change to a similar form occasionally in *Blonde Roots*. In moments of heightened emotions, Doris’s language becomes poetic, which is also underlined by use of italics.



The next flashback comes in the form of a restless dream. The flashback covers how Doris was captured as a child, put to shackles, and taken to slave ships from her homeland. The uneasiness of her mind through the journey to the train and beyond on her escape is reflected in a growing severity of the flashbacks and their respective memories from the past. The moment of her capture is defined by Doris as a point of inception for a state of perpetual fear. She says “I had lived with fear ever since the man the Border Lands had grabbed me when I was playing hide-and-seek in the potato fields behind our cottage with my sisters” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 46). As she was kidnapped to be sold as a slave to Aphrikans, this moment was a turning point for her from a human being to a commodity. It was her objectification. Accordingly, Doris revisits this event with a little more detail in a short section titled *It*. “It” as a pronoun obviously refers to non-human animals and objects. However, Doris’s story adds further layers to this analogy through a children’s game. During the hide-and-seek game with her sisters, Doris was “it.” Also, she was caught and carried away during that play session. The instantaneous transition from being “it” in a child’s game to being “it” in real life, a property that can be bought and sold, emphasises how little a person’s life means in a system like slavery. Without warning, without reason, and without any explanation an individual’s identity can be erased beyond repair in a fleeting moment. The flashback in the form of a dream continues until her arrival at the shore where the slave ships are docked. The journey there has Doris witnessing violence, rape, and death even at the beginning of her new life as a slave. Doris’s perception of the driver as “a hawk sweeping down about to pluck [her] eyes with its beak” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 67) as she awakens and instantly raising her hand to hit him in self-defence are testaments to the increasing emotional strain she experiences because of recalling traumatic events and the fear of being caught. Although the driver is there to help her escape, her reaction is beyond her control.

The severity of Doris’s flashbacks reaches its highest point at the docks where she sees the slave ships. Signs of distress start to manifest physically. Seeing the men preparing for the Middle Passage makes her clutch her stomach (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 72). The distrust towards her helpers continue to parallel her emotional strain. Ezinmwene, her next escort from the Resistance, seems to Doris like a spoiled child of a rich family, helping the slaves for the rush she gets from it. Although she does not have any tangible

reason to distrust her yet, Doris expects her to slip up saying “She would be careless. I would be cautious” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 70). The fear she has been living with seeps into her perception of anyone from the Aphrikan race. When fear overcomes Doris as she is about to embark on a small ship, which is supposed to sail her away to her homeland, her mind spirals into a deluge of rightly paranoid thoughts:

Had the Resistance been infiltrated? Of course.

Everything was clicking into place.

The heat was frying my brains.

I couldn't think straight.

My feet could not, would not climb aboard the ship.

Not another floating torture chamber

Not another floating coffin.

Not after all this time.

I dug my heels into the sludge of the docks, and felt myself sinking. (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 74)

The visual stimulus of the slave ships combined with the action of boarding the ship conjure up the haunting flashback of Doris's Middle Passage. The aftermath of the flashback proves that the Middle Passage was the most traumatic part of her life revealed so far. The flashback reveals a series of extremely dehumanising experiences on board of a slave ship. On the claustrophobic shelves below deck, Doris's sufferings include lack of food, water, and fresh air, witnessing death, torture, and rape of the enslaved, violent punishments, lying in her own urine, faeces, and even lying next to the decomposing body of her shelf-mate Samantha for three days (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 75-92). The conditions of the slave ships were so horrendous that they stretched the borders of sanity of their involuntary inhabitants. Sensing the possibility of reliving the same journey, Doris's mind goes into a shutdown. It is not until she wakes up later that it is revealed that Doris fell into a fit of frenzy, resisted entering the ship, and blacked out (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 105). As the end of the flashback and Doris's realisation conclude the first book, the narrative wraps around itself to form a circular structure. Whereas the narration of her escape supposedly leads her from Bwana's clutch to freedom, the increasingly tragic flashbacks conclude at how she ended up in Bwana's compound in the first place.

The second book of the novel introduces a drastic change to the narration. First of all, the style of narration switches from a stream of consciousness with flashbacks of the past to a series of essays published on a pro-slavery pamphlet entitled “The Flame” (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 109). Secondly, Evaristo turns the tone of the narration upside down by having Bwana as the voice of the second book. The book consists of six essays penned by Bwana, whose full name is revealed to be Chief Kaga Konata Katamba I, whose initials match the notorious white supremacist, terrorist group Ku Klux Klan. The same initials are also branded on Doris’s body with a branding iron. Bwana’s essays are an amalgamation of dominant, racist, social, cultural, and supposedly scientific justifications proposed to justify the enslavement of black people during slavery. Newman calls this section “corrective balance” and explains:

The corrective balance comes in the second book, where Evaristo gives the reader full access to the thought and emotions of a “blak” racist intellectual. [. . .] The pamphlet, a supposed defense of slavery against abolitionists, advances a creed of pseudoscientific racism and shares its name with a newspaper of the British far-right party, the National Front, indicating the long reach of racist ideology. Written “in defence of my rights” (110), it claims the rational high ground from the first page, beginning “I am a reasonable man and a man with reasons” (110) and describing its author as having gained access to objective truths through “Serious Contemplation, Erudite Debate, as well as Rigorous Scholarly research and the analysis of Vital Statistics” (112). [. . .] Evaristo has acknowledged the influence of Peter Fryer’s arguments that racism emerged in the eighteenth century as a defensive ideology for the planter class as a way to justify themselves not merely to the rest of society but in their own eyes. (292)

While explaining the reasons why the white races should be colonised due to both their essential inferiority and the mission to civilise them, Bwana assumes the voice of reason reminiscent of the supposedly-humanitarian explanations to colonialism and slavery. However, he also ironically reveals that the exceedingly masculine and patriarchal persona that he proudly wields is based on his own traumatic childhood. In *Humble Origins—Personal Tragedy*, he relates how he was outsmarted by his younger brother in a hunting party as a response to which his father humiliated and emasculated him in front of the whole clan saying that he is more of a woman than a man (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 113-4). The shame he feels by his father’s taunts transforms him into an opportunistic and sly social climber, eventually ending up at the business of slave trade to get rich. Finally, the second book also creates suspense in the narration by delaying the outcome of Doris’s attempt as well as providing dramatic irony by revealing the fates of Doris’s family members as slaves much earlier than when she actually finds out.

The third book once again changes the style of the narration. Doris takes the narrative voice back and returns to a style similar to that of the first book. However, the flashbacks are no longer present in the narration. Therefore, except for the two-year time gap, the third book adapts a more linear narration compared to the first. After Doris is recaptured and punished by 201 strikes of the lash, the setting of the novel quickly changes to the Paradise Island, which is part of the West Japanese Islands. This brings about a shift in the language of the text as well. The slaves working on the plantation speak a creole similar to Jamaican patois. Therefore, the dialogues receive a linguistic makeover. Moreover, aside from Doris's initial inability to adapt to the much harsher working conditions in the plantation, her new setting provides a relatively happy home to Doris centred around the slave quarters. In the final book of the novel, Evaristo leaves the "rational" male behind and presents a world in which women characters dominate. Throughout the book, there is an emphasis on strong women and on families surviving and clinging together despite the odds (Newman 294). Ye Meme plays an especially pivotal role and Ma Marjani, Doris, and the children seem to gather around her. Ye Meme's strength of character is reflected onto her physical appearance as well. She is a tall and stout Viking woman, who offers Doris physical help during working hours and takes her in. The sisterhood, or female solidarity that Doris finds at the plantation seems so normal to her that it almost exceeds the limitations of slavery, so much so that she abandons her aspirations for freedom. It is not until she learns about a "karpenter" who "com from ova da wata long time ago" called "Magik Fingas, becorze everything he mek so bootifal" that she realises her past lover Frank is on the island with the Maroons (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 195). His profession and where he came from indicate his identity. Therefore, Doris can reunite with him if she escapes. Saving the two boys of Ye Meme and Ma Marjani from being sold to cover the debts of Bwana's son, who runs the plantation, provides the final push for Doris to reconsider the possibility of escape.

However, freedom journey is filled with mourning rather than joy. Her final story of escape is that of loss rather than triumph. Doris's idea of freedom is revealed through a daydream earlier on in the book while she was still on the boat of escape. She envisions

a return home to England, where she will meet her parents, her sisters, her sister's children, and unrealistically Frank and her own lost children waiting there (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 162-3). In other words, her ideal concept of freedom is the recovery of all the family she has lost along the way. Her daydream is, in fact, dead on arrival because of Bwana's revelation of what happened to the rest of her family earlier in the second book. The possibility of her fantasy is already compromised by the rational narration of Bwana. Even when a reunion does happen, it only reveals further loss. Doris and Sharon's reunion brings about an ironical closure to Doris's desire to meet her family again by revealing that all members of her family died on Bwana's slave ship while the only remaining one, Sharon, has been his mistress for long years (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 236). The news finds life in front of Doris's eyes as flashing images:

The images kept replaying themselves:

Madge raped to death.

My father dying in his own excrement.

My mother, drowning.

Little Alice's suffering, all alone in the world.

My one surviving sister loving, or so it seemed, the man responsible for all of the above. (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 236)

Furthermore, her last branch of hope, Frank, upon their reunion after freedom, turns out to be "not the quiet man [she] had once known. He was an angry man, a warrior man, a married man" (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 260). With him, each and every re-union she dreamt of is lost along with Ye Meme and Ma Marjani, whom she has to leave behind. Consequently, freedom leaves Doris a lonely woman living to her very old age with only Yao, Ye Meme's son, to look after. Having lost the solidarity of her friends and all her loved ones, Doris does not find any solace in freedom. Her situation is reflected in a dark cultural omen in the last lines of the novel: "In the twenty-first century, Bwana's descendants still own the sugar estate [. . .] The cane workers, many of whom are descended from the original slaves, are pair" (Evaristo *Blonde Roots* 261). The end of the practice of slavery mirrors the role of freedom in Doris's life. The machinations of slavery, according to Evaristo, still continue in different shapes and forms in contemporary society.

While unveiling Doris's past trauma through flashbacks, narrating it, and turning her journey to freedom into a journey of loss, Evaristo maintains the fundamental concept of her novel: the inversion of roles of races in the machinations of slavery and slave trade. From the smallest cultural detail, customs, daily life, to grand narratives, nothing escapes Evaristo's panoramic view of inverted history. Burkitt comments on these inversions as follows:

These reversals of racial stereotypes, dislocations of time and place, and interrogations of historical and literary narratives in *Blonde Roots* combine to produce a text that is at once fixed in black British history but which also destabilizes the foundations of the historical moment of the Atlantic slave trade. As Evaristo centralizes the Atlantic slave trade in the context of her novel, she demonstrates it to be a crucial moment in the construction of the racial dynamics of the 21st century. (415-16)

This “destabilisation” of the discourse behind slavery emphasises the fact that the socially constructed concepts and their stereotypical attributions are no more than imprints left on the collective psyche of our societies about race. All her reversals are almost instantly recognisable to the attentive eye to the point that it can be argued that Evaristo only ever reverses one thing throughout the novel; that one thing, which is actually irreversible by biology, unlike all the other social constructions, is the person's skin colour. It is also the only thing that does not need to change. However, by making that fundamental reversal, Evaristo corners her readers into empathetic thinking. Regardless of their race, readers who engage with the text, acknowledge the traumatic experience of enslaved blacks if they feel empathy after witnessing Doris's traumatic experiences. Even if the reader is white, and identifies with Doris on the basis of skin colour, he/she indirectly lays claim to a traumatic past that has been historically reserved for the racial “other.”

**CHAPTER 4**  
**PERPETRATOR TRAUMA AND THE ENDLESS CYCLE OF**  
**VIOLENCE IN MARLON JAMES'S**  
***THE BOOK OF NIGHT WOMEN***

Critically acclaimed Jamaican novelist Marlon James shows interest in retelling the past of his home country in creative retellings as well as weaving the country's African ancestry into his works. He won the Booker prize in 2015 for his novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014). In a journey spanning decades and taking the reader from Jamaica to the U.S. and back, James explores themes of drug trafficking, gang violence, and Jamaica's recent past political atmosphere. The assassination attempt on the legendary reggae singer Bob Marley is included to further demonstrate the heights of politically charged gang violence in Jamaica. Two of his most recent novels, which are a part of *The Dark Star Trilogy*, are set in a mystical and ancient version of Africa in an epic fantasy quest. Each instalment of the trilogy offers a new perspective to the original story involving court intrigue and claims to the throne. *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (2019), and *Moon Witch, Spider King* (2022) have garnered popular interest to his works with comparisons to George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* series, which have gained worldwide popularity. Delving into the past through fiction, be it realistic or fantastic, is a staple in all of James's novels. In that respect, *The Book of Night Women* is no different. Being his second novel, *The Book of Night Women*, takes its reader to the last quarter of the eighteenth century colonial Jamaica. The protagonist is Lilith, a slave girl at Montpelier sugar plantation, finds herself mixed in a brewing storm of a slave rebellion and an unexpected romantic relationship with the plantation's new overseer. The novel explores the themes of violence and its effects on both the individual and the society in general through the reciprocal violent events between the black slaves and their white oppressors. Within this continual struggle, Lilith tries to shape her identity as an individual through her experiences. As she is barely an adolescent throughout the storyline, she is consistently in search of what is to be a woman. However, the trauma she

experiences as both the victim and the perpetrator leads her to form an unhealthy understanding of womanhood.

The novel is set in the final years of the eighteenth century in Jamaica. Although the exact dates are not kept throughout the novel, the circumstance of Lilith's birth depicted in the very first page indicate that she was born in 1785 (James, 3). Considering that Lilith is in her early teens and that the story ends with the rebellion taking place a few years after, it can be concluded that the time frame spans from 1785 to the early years of the nineteenth century. Lilith is born into slavery at Montpelier plantation, where she continues to serve. Montpelier, which was a thriving sugar estate in the past, has been on the decline due to the deteriorating mental state of its master. Its overseer, Jack Wilkins, who is known to be a cruel and brutal man, is old now, therefore the fate of the estate is in the hands of the returning young master, Humphrey Wilson, and his close Irishman friend and his new overseer, Robert Quinn. Lilith, being the daughter of the overseer, grows up in Circe's hut. She is left in her care in exchange for a degree of freedom for Circe. Circe and Tantalus act as foster parents to Lilith until a Johnny jumper named Paris attacks Lilith and tries to rape her. Lilith kills the offender in response. The act is swept under the rug by the efforts of Homer, who is the head of the servants at the estate. Lilith is transferred to the great house to protect her from a possible retaliation, where she becomes a house slave. It is during this period that Lilith is introduced to Night Women as a possible seventh member for the group, who are staging a slave rebellion. However, Lilith's time at Montpelier Estates is cut short when she accidentally burns a white attendant with hot soup at the Christmas reception. Therefore, the setting temporarily changes to Coulibre estate, where Lilith is sent on an exile for disciplining by the Roget family. Although Coulibre is not a sugar estate, and there are much fewer slaves compared to Montpelier, the estate is run with an iron hand by Roget's second wife and Isobel's stepmother. The treatment of slaves is even more dreadful than what Lilith experiences in her time at Montpelier. Lilith's violent potential is exponentially increases with the atrocities she witnesses and experiences at Coulibre. Eventually, due to her rebellious nature, Lilith talks back to Master Roget, who attacks her. This brings about Lilith's most violent reaction in the novel. In order to escape punishment, Lilith drowns Roget. However, killing a white man will certainly be punished with death. In order to hide her deed, Lilith



pushes the Mistress from the balcony of the stairs and sets the whole house on fire, killing the two little children and their nanny in the process as well. After Lilith's return to Montpelier, the setting stays the same for the remainder of the novel. In fact, the narrator reveals that Lilith spends the rest of her life on Montpelier grounds even after the rebellion of Night Women. However, Lilith is constantly haunted by her violent past and suffers from perpetrator trauma. She clearly does not want to kill anyone else if she can help it. Her blooming relationship with Robert Quinn after her return also indicate Lilith that even in bondage, she could carve out a life with Quinn for herself. Nevertheless, the rebellion eventually takes place and Lilith refuses to be a part of the violence. By now, Lilith knows that vengeance, which is Homer's true motive behind the rebellion, does not bring any reconciliation to her. Rebellion eventually fails because the slave did not have any plan for what to do after they killed the whites in the plantation. Lilith remains the sole survivor of the rebellion as the any captured slaves perish hanging in gibbets.

Lilith's story is narrated in English. However, James's use of language is the closest to Jamaican patois among the three novels, namely *The Long Song*, *Blonde Roots* and *The Book of Night Women*. Even so, he keeps the spelling differences to a minimum in order to appeal to a wider audience because spellings in Jamaican patois can be hard to decipher to the untrained eye and hinder the readers experience with the book. Although it is revealed at the end of the novel that the story is narrated by Lilith's daughter Lovey Quinn, it is not limited to the Jamaican patois. In fact, the usage of language follows the principle of decorum in that each character uses appropriate language to their identity and status. In other words, the usage of English show variety within character dialogues, meaning that the English used matches the speaking character. While slaves mostly use patois, characters such as Robert Quinn, Humphrey Wilson, and Isobel Roget use English language differently reflecting their backgrounds. While Humphrey uses standard English, Robert Quinn speaks in an Irish dialect of English. Isobel is a unique character in terms of her speech patterns because her language progressively changes throughout the text as a thematic compliment to her self-loathing image as a creole. Although she is initially portrayed as a proper lady, she enters a downward spiral with her relationship with Humphrey Wilson and addiction to opiates after the deaths of her family members. The first indications of the change she is going through come in the form of Isobel

catching herself speaking as slaves do. When commenting on the state of Montpelier Estate she says, “Me no kno- I, I don’t know what’s to come of that estate without some sense brought to it” (James 194). At this stage she still makes an effort to correct her speech. In addition to her creole speech, her supposed knowledge of Obeah suggest that she is far more involved in the ways of the slaves than someone of her status is supposed to be. This characteristic is what differentiates her from characters like Wilson and Quinn. Unlike them, she is born and raised on the island and claims that living in a colony changes one. As she sinks further into depression, she no longer tries to maintain her proper English and speaks more and more closer to patois. Her use of language closely compliments her character development. Other than the use of language by individual characters, the overall narration is closer to Lilith’s point of view. Therefore, the majority of the narrative is in patois. The strength of the narrative lies with its storytelling; therefore, the language is not adorned with figurative devices. Instead, James adopts a direct style which is straightforward, at times vulgar, and realistic. James is also very explicit about how he narrates violence and sex which are part of the realities of life on a plantation.

In terms of characterisation, the novel is rich both in the number of characters and character depth. The protagonist, Lilith starts out as a young girl in search of what it means to be a woman. Being the prettiest girl at the estate with a lighter skin and piercing green eyes, she feels that she is superior to all the other women around her. With such a disillusioned self-image and her rebellious nature, it is clear that she is to find herself in trouble with the white masters of Montpelier. The accident, where she spills hot soup on a guest at the Christmas party, and the punishment she suffers for it marks a turning point for her in that, however she feels about herself, she is just like any other slave on the plantation even with her beauty. Her inner conflicts concerning vengeful violence, love, and womanhood constitute the main themes of the novel. Considering that the point of view of the narrator is through Lilith’s eyes, the reader has full access to her internal monologues and thought processes concerning the events taking place in the novel. Therefore, the complexity of her character, and her character development from an entitled and ambitious young girl to a reserved, cautious, and smart one can be traced as the events unfold. When she must decide where her loyalty lies on the eve of the slave

rebellion, her decision to adhere to neither side is completely informed by her view of life within that society, which has been shaped by the violence she has both endured and inflicted. Therefore, she is not only a round character, but also a dynamic one.

Alongside Lilith, it can be stated that Homer, Isobel, and Quinn are also round characters. All three characters show varying levels of character depths and inner conflicts. However, as the narrator's point of view is limited to Lilith's mind, the inner struggles and depth of these characters are revealed to the reader through their relationships, dialogues, and stories. Homer is one of the key characters of the novel because she is both influential as the head of the house-slaves in Montpelier and the leader of Night Women. Throughout her years in Montpelier, Homer has gained a certain level of trust from the owners of the estate, which enables her to pull the strings inside the household as well as know whatever happens in the place. She is portrayed as a calm, collected, and calculated old woman in her management of the kitchen and other household services. However, she turns into a vengeful and dangerous leader when it comes to her role as the chief organiser of the upcoming slave rebellion. She cunningly maintains her mask as a responsible servant during the day to avoid any suspicion to her plans. Her insatiable desire to kill all whites on the island is fuelled by a traumatic past. As she is a master manipulator when it comes to hiding her motives, her past and true motives are revealed to Lilith and the reader gradually. She relays to Lilith that in addition to the violent punishments she has suffered because of the mistress of the house, she has had three children in the past all of whom she has lost (James 213-4). Therefore, she has secretly held on to her grudge and orchestrated the rebellion over years. However, her respected status is not just due to her position of the head of the slaves. She is also one of the two characters, along with Lilith, who supposedly possess spiritual qualities. Lilith's spirituality is not practiced but confined to the identity of the mysterious dark woman who seems to haunt her. However, Homer is believed by many to be a practitioner of Myal or Obeah, which some people including Lilith suspect. Possible Obeah practice incites fear among both blacks and whites as Jones asserts,

Homer is respected as a leader (though whether this is full intentional is questionable) among her peers not just because of her intelligence, literacy, and thoughtful strategizing, but also because they are afraid of all that Myal might make her capable

of. This suspicion of Myal is shared by the black and white people alike [. . .] [F]or white people, the two forms of black spirituality are indistinguishable. (72).

Therefore, Homer, successfully maintaining multiple roles within the narrative, is a complex character. However, she is also a constant character. Her real motives and thoughts might be hidden from the reader initially, but they stay the same throughout the text. When Lilith confronts her about the futility of seeking revenge in quenching the sorrow of the past, she refuses to rethink her plans. As a result, she does not undergo any changes or really develop making her a round but static character.

Robert Quinn is an enigmatic character in that he seems to grow as a character in terms of developing a distaste towards violence against the slaves which contradicts his role as the new overseer of the plantation. This is further complicated by the fact that he develops feelings towards Lilith and tries to create a space where the boundaries of master-slave relationship is broken within his house after Lilith moves in. However, his violent nature resurfaces at intervals even towards Lilith and his final decision to fight to quell the rebellion make it clear that he does not really go through a real change in character. He arrives at Montpelier as the right hand man of Humphrey Wilson, for whom he does his dirty work, and dies fulfilling the same role. Therefore, he remains a static character albeit a round one considering that he displays a depth in his struggles to overcome the restrictive roles attributed to skin colour thanks partly to his Irish origin.

The only other dynamic character in the novel is Isobel Roget. Isobel's character represents the other end of the spectrum for Lilith. While Lilith is a slave girl with aspirations for superior standing, Isobel is a white girl who has similar dreams. Just as Lilith's loss of a home which temporarily transcends the social norms ruling the life at the plantation, Isobel loses her estate along with her family, and her planned marriage to Humphrey Wilson falls through. Moreover, she also loses her social standing due to her frequent visits to an opium den where she engages in activities that are enough to destroy her reputation. Lilith's hand in her moral demise ironically binds the two women together. Finally, having lost everything, the two women co-exist at the abandoned big house

almost as equals. Their fate at the end of the story symbolically creates a middle ground which they share and is far from their initial social differences.

As a part of his characterisation, James ironically names the slave characters of the novel after characters of classical literature and mythology. Robert Quinn reveals that it was Jack Wilkins's father who started the tradition upon learning Lilith's name: "I thought every negro had a Greek name [. . .] I heard Jack Wilkins' father had a certain predilection for tragedy" (James 92). Lilith is the only exception to the rule because she was named by Jack Wilkins himself. Jack Wilkins's father is the former overseer of the plantation and is long dead. However, Wilkins reveals more about him to Lilith saying,

Ever heard of my father? he say. – He would have been stunned by the likes of you, he would have. Didn't take very kindly to the abuse of niggers, as I recall. No, an upstanding gentleman he was, given to calling niggers Africa men, if me memory serves me right. [. . .] Weak. The son of a bitch was weak" (James 170).

Considering that the classics are part of a legacy that the Europeans have looked up to in modern history, it is ironic that slaves, who are considered to be the property of their masters and given very little value, are named after classical figures. Jack Wilkins's father's leniency towards slaves, explained by the quotation above, provides an insight into the possibility of such a naming scheme. Naming is an exercise of power within the context of colonial relations and such a naming scheme subverts its purpose. However, James further deepens the naming scheme by making metaphorical allusions to the classical characters with the character's fates, personality traits, or their role within the plot structure. Lilith's strongest personality trait is her headstrong and rebellious nature which is an allusion to Lilith, Adam's first wife, after whom Jack Wilkins named the protagonist (James 92). Her internal struggle to understand what being a woman should feel like and what a woman is, also alludes to the biblical story of Lilith being the original woman. Similarly, Homer's name is a reference to the blind poet being the forefather of western literature and a leading figure in his practice. Homer is similarly respected within the novel and she is the mastermind behind the rebellion plot and seemingly the gateway to freedom. Other minor characters such as Demeter and Atlas share the fates of their respective mythological counterparts. Demeter, Lilith's mother used to be the most beautiful girl on the plantation, but she was raped by Jack Wilkins as punishment for her

brother Bacchus's escape attempt (James 375). And Atlas makes the ultimate sacrifice as he is hanged (James 382) without giving up information on the riot, even though he reveals Homer's involvement. The burden of whether the riot can happen or not falls on his ability to withhold information alluding to Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders. Such metaphorical matchings are made with the slave names throughout the narrative, however, considering that there are so many characters, not all names carry symbolic importance for the overall plot structure.

The overarching theme of the novel is the reciprocal nature of violence. Being subjected to violence is one of the realities of a slave's life. Violent action, especially as a form of punishment, and making an example of alleged wrongdoers is both an exercise of power and a way of maintaining domination over the enslaved people. Therefore, James directly engages in narrating the violence against slaves in a highly visual and uncensored manner in order to fully capture what effects it might invoke in the minds of the characters who suffer it. According to Nehl, James makes a conscious choice to explicitly represent violence, even bordering on pornography:

Like other contemporary authors who revisit the past of slavery from twenty-first-century-perspectives, exploring the nature of white power and rendering "the lives of the nameless and the forgotten," James must answer the crucial question of how to write about acts of anti-black violence, sexual abuse, annihilation and torture, and to what ends. Depicting Wilkins's atrocities against Bacchus, Bacchus's sister and Leto, the passage quoted above is representative of James's decision to include explicit, and extremely shocking, scenes of violence in *The Book of Night Women*; it illustrates the novel's narrative choice to present the horrors of slavery and, in particular, the black woman's experience of (sexual) abuse in an unsparing, even pornographic, manner. (178)

Nehl's observation is true for all instances of violence in the novel. In fact, it is not limited to inter-racial violence either. James depicts intra-black violence equally graphically. Nehl shows ethical concern over James's choice in his chapter. Stylistically, over sexualisation of violence might undermine James's thematic intentions. Thematically, James present the conundrum that violence only breeds further violence in a sterile vicious cycle. This is especially reflected in the repetition of the phrase "Every negro walk in a circle. Take that and make of it what you will" (James 32). At intervals, this sentence is repeated throughout the novel with slight variations. It suggests that everyone living the life of a slave and those who suffer from the same ideologies that underlie

slavery are confined to this supposed circular motion like fate. At the next repetition, the narrator sheds more light onto what this sentence means saying,

Every negro walk in a circle. Take that and make of it what you will. A road set before every negro, from he slip through the slave ship or him mother pussy, that be just as dark. Black and long and wide like a thousand year. And when a negro walk, light get take away from him so he never know when he hit the curve or a bend. Worse, he never see that he walking round and round and always come back to where he leave first. That be why the negro not free. (James 118)

Though cryptic, James's message is not confined to slavery itself. A black person needs to break this vicious cycle to be really free. He claims that every road takes him back to the beginning suggesting that the first step towards freedom might lie in how he engages with his history. Therefore, one must face violence in all its aspects within the context of slavery to break its repetition. Choosing a woman protagonist enables him to explore the sexual violence slave women experienced by both white and black men in addition to inter-racial and intra-black violence. Schwartz comments on the experience of a black slave woman saying that

[e]nslaved women are threatened by all races and classes, including slave owners, overseers, slave drivers, Jhonny-jumpers, and even male slaves. It is important to note that although Black men faced extremely horrific treatment on slave plantations, Black women had a uniquely oppressive experience as the victims of both racism and misogyny. (16)

This enables James to explore all forms of violence. He also subverts traditional masculine power dynamics by representing black slave women as the perpetrators of violence. Being subject to both white and black violence, at first glance the violent response of black women might seem justified, however, it also entraps them in the cycle which obstructs true freedom. In order to demonstrate it, James uses a protagonist who is both the victim and perpetrator of violence. What differentiates Lilith from the other Night Women is that she has taken the initiative to inflict violence on both a black sexual offender and white masters, while others thirst for doing it. However, Lilith suffers from perpetrator trauma afterwards meaning that her acts of violent response, after a brief moment of empowerment, only brought her guilt and mental suffering. This brings about her fallout with Night Women because she realises that Homer is after vengeance rather than freedom, and that she is leading everyone following her to their deaths. As Lilith breaks out of the cycle of violence, she stands as an example that one does not have to

comply with the continuation of it. The cycle is also not limited to her story, because it is rather timeless. The final repetition of walking in a circle is as follows:

Every negro walk in a circle. Take that and make of it what you will. But sometimes when a negro die and another negro take him place, even if that negro not be blood, they still fall in step with the same circle. The same circle of living that no nigger can choose and dying that come at any time. Perhaps nigger take things as they be for what used to be what will always be what it is. Maybe it better for backra and nigger that things go back to what people think is the best way until the fire next time. White man sleep with one eye open, but black man can never sleep. (James 411)

This section suggests that generation of generation new people fill in to the cycle of violence with violent eruptions at time. And as long as it continues neither side will find proper peace. Therefore, whenever new people enter the circle to replace others in a “generational continuity”, they ensure “the fantasy of trans-individual transmission underlying race consciousness” making the continuity and reciprocity of the circle “not only confinement in a system of literal slavery, but also the confinement of the means through which opposition to these systems has been articulated (Harrison 15).

The novel initially portrays counter-violence by women as the essence of being a woman. Womanhood is associated with the power of retaliation and self-preservation as Sangeeta suggests,

[t]he school of thought that segregated man and woman into binary opposites, positing man as being superior and stronger than women, also suggest that women are soft and will shy away from violence. Marlon James seems to challenge that assumption in *The Book of Night Women*. The women in the novel are invested with what James refers to as ‘the true darkness and true womanness’ but reads more like an instinct for self-preservation in overdrive. (16)

The survival instinct against violence, especially male, initially becomes a milestone around which Lilith constructs her identity. Nehl makes a similar observation claiming that “[f]or Lilith, the notion of “true womanhood” is not at all linked with submissiveness and passivity but with resistance and disobedience” (185). This notion is first introduced after Lilith brutally kills the Johnny-jumper named Paris, who tries to rape her in Circe’s hut. She acts in self-defence, but the act of killing leaves her in an exalted state with mixed emotions: “That was the first time she feel the darkness. True darkness and true womanness that make man scream. She shudder and she feel ’fraid and proud and wicked



and she feel good. So good so that she get more 'fraid" (James 16). It is important to note that the attempted rape incident takes place in a transitional period for Lilith. She is just fourteen and entering puberty. Her body is rapidly changing and she has her first period (James 7). Yet, she does not receive any guidance as to what is happening to her body. She still considers herself to be a little girl, which she obviously is. However, the role of woman is forced on her without Lilith knowing what it means. Circe repeatedly tells her that "soon and very soon you goin' be taking man" (James 10). In a period when she is in the process of self-discovery about her body and identity as a woman, Lilith mistakes the exhilaration she experiences after killing her attacker with womanhood.

The triangular association of womanhood, darkness, and violence continues throughout the novel. The metaphor is expanded with the introduction of Night Women. The group is led by Homer, who helps Lilith by covering up the murder of Paris and taking her in as a house slave at the estate. In accordance with the theme of darkness, Night Women get their name from their meetings taking place at night time in a hidden cave within the borders of the plantation. The entrance of the cave is a small flicker of light in the consuming darkness of the night. Navigating through the darkness and finding the cave is evidence enough for Homer to accept Lilith as the seventh member of the group:

-Lookee here now. Girly sniff out the house for sheself. [. . .] Lilith hear the voice coming from further and it frighten her a little, but that was where the light be. [. . .]

-The girl would never find this place if she didn't have special eye to look. Don't it Homer?

Homer come of a dark corner.

-Almost Nothing special in the eye, but in the woman herself. (James 65)

Something special mentioned in the passage refers to an innate darkness according to Homer. It is also revealed that every member of the group, aside from Homer, is the daughter of the old overseer Jack Wilkins, from his assaults on different slave women over the years. It is not a coincidence that Homer picks these women for her plot. The narrator refers to these women as "Woman who carry Jack Wilkins' malice in they very being. Woman who could see the moon and know when be the time to shed blood" (James 415). Considering that Jack Wilkins is an extremely cruel and violent man, Homer choose his daughters who might have inherited his cruelty. Given their objectification, violence

they experience, and possibility of freedom in sight, Homer predicts that these women have the potential to dish out similar violence in retaliation according to her plan. Therefore, she leads them to play their roles along with her during the light of the day, and invoke their true self under the guise of the darkness of the night. Accordingly, the narrator states that in Homer's song, after the failure of the rebellion, she belongs to "the dark of the eye where secrets be" (James 415). This is foreshadowed when Lilith sees Homer at her first meeting with Night Women where "Homer pick up a darkness that make her look different from before" (James 67) and there are "lightness and darkness flowing over her face" (James 68). Homer's seemingly changing appearance is indicative of the duality of her character between her calm and collected personality and her vengeful spirit. Disregarding all of Homer's initiatives and promptings, and despite attending several meetings, Lilith never actually forms a solidarity with Night Women.

In order to understand Lilith's refusal to be a loyal member of Night Women, her personal traumas and their impact on her character development should be closely analysed. Lilith's traumatic experiences are more complex than the one of the previous two novels, namely *The Long Song* and *Blonde Roots*, in that she suffers from both victim and perpetrator trauma. Although Lilith survives the first attack on her by the Johnny-jumper without harm, she suffers a long period of sadistic punishment after accidentally burning Isobel's chaperone with hot soup at the Christmas party held by Humphrey Wilson in front of guests of the highest standing in the island. King comments on the severity and effect of the punishment on Lilith as follows:

Despite Lilith's imaginings that the ball will elevate her standing, in reality the events of the ball solidify her social position as an enslaved woman. Already accustomed to brutality in disciplining Massa Humphrey's slaves, Miss Isobel dictates Lilith's punishment when she accidentally spills hot soup on Isobel's chaperone. Once the mechanisms of power have been set into motion, there is no room for compassion or understanding, as Lilith discovers when she is severely beaten and raped by several white drivers as merely the *first* part of her punishment. (emphasis in original 64-65).

Humphrey Wilson's vicious attack on her, and the beatings and the rape that follow in its wake leaves Lilith in a near-death state. Moreover, without even giving her any time to recover, Lilith is further punished by Humphrey and Isobel thirty with lashes of the bullwhip, which is defined with the statement, "negro rather burn from the breath of Satan

than get” (James 163). Even still, she is whipped ten times every time Isobel comes to Montpelier. The fact that she survives the ordeal is a testament to her perseverance to the point that she walks to receive the whipping on her own and tries her best to leave her head held high. Her rebellious nature shows even in a broken body. Even so, the whipping, which is ordered by Robert Quinn, leaves them both traumatised to the point that when they get intimate later in the story both flinch upon touching the scars on Lilith’s back. Although Robert Quinn does not exact Lilith’s punishment personally, he is indirectly involved as the overseer in both the rape incident following the Christmas party and the whippings that follow it. Quinn’s vague order to the drivers to “deal with her” (James 153) in order to save Humphrey, who personally and violently attacks Lilith in front of his guests, from further embarrassment, enables the drivers to do as they please with Lilith. Even though he is shocked upon learning the punishment and exclaims that he did not intend that the drivers rape Lilith, Homer’s response clearly indicates that he should have expected the outcome (James 158). Similarly, Quinn does not whip Lilith himself, yet as the overseer he has to be the one to dictate the punishment. Therefore, he has to watch the girl, in whom he has already shown signs of interest, getting shredded by the whip day after day. These experiences remain as a looming dark cloud above their relationship as Quinn experiences sudden surges of guilt especially upon touching her back. Lilith’s two sexual encounters up until this point have been one failed rape attempt by Paris and the incident after the party where she was raped by multiple men. Therefore, Lilith does not have any concept of a healthy sexual relationship. The only guidance she has on it comes from Homer who says to her that making love can be so sweet (James 212). Since Lilith experiences kindness from a man for the first time after moving into Quinn’s house as a personal housekeeper, she experiences conflicting emotions. Although she starts to develop feelings for Quinn, the emotional scars left from the punishments she received haunt her. Therefore, she is often contemplating that she should hate Quinn. This internal struggle is further enhanced with the occasional outburst of anger by Quinn and the resurfacing of the master-slave relationship between the two characters. Quinn’s Irish identity also contributes to Lilith’s struggle, in that, it suggests that he is socially not an equal to Humphry placing him in an in-between status. Quinn claims, “In these colonies the Irishmen are held in even lesser esteem than negroes” (James 289). However, Homer constantly reminds Lilith that Quinn is out in the field whipping other slaves. So

his position is rather ambiguous. It is true that he is disrespected by others such as Isobel and Jack Wilkins, nevertheless his position as overseer and his superior position to Lilith can obviously be observed especially when he is angry with her. What he offers Lilith is a position similar to his own, in that, she is still a slave and is reminded of that if she crosses the line. However, Lilith can enjoy a certain degree of freedom as long as she is on good terms with him. Accordingly, O'Callaghan states that

[t]he love Quinn offers brings her freedom in the bedroom but leaves her as enslaved in other aspects of her life as she was before he arrived; he cannot even free her, for her former master (and his) has refused to sell her. Ultimately, the Irishman's loyalty is to his own and when the inevitable slave insurrection occurs, he joins the white men of the plantation to put it down. He is killed, of course. (402)

While Lilith chooses to stay with him and protect the house they have built together as well as a drugged Quinn, his choice to storm off to fight the rebellion upon waking up indicates that his loyalty and priorities lay with Humphrey and slavery.

The violent punishments that Lilith suffers not only traumatise her to a certain extent, but also incite violent responses by her which traumatise her even more. Lilith is a headstrong and rebellious character from childhood. When she is subjected to violence, she internalises it and as a response to her continual torture in Coulibre she gives in to her own violent urges. In order to understand Lilith's reasons, potential to perpetrate violence, and their psychological impacts on her, it is essential to first of all look at how acts of violence can traumatise the perpetrators. Explaining that perpetrator trauma has not received enough critical attention within trauma studies in literature as victimhood takes the centre stage, McGlothlin states that

[a]lthough from the standpoint of common sense it might seem obvious and uncontroversial to state that perpetrators of extreme violence might experience psychic repercussions as a result of the commission of their crimes, contemporary trauma theory, with its hitherto near-exclusive focus on the victim as the sole sufferer of the traumatic effects of violence, has had very little to say about either the phenomenon of perpetrator trauma or its representation in literature. (100)

While witnessing and victimhood receive the attention of many studies, perpetrator trauma has been neglected. This might be a result of the fact that empathising with a victim is easier and assumes a moral standpoint. This is undeniably essential to confront especially historical and transgenerational trauma. However, it might be the same moral

standpoint that might have averted attention from perpetrator trauma. Accordingly, Mohamed, who defines perpetrator trauma as the concept where “commission of crime itself causes psychological injury to the perpetrator, which can result in a particular adverse physical, social, or emotional consequences” (1162), he also suggests that

[t]he choice to highlight the traumatic experience of victims and to downplay—or even deny—that of perpetrators may intuitively feel appropriate. Why should we devote any sympathetic attention to the individuals responsible for unjustifiable bloodshed, and what right do they have for their pain and their wounds to be recognized and respected? Alternatively, to the extent that perpetrator trauma might not be denied, it might be dismissed as a comeuppance. If individuals who have committed horrific crimes now suffer as a result, then the nightmares, the flashbacks, the isolation—these are merely a whit of what they deserve. (1164)

As a result, the traumatised perpetrators are regarded as individuals who deserve psychological damage that they suffer due to their own actions. They might even be perceived as part of their punishment. In order to normalise this approach dehumanising the perpetrators and creating a perception that they are monsters are employed (Mohamed 1207). If the perpetrators are considered as monsters, it can be assumed that their behaviour can be seen outside of the norm attributing an unintelligibility to their actions. Therefore, foreclosure or healing would be out of the question. However, if we consider the perpetrators as human beings who commit violent acts by choice, their choices can be open to analysis and possibly understanding (not necessarily forgiveness). Therefore, Mohamed believes that understanding perpetrators as human beings is a necessary component to healing and reconciliation especially if cultural trauma is involved (1205).

In terms of the symptoms, perpetrator trauma is very similar to the trauma of the victim or the witness. It is important to note that, when it comes to violence, victims, if they cannot work through their past trauma effectively, might end up in the shoes of the perpetrator. Green and Browne’s study on perpetrators of domestic violence show that childhood mistreatment may increase the risk of the victim becoming the perpetrator as an adult through “recidivism”, especially in combination with other personality disorders (162-163). It is not uncommon that victims of trauma suffer from personality disorders. Similarly, He et al. conclude in their analysis of Ian McEwan’s *The Children Act* (2014) that “the perpetrator’s aggression in this situation serves as a method of self-protection and release of her repressed trauma” (2472). The reciprocity of violence in James’s novel

and Lilith's response to it is a testament to these approaches to perpetrator trauma. Moreover, according to Yang, denial itself can be a symptom of perpetrator trauma as a defence mechanism (48). In denial the perpetrator might try to divert the blame onto someone or something else. And finally, perpetrator trauma shares the symptoms of victims of trauma, as McGlothlin suggests

While the aetiology of trauma is very different in the case of the perpetrator of violence than it is in the case of the victim, the symptomatology in both contexts is quite similar, including psychic and somatic aspects such as anxiety, panic, depression, irritability and physical complaints. Further, a key symptom of perpetrator trauma is recurrent intrusion, which refers to the involuntary, often highly distressing disruption of thought by undesired cognitive content, particularly memories that relate to the traumatic event. Such intrusive imagery in the form of unwanted thoughts, nightmares and flashbacks is "especially strong in perpetration-induced trauma" (MacNair 2002: 136) and is often accompanied by strategies of avoidance, whereby the perpetrator attempts to evade distressing reminders of the original trauma. (107)

While intrusive symptoms are still prominent, the avoidance mechanisms are important outliers of perpetrator trauma. Guilt and shame are very strong emotions that dictate human behaviour as humans are social beings. Therefore, it is common among perpetrators to try "neutralize" their actions through forms of denial or to "rationalize" them in hopes of justifying their actions (McGlothlin 107). Of course not all offenders are traumatised by their actions, but understanding the symptoms of those who are can be productive in fields of understanding crime, justice, healing, and rehabilitation.

In the novel, Lilith commits multiple acts of violence both voluntarily and in self-defence. These acts of violence are associated with a supposed darkness within her, sometimes Obeah, and her "uppity" nature in general. However, the burden of a growing list of violent actions starts to put a psychological burden on Lilith. Her deeds include the murder of Paris, who attempts to rape her at the beginning of the novel, the supposed murder of Andromeda through Obeah, and the deaths of all members of the Roget family excluding Isobel, either by Lilith's hand directly or by the fire she starts to cover her murders. Killing Paris and Master Roget are acts of self-defence. However, the deaths of the two children of Roget family, their nanny, and Andromeda are especially hard for Lilith because they were innocent. Taking the lives of innocents perpetually scars Lilith

psychologically as she starts to experience more and more intrusive symptoms of perpetrator trauma.

The most enigmatic manifestation of Lilith's traumatised mind is the Dark Woman. She is a mysterious figure Lilith sees in flashes watching her. With her uncanny appearance, the Dark Lady is a ghost-like figure haunting Lilith. She appears for the first time after Andromeda's death. In fact, Lilith instinctively thinks that the Dark Woman is Andromeda: "Two night in a row, Lilith wake up and see a woman watching her. The first night she go to scream but catch her mouth. She first think it be Andromeda in the shadow but this woman thin. Her hair wild and natty her skirt spread like bat wing. Lilith can't make out the face. She don't see no eye, only the blackest of the black" (James 142). Although the scene feels like a recurring nightmare at the time for her, Lilith will continue to see the apparition even when she is not sleeping. The Dark Woman does not have a recognisable face, does not speak. She does not appear to attack Lilith either. She is often seen watching Lilith from a corner of the room. The only time she communicates with Lilith is when she uses gestures. Her nature and intentions are unclear. However, she has a darkness about her, hence Lilith calls her the Dark Woman. James does not offer any obvious or tangible explanation as to the identity of the Dark Woman. On the contrary, he mystifies her existence with indications that she might be an Obeah. Brown provides a definition of Obeah and its spiritual practice as follows:

"Obeah" (or "obia") was the catchall term used to describe a complex of shamanistic practices derived from various parts of Africa and conducted by ritual specialists working largely outside formal institutions. Practitioners of obeah operated as herbalists and sages tending to physical, social, and spiritual needs, though whites generally mischaracterized obeah as simple witchcraft, thus failing to see its larger role in social and spiritual healing and protection. [. . .] The term "obeah" also referred to the charms that carried spiritual power and could be placed strategically around an individual who was to be cursed or protected. These were made of a variety of materials thought to have sacred significance, including blood, feathers, parrot's beaks, animal teeth, broken glass, eggshells, and dirt from grave sites. (146)

The definition maintains that Obeah is a form of spiritual art rooted in regions in Africa, whose practice was brought to the Caribbean by slaves. It also has a counterpart in Myal, which is a similar spiritual practice, but it carries associations with divinity and good spirits. The novel portrays Obeah as a dark type of spiritual practice. The contestation of two practices can be observed in Homer's vehement denials that she practices Obeah. She

claims that she is a Myal woman. Including the haunting of the Dark Woman, the novel leaves all instances of supposed Obeah open to interpretation.

James introduces the possibility of Obeah practice only to strategically undermine it to create ambiguity leading the reader to ponder upon the possibility of supernatural forces at work or other underlying possibilities. The two instances of Obeah practice are the deaths of Circe and Andromeda. The former supposedly works Obeah on Lilith but Homer counters it with a ritual of her own: “Homer prick Lilith thumb and she wince. Homer stick Lilith thumb in the glass until the potion turn red. She pull open Lilith dress [. . .] and mark an X on her chest with the potion” (James 50). The counter ritual, which is a response to Circe, who supposedly calls Obeah on Lilith, kills Circe instead. Andromeda dies as a result of Lilith asking an Obeah woman through Gorgon to make her sick. Both women die in the same manner as blood pours out from every orifice on their bodies. The rituals and the mysterious air of these episodes are suggestive of evil spirits which are at work. However, Homer reveals that they killed Circe because she would tell on Night Women’s plans of rebellion saying, “Beside, the bitch was goin’ be a turncoat nigger—you hear her yourself. No, better she did gone and gone quick” (James 293). The revelation largely demystifies the circumstances of Circe’s death except for how it happened. Clearly, Circe was not engaged in any spiritual endeavour to call on spirits to kill Lilith and she was never countered. It was all according to plan. Doctor’s examination of Circe’s body indicates that she died because of “the worst case of the bloody flux” he has ever seen (James 52). Bloody flux is another name for dysentery, which is a bacterial infection. As it is an infectious disease, it can spread with contact. Therefore, some mystery remains as to whether Homer can infect others with dysentery without catching it herself, and as to how dysentery can be so severe in both of these cases. James does not provide a definitive answer. The mystery surrounding the spiritual affairs of Homer is intentionally left unsolved. Layne argues that James juxtaposes Obeah in the novel with “secular-rationalism” of the Age of Reason represented by Humphrey Wilson by saying:

In [Humphrey’s] eyes, obeah is opposed to the truths discovered by his civilized European society, namely: the acceptance of natural law as interpreted by the scientific method and the revelation that Christ, the son of the one true God,



sacrificed himself to absolve the sins of humankind. Humphrey sees no discontinuity between his religious knowledge and his knowledge of natural law. Christianity evades the demystification of what I call the “supernatural core” (of miracles, resurrection, a divine realm, among other things) by authorizing natural law and attributing to God the power to suspend those laws. Humphrey’s definition of religion, however, does not tolerate other interpretations of the natural and supernatural. Any system of belief that exceeds his Eurocentric definitions and categorizations is placed in the order of superstition. (54)

By leaving the possibility of Obeah by not offering a closure or explanation, James adheres to the perspective of the slaves and refuses to rationalise these events as Humphry Wilson would have it. Homer’s knowledge of herbs is so immense that she could have the mistress hallucinate for years to the point of madness and that she could prepare remedies for a large variety of ailments, therefore both spiritual and logical interpretations are possible.

The Dark Woman’s identity is left vague on purpose. She is also a mystery to the narrator herself. The narrator ponders upon the possibilities of her identity as a spiritual being. Is she a Sasabonsam (James 50), Omulu (124), an Abarra (219), Anansi or Ogun (251))? Again there is no clear answer. However, the Dark Woman can be analysed from the perspective of perpetrator trauma. In order to understand her haunting Lilith, the timing of her first visit requires special attention. By then, Lilith had already killed Paris and presumably Andromeda. The Dark Woman appears for the first time in the text right after the fate of Andromeda’s daughter is revealed. The innocent girl not only witnesses the grotesque demise of her mother, which leaves her almost mad, but also is sold away to a man who is hinted to sexually abuse her (James 142). Considering that Lilith did not want Andromeda dead, but bedridden with sickness so that she could replace her at the Christmas reception, and the fate of her daughter, it is safe to assume that Lilith’s feeling of guilt start around this time. Her violent potential has put her in the position of murderer without cause this time as opposed to Paris’s murder. Accordingly, the guilt ridden Lilith creates a mental manifestation of her own violent tendencies as a form of rationalisation. Mohamed argues that perpetrators might divert their guilt, in a way of denial, to forces greater than themselves in order to assume the role of a victim claiming that they commit acts of violence not on their own accord but on orders of someone, a system, or a force (1167). Obeah spirits and haunting go hand in hand, therefore by attributing her bloodlust

to the haunting of a spirit converts Lilith from the role of the perpetrator to a victim in her own eyes as a defence mechanism. It also provides a meaningful explanation to the continual effort to identify the Dark Woman throughout the novel.

The visits of the Dark Woman become more frequent during Lilith's stay at Coulibre. It is no coincidence that she appears more there considering that Lilith is perpetually tortured, whipped, beaten, and assaulted by the Rogets. She both witnesses sadistic violence towards the slaves, especially Dulcimena, and experiences it herself. The helplessness she feels in the face of torture directs Lilith to fantasise about turning onto whites.

Lilith did still have spiritedness 'bout her, but this time she keep quiet and make the spirit work secret-like. Lilith start to imagine what white flesh look like after a whipping. What white neck look like after a hanging and what kinda scar leave on a white boy after black punishment. She think of the little Roget boy, Master Henri, of tying and hanging the boy up by him little balls and chopping him head off. She make the thoughts of white blood work into a fever. (James 200)

As her desire for retaliation increases, so do the visits of the Dark Woman. She can now appear during the day as well. Finally, Lilith's desire for revenge reaches a climax when without realising, she makes a snarky comment to Roget, who attacks her. Considering the treatment she gets at Coulibre, it is safe to assume that she will be killed for that comment. While Lilith drowns him in the tub, Lilith feels "the darkness growing under her skin" (James 223). The feeling of darkness indicates Lilith giving herself in to the influence of the Dark Woman, and by extension her innate violence. Therefore, she realises that "she know what the woman in the dark want. Blood. The woman want blood" (James 223). This realisation leads to her killing Mistress Roget by pushing her down the balcony and the children along with their nanny by setting the house on fire to cover her tracks. Lilith reaches the climax of her potential for violence at Coulibre incident, which is to psychologically scar her for the rest of the narrative. The Dark Woman's influence on her in committing violence is further established in another encounter when Lilith shouts at her, "Who you want me to kill now? Who you want me to kill now, bitch" (James 296). Although Lilith has given in to her desire for vengeance, it is clear that starting from Coulibre, she completely blames the Dark Woman for actions in order to avoid accountability. However, after Coulibre, even though she is scared of the Dark

Woman, who is visiting her as her innate urge to join the rebellion to kill all whites, Lilith fights back her urges, because she has started to experience other symptoms of trauma.

Although the Dark Woman can be categorised as a hallucination herself, Lilith starts to have hallucinations and flashbacks of the murders she committed. The fact that she works relentlessly after her return to Montpelier indicates that she is tiring herself out to stop her imagination running wild about her deeds. She wonders “how much work a nigger must do to forget. How long a nigger must work until she feel debt pay or punishment enough” (James 250). In the darkness of the cellar, which is her dwelling at Montpelier, Lilith imagines seeing “Mistress Roget blood spread like wings. Mistress Roget eye open wide and she scream hellfire” and, in a rather common imagery for guilty conscience, blood on her hands (James 251). The complexity of her hallucinations are so great that her vision, hearing, and smell are all stimulated. The melting of small bodies of the two children into a pulp along with their nanny, the smell of burning flesh, the voices of their screams plague Lilith’s mind. Therefore, Lilith’s only way to cope with her trauma is to acknowledge her mistakes and avoid doing the same again. Her refusal to be involved with Night Women’s rebellion lies with the fact that Lilith, through experience, recognises the vicious cycle of violence and refuses to be a part of it anymore. She explains herself to Homer:

You kill just one time and you know why God save murder for himself. Wicked, wicked, wicked. And good. Good. Good. Too good. You understand me? [. . .] You do it and you know why white man be master over we. Because he can grab a nigger and kill her just so. Just like that. Only white man can live with how terrible that be. [. . .] Me is a murderess. You want that kinda living, then take it. Every nigger have reason for white man to be dead. Me more than most. You can talk all you want, but me shed real blood, and me not shedding no more. Me not killing nobody. (James 319)

It can be observed that Lilith, after suffering the symptoms of perpetrator trauma, realises that having reason to kill does not justify murder or satisfy the thirst for vengeance as it does not bring back what is lost.

Lilith and Homer are two slave women who are very similar, in nature, in that they are both after revenge. The revelation of the fates of Homer’s children, who are all dead,

leads Lilith to the epiphany that the rebellion is staged just so that Homer can exact her revenge on Montpelier. What differentiates Lilith from Homer is that Lilith has already retaliated with Coulibre incident, yet has failed find any satisfaction in revenge. She has only found herself marked as a murderer bound to carry the guilt forever. There are two important indications that point towards the fact that Homer's true motive is not freedom. First of all, there is the looming threat of the Maroons. The representation of Maroons in James's novel is a stark contrast to the one in Evaristo's *Blonde Roots*. In *Blonde Roots*, Maroons and their town are the finish line in the race for freedom, because they are a formidable force that raids plantations and fight off the redcoats. However, in *The Book of Night Women*, Maroons are in compliance with the British, even catching runaway slaves and returning them. Both representations are true to the dynamic role the Maroon communities play within the political history of the island. Ozuna explains that Maroons who fought against the British in the First Maroon War, raiding plantations and helping slaves changed their strategies after signing two treaties with the British (134) and states

[i]n the post-treaty era, Windward and Leeward Maroons conspired with the British militia to suppress rebellions of the enslaved and capture runaways. Moreover, Jamaican authorities mandated post-treaty maroons to close off their communities to non-maroons and suppress Black insurrections. Thus, when dispossessed Black peasants erupted in violence during the Morant Bay Rebellion led by the deacon, Paul Bogle in 1865, maroons and English troops jointly quelled the insurgency. (134)

The Maroons represented in this novel refer to the post-treaty Maroons. The fact that Maroons inhabit the mountainous areas of the island complicates possible escape plans of the slave. The only way to escape the arrival of redcoats is to escape to the highlands, however, the Maroons are the masters of that territory owing to their guerrilla tactics, which they employed against the British for decades. Now that they capture runaway slaves for money, the chance of a lasting freedom after burning down Montpelier is slim. This is exactly what Lilith inquires about Homer's plan only to learn that she expects strength from numbers (James 337). The desire to form a six village community just like what they had in Africa is but a yearning for the past rather than a plan for what comes after the rebellion. In fact, most of the slaves at Montpelier have never seen Africa as they were mostly born on the island. Consequently, Homer's detailed plan as to the execution of the rebellion creates a stark contrast to the vagueness of what to do after they are free, which should be of equal importance considering that they will finally be free. Such discrepancy between the two sections of the plan makes it clear to Lilith that Homer does

not actually have any intention of escaping. Therefore, Homer and Lilith stand on the opposite ends of the scale as two women, who do not chase the slim chance of freedom, but death and survival respectively. Having figured out Homer's intentions, Lilith's refusal to take part in the rebellion should not be considered a betrayal because if she intended to betray Night Women, she could have done it much earlier by revealing the plans to Quinn, which she never does. Her choice is to hang on to what she has with Quinn, even against his will by drugging him, and try to survive the rebellion together.

It is ironic that Lilith, who refused to take the chance at freedom, is the only one to survive the rebellion and live at the estate in an almost free state. After taking her revenge, Homer perishes along with the rest of Night Women, whose deaths and struggles are immortalised through their individual songs. When their songs pass from one slave to another through the years, Iphigenia, who betrayed Night Women, and Lilith, who refused to be part are left out of songs (James 415-16). Lilith is given freedom without papers to live in the estate after Humphrey abandons it, however, she loses everyone around her including Robert Quinn. The only two people around her are her father Jack Wilkins, who is the source of her "malice" and Isobel Roget, who is a constant reminder of her trauma. The novel itself, through the narrator Lovey Quinn's composition becomes Lilith's song. Lovey Quinn claims that Lilith

teach me for me but for her, for when the time come to write her song she have somebody true to be her witness. Somebody who know that one cannot judge the action of a niggerwoman who only wanted to be everything and nothing. Mayhaps she 'fraid of how the time was goin' judge her. (James 416)

Although, Lilith presumed superiority to other slaves due to her lighter skin and green eyes, Lovey Quinn's hint that she was afraid to be judged indicate that her final decision was not informed by a desire to gain the favour of her oppressors, but by her own desire to break free from the cycle of violence.

By the revelation of the narrator as the protagonist's daughter at the end, James challenges the authenticity and editorship challenges to the original slave narratives. Similarly, through his usage of Jamaican patois he stays true to the identity of his characters and the way they speak. In creating a song for the songless, James strays from creating a

martyrdom story in search of freedom to form a narrative where the protagonist, who is both a victim and a perpetrator of grotesque violence, rises above the confinements of reciprocal violence and racial struggle by listening to her guilty conscience that plagues her with hallucination and flashbacks of her horrid deeds. The fact that the rebellion fails and that the remaining slaves perish in gibbets prove that cycle of violence continues for those who keep participating in it. The violent retaliation of the slaves in the form of a rebellion result in further violence by Humphry who personally designs the gibbets forged out of his “own rage” (James 407). James challenges the philosophy of an eye for an eye indicating that staying stuck in the traumas of the past might prevent even the contemporary reader from finding true freedom and peace. In doing so, he provides a new perspective into history through his historical re-imagining of the colonial history of his homeland.

## CONCLUSION

Having appeared around the turn of the nineteenth century, slave narratives hold historical significance in that they were the first instances when enslaved people from Africa in the British and American colonies found public voice. They were revolutionary in the sense that they provided the perspective of the dehumanised other with hopes of restoring their humanity in the eyes of the general public. Their appearance without a coincidence parallels the increasing anti-slavery voices in the British Empire. In fact, they were supported and publicised by the movement, pioneered by William Wilberforce in the British Parliament. Even though the involvement of anti-slavery editors casts a shadow on the authenticity of the narratives, such as Equiano's narrative, it is undeniable that they faced their contemporary problems. The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the on-going practice of slavery stood as two systematic racist practices that needed to be addressed. Accordingly, it was only natural that early slave narratives focused on the victimisation and dehumanisation of the peoples subjected to slavery in order to gain public sympathy and to support their cause. Moreover, rallying for the abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation required that freedom be presented as the be-all-end-all solution in these narratives. In other words, freedom was the ultimate goal. In line with this, these narratives had the purpose of achieving freedom and they evolved accordingly.

Two centuries after the abolition of the slave trade, three neo-slave narratives, namely *The Long Song*, *Blonde Roots*, and *The Book of Night Women*, prove that slave narratives still require critical attention to address contemporary problems. In fact, fictional slave narratives have been written since the 1980s to attract attention to contemporary issues of racism, racial inequality, identity crisis, and discrimination. Freedom is no longer enough on its own to tackle the cultural heritage of the traumatic past of slavery. This point of view is reflected in all three of the novels analysed in this dissertation. Levy's July is left in a state of simply surviving on the grounds of the plantation where she used to be enslaved. The loss of her two children, mother, and two love interests leave her broken to

the point that she cannot find the strength to start a new life outside Amity. Even after the economic downfall of the plantation, she continues to live there like a homeless person, or a ghost haunting the site of her oppression until her fated reunion with her long lost son, Thomas. Evaristo's Doris successfully escapes the plantation life in her second attempt only to find that her dreams about life after freedom can never be fulfilled. Her journey to freedom is characterised by loss. Due to her escape, she loses the sisterhood she experienced with Ye Meme and Ma Marjani. The tragic fates of all her family members are revealed to her just before her escape. Therefore, her dream of family reunion is shattered by slavery. Finally, she does meet Frank again, yet he is now a completely different person, a fighter fuelled by anger against the plantation owners and a man with a new family. Freedom only provides a secluded life as an escapee in the Maroon town located in the mountains. When emancipation happens, she is a very old woman who has found solace only in the fact that she saved the lives of the two boys she took with her. And lastly, James's Lilith is so traumatised by the violence she experienced both as victim and perpetrator that she chooses inaction to break herself free from the cycle of violence. The rebellion of Night Women, in Lilith's perspective, is staged as an act of revenge, fuelled by Homer's hatred towards the plantation owners. Her personal vendetta is masked behind a supposed fight for freedom. When the storm calms, Lilith is ironically left alone at the manor as a free woman. She acts against retaliating violence with violence and only wants to ensure her survival. Even so, she still lives the rest of her days on the plantation alone after Robert Quinn's death in the rebellion. Consequently, all three female protagonists do achieve a form of freedom at the end of their journeys, yet apart from July's reunion with Thomas, their stories are of loss and sacrifice. They accumulate traumatic experiences during their journeys, rendering the final freedom almost meaningless.

All three novels use a realistic approach in their use of language. In comparison to original slave narratives, which were mostly written in standard English due to the involvement of editors and their target audience being the general public, neo-slave narratives turn their attention to how a slave would speak English. Accordingly, all three novels, which are mostly set in colonial Jamaica, or a fictional counterpart of it, integrate Jamaican patois in their narration to varying degrees. In *The Long Song*, a distinction can be



observed between the storytelling sections, in which the narrator is speaking, and the language characters use in dialogue. The overall narrative is closer to standard English while characters speak in patois. A similar approach is used by Evaristo in *Blonde Roots*. Having worked as a secretary in Bwana's office, Doris is very articulate in her use of language. To make matters more complicated, the historical inversion of the novel means that English is actually Doris's mother tongue. Therefore, patois becomes more prominent in the final book of the novel. The island is a hub of creolisation which is reflected in the language of the slaves. Doris's new companions all speak in a thick accent, which is reinstated by the spellings of the dialogues. James's *The Book of Night Women* differs from the other two, in that, patois is used throughout the narration. This is due to the fact that the narrator is Lilith's daughter, Lovey Quinn, who relays the story to the readers as Lilith passed it on to her. This novel's language is the closest to Jamaican patois among the three. Consequently, all three novelists adapt English language to fit into their contextualisation and incorporate the slaves' own English into their narratives to varying degrees.

All three novels tackle both personal and historical trauma in tandem with their own methods. In Levy's *The Long Song*, July relishes the power of being the narrator of her story. It enables her to censor the most troublesome and traumatic parts of her past as she writes. This is due to both the pain of remembering and reliving those events, and a longing to grant a happier life to her younger self. She feels that she was undeserving of such pain inflicted on her. She witnessed the death of her mother, Nimrod, and many other companions in the aftermath of the Baptist War. She abandoned her son in fear of him being sold away as a slave. She also lost her second child, Emily, as she was kidnapped by Goodwin when he left for England. The freedom she has does not mean anything to her anymore. Therefore, it is no coincidence that she wants to rewrite the past especially at the points where she lost her children. The new narrative, with its alternative endings, is empowering for her younger self. At the same time, it provides a coping mechanism for older July, the narrator. In fact, the alternative endings function as screen memories for July. Through association, they cover for July's painful memories with a happy cultural memory, in the case of the day of Emancipation, or Miss Clara's, who is a very similar character to July and her fierce rival, happiness after being free. Screen

memories might be regarded as a repressing mechanism, yet the ending of the novel juxtaposes the ending of July's story, in that, it introduces the possibility of further healing. It was a twist of fate that brought July and Thomas together. However, the publication of July's story is intentionally turned into a hope of reunion on the last page, where Thomas, as the editor, inquires whether any future readers have any information on her half-sister. The ending implies that there is still hope for July to reunite with both of her children, whom she could not keep by her side. Consequently, the changes to the narration of the past, and their reversal in current time because of Thomas's insistence, and the publication of the story are all methods of healing for July's traumatic past.

Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* shows similarity to Levy's *The Long Song*, in that, it performatively represents the processes of Doris's traumatisation especially in the first book of the novel. Intrusive symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares are caused by trauma. The linearity of the narration of Doris's first escape attempt is broken by sudden flashbacks which take the reader to Doris's past to show them how she was captured, transported through the Middle Passage, and enslaved in gruesome detail. The narration employs the stream of consciousness technique to integrate these flashbacks. Doris's observations and emotions during her escape trigger past memories to flood to her mind without control, culminating in her blackout upon seeing a slave ship. These flashbacks mimic the experience of the people who suffer from PTSD. However, the representation of trauma is not limited to the flashbacks in the novel. Similar to July, Doris's traumatic past brings about a nostalgic view of her family life in England and a longing for those days. In addition, the loss of her children, who were sold away after birth, and Frank has also left a mental mark on Doris. She has failed to hold onto both her families. Therefore, she is often seen daydreaming about reuniting with them. Nevertheless, she never does, except for her older sister Sharon, who has changed drastically due to her status as Bwana's mistress. It can be argued that the eventual freedom she acquires after her second escape does not bring any fulfilment to Doris's longings for her lost loved ones. Even so, the ending of the novel is not that pessimistic, in that, Doris escapes knowing that she can finally save two boys, sons of Ye Meme and Ma Marjani, whom she considers family. She finally finds solidarity in the company of Ye Meme and Ma Marjani, and their children in her days at the Home Sweet Home plantation. These relationships are the

closest thing that Doris has to a family bond after she loses Frank and her children. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the idea of the second escape attempt comes into being only after she finds out that the two boys would be sold. In this regard, the successful escape means that Doris could finally regain agency to decide her own fate and save people, whom she considers family. For the first time since her enslavement, she manages to prevent slavery from destroying her familial bonds. Moreover, Evaristo's inversion of history reverses the roles of the perpetrator and the victim in the context of historical trauma. The readers are, in a creative manner, funnelled into empathical understanding of the two sides of struggle.

James's *The Book of Night Women* differs from the previous two novels in regards to its blurring the lines of being the victim and the perpetrator. Lilith transitions from the role of victim into the role of perpetrator as she is the only one among the three protagonists who actually responds to violence by violence. Her rebellious nature, in combination with her potential to act violently, results in her killing all the members of Roget family except for Isobel, in retaliation to the daily cruelty she both witnesses and experiences at Coulibre estate. She is the only character in the novel who actually kills white people, which is something Night Women aspire to do through their plans of rebellion. However, the experience is transformative for Lilith. As a young girl, who is just transitioning to adolescence, Lilith mistakes the feeling of power after killing an offender for true womanhood. It can be observed that she gradually develops an unhealthy perception of her selfhood, which, in turn, leads to further violent acts. However, she also starts to suffer from perpetrator trauma, which is an underrepresented type of trauma in trauma studies. Physical irritation, lucid hallucinations that manipulate all her senses, nightmares, and the Dark Woman, who is a mental projection of her violent tendencies, haunt her throughout the second part of the novel. The novel portrays the reciprocal violence between the races as a vicious cycle. Violence breeds further violence as the cycle continues on. However, the slave characters, who have been treated violently, and who lost their families, children, and loved ones, cannot recognise this cycle. Lilith is the only one who experiences the second stage of the cycle by becoming the perpetrator of violence committing the murders. Nevertheless, the deaths of the children and their black nanny especially traumatise her, making her understand that violence neither heals past wounds,

nor brings back the lost ones. It is only through perpetrator trauma and guilty conscious that she decides to take part in any more violence, in other words, the rebellion. This decision makes her the only survivor of the rebellion. Although she acts as a free woman at the end of the novel, she is forced to share the estate with Isobel, on whose downfall Lilith has a big role, reminding her constantly of the atrocity she has committed. The novel itself becomes a song, sung by her daughter, for Lilith, whom the songs of the other members of Night Women excluded, as the story of the one girl who pushed herself outside the cycle of violence.

Written by two female authors and a male author, the three novels interestingly employ similar protagonists in terms of status. July, Doris, and Lilith are all women slaves who are employed at the manor of the plantation owners. House slaves lived a relatively safe from the daily struggles of field slaves. However, they are not exempt from brutal punishments when they make mistakes. Moreover, two of the protagonists, namely July and Lilith, are the daughters of the overseers of their plantations, making them mulatto women. They seem to enjoy having a lighter skin tone, which gives them a sense of superiority over other slaves. Being of mixed race is not the case for Doris, however, she is well educated compared to the workers of the plantation, even calling herself a “white collar slave.” Nevertheless, the illusion of status is eventually broken for all three protagonists. It is a moment of epiphany when they realise that in the eyes of their oppressors, there is nothing that separates them from the rest of the crowd. It is an ego-shattering realisation, but a necessary one in order to make them adapt to the reality of their situation and better survivors in worse situations to come. Having slave women as their main character is also enabling for the authors in that they can explore further levels of exploitation, especially sexual exploitation. July and Lilith both are mulatto children born after incidents of rape committed by overseers against their mothers. All three characters witness sexual abuse against women by the white men of the plantation, with examples of black men added in especially in the case of Lilith. Lilith herself becomes the victim of sexual exploitation by both black and white men on multiple occasions throughout the novel. Sexual abuse and mutilation of male genitalia are also depicted, but they are given as exemplary punishments to emasculate and oppress rebellious men. Whereas sexual abuse of women on plantation grounds can be regarded as common as a

daily occurrence. Moreover, female protagonist also enable the authors to explore trauma of loss through motherhood. All three novels employ either protagonists or major characters who are traumatised by the loss of their children. Tendency to violence, anger, and depression are among the responses to the such traumatising loss. Even so, all three protagonists paint pictures of strong and powerful women who can craftily survive in such hostile environments as theirs. Their narratives are those of empowerment rather than victimisation.

Presenting empowering narratives as opposed to the victim narratives of the old slave narratives is a defining characteristic of these novels. It is true that they represent both stories of traumatising events and perform the processes and symptoms of trauma. However, the traumatic experiences are presented in creatively empowering ways such as July's re-construction of her own life story with its silences and screens hiding her vulnerable moments. Lilith's final decision to stand against Night Women based on her own perspective shaped by her own experience is another example. The stories of the protagonists are shaped by their personal traumas and to a certain extent performatively stylised to match their experience. These narratives encourage the readers to examine their protagonists as individuals, who try to regain agency to control their own fates rather than just being the representatives of collective suffering at the hands of slavery. In accordance, the novels hardly ever suggest a racial solidarity among slaves except for families and very small groups. The rankings among slaves, intra-black violence, intrigues, betrayals, and even murders are included to prevent the reader to perceive the slaves like a hive mind. Instead, each character is an individual with their own agenda, plans, aspirations, and ways to survive. In doing so, these neo-slave narratives enable a new perspective on history and cultural trauma by narrating complex micro histories.

At the same time, by focusing on their journey with their ups and downs, these neo-slave narratives bridge the gap between past trauma and present cultural scene. Empathetic understanding the historical other is enabling to the contemporary readers to reassess the grand narratives about such limit events such as slavery. Re-evaluating the past trauma from a new perspective and focus brings to the foreground new ways of understanding

the workings of social and cultural structures in these micro histories. Totalising attitudes to victims in favour of group identities rather than individual identities entrap the readers in the power dynamics of grand scale. However, power does not exist only as a tool of the oppressor. Therefore, individual stories of these protagonists indicate how power and agency are re-obtained when history is analysed on a micro level. Even their traumatisation and their coping mechanisms can be regarded as the struggle of self-empowerment. It makes them survivors rather than just victims. The fictional space created by the neo slave narratives makes such close reading of history possible. In this respect, slavery's transgenerational traumatic effect on the identity making processes in the modern world can be re-evaluated in an empathetic literary space, which is beyond the constrictions of temporality. In such a space, these novels thwart the roles of the victim and the perpetrator. Therefore, July can dwell on her temporary victories over Caroline Mortimer and Miss Clara in her characteristically sharp wit and humorous narration. Doris's historically inverted world can suck the readers in to re-evaluate their roles in this long history of racial discrimination. And Lilith's choice of survival over hatred and violence after getting a glimpse of possibilities beyond the confinements of racial hierarchies can resonate to the readers. How the characters handle their personal traumas and how they are represented by their authors in relation to the wider scope of transgenerational trauma are key to meeting them in this fictional space as complex human beings. If an understanding can be achieved, the stories of their trauma can pave the way to healing the current ones. Therefore, taking a glance at one of the darkest times of human civilisation through the artistic lens of these authors can enable the contemporary readers to understand both themselves and their culturally other better.

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## **APPENDIX 1. ORIGINALITY REPORT**





**APPENDIX 2. ETHICS COMMISSION FORM**

