

IDENTITY AND DISLOCATION IN
CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE:
A STUDY OF THE WRITINGS OF
VELMA POLLARD

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Abstract

Jamaican-born Velma Pollard has been publishing poetry and short stories for nearly thirty years. Her first poems appeared in the 1970s, her first volume of short stories in 1989, and her first novel in 1994. Despite this considerable literary output, in the ever-growing critical literature on Caribbean women's writing Pollard's work has not attracted any of the scholarly treatment accorded to other writers. Given this lack of critical attention to Pollard's considerable body of work, this thesis aims to provide the first detailed and contextualised study of her writings (excluding the majority of her poetry and of her writings on linguistics), and to accord Pollard the recognition her work deserves.

Chapter 1 of this thesis situates Pollard's writings in the context of Caribbean (women's) literature, and writings on identity, dislocations and (Caribbean) migration. I argue that Pollard's principal contribution to Caribbean literature is found in her engagement with two main subjects, return migration and relationships (male-female and female-female), within a wider context of debates on identity and dislocation.

Chapter 2 introduces Pollard's work by way of a general discussion of her novella *Karl*, which won the Casa de las Americas literary award in 1992. I consider *Karl* to be central to Pollard's work, not least because it features many of the themes explored by her later writings, including her novel, *Homestretch*, which is the subject of Chapter 3.

Pollard's first novel, *Homestretch*, which was published in 1994, explores the themes of identity and dislocation through the experiences of 'return migrants' and 'repeat migrants' and their comparison of life in England, the United States and Jamaica. The novel chronicles how these migrants come to reconnect with and accept their cultural heritage.

In chapters 4 and 5 I discuss selected stories taken from Pollard's two collections of short stories, *Considering Woman* ('Cages', 'My Sisters', 'My Mother', and 'Gran') and from *Karl and Other Stories* ('A Night's Tale', 'Miss Chandra', 'Betsy Hyde', and 'Altamont Jones'). In these stories Pollard explores male-female relationships and the lives of several generations and a wide range of Caribbean women and men. Pollard utilises the West Indian setting, speech, situations and conflicts in these stories to graphically describe familiar Caribbean role models and to provide a narrative and literary examination of the frustrations and conflicting desires of women in the region.

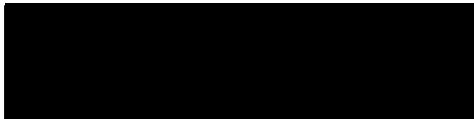
In my conclusion, I address the ethnographic quality and significance of her work, and its contribution to an understanding of the Caribbean.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the College.

Signed:

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

Darlene Schulenburg

Date: 1 May 2001

The right of Darlene Schulenburg to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

For my grandmother,
Hilda Timm, nee Young (1893-1989)

And for my two little sons,
Edward Arthur James (b.1997)
and
Rupert Albert George (b.1998)

And these books of endless unbinding
will fatten with the leaves of their reaping
and the seamless wide open wall sides
will green with the pages of their toil...
tomorrow belongs to the children.

(from 'British Museum and After',
in Velma Pollard, *Crown Point and Other Poems*, 1988)

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PREFACE

One of the Christmas presents I received from my husband in 1994 was a copy of Velma Pollard's novel *Homestretch*, which was published earlier that year. The book's cover proclaimed: "Wistful nostalgia and joyful homecomings are delicately interwoven with tangible descriptions of Jamaican life, both past and present." Knowing of my interest in migration, identity and Caribbean literature, my husband thought the novel appropriate, not least because it seemed to encompass the themes I was addressing in social anthropology, which I was studying at the time. Captivated as I was by Pollard's novel, I decided that I wanted to return to literature and to explore the dominant themes of Pollard's work, namely identity and dislocation. These themes seemed particularly appropriate for discussion for a number of reasons, not least that at that time my course examined the role of symbols and symbolic boundaries in the constitution of community and individual identities.

I first encountered 'black literature' at fourteen, when I read Edward R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* which I had discovered on my mother's bookshelf.¹ I found it interesting and unsettling, but it was also special to me because my mother had studied it as part of her RSA English Literature in 1970. My first academic encounter with Black literature came as an undergraduate at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, where I took two modules in Caribbean literature ('Other literatures: Caribbean writing') as part of my B.A. degree in English Studies with Women's Studies. This allowed me to explore questions of language, culture and consciousness in a number of texts by Caribbean writers in a post-colonial context and in the light of feminist theory. Many of the readings revolved around the themes of identity and dislocation in one way or another.

The reason the subject appealed was that I immediately began to make connections between what I read in Caribbean literature with my South Atlantic home island of St Helena. A British Overseas territory, St Helena was settled by the English in

1659 with peoples brought together from various parts of the world, as in the Caribbean.² The island's present population tends to be described as mixed and no distinction between descendants of the white settlers and imported coloured labourers is usually made. As far as identity is concerned, St Helenians assert a British national identity, while showing pride in a St Helenian local identity. St Helena has a resident population of a mere five thousand and faces serious economic difficulties, being dependent on a grant-in-aid from the British government. About one third of the island's work force is employed on contract overseas, as result of which St Helena is no stranger to the problems stemming from migration.³

Problems of identity and dislocation are especially close to my own heart, given my life history and that of my family. Having first come to the United Kingdom as a student and, eventually, to live here indefinitely, identity came to matter to me more than it had ever done before. As Carole Boyce Davies has remarked of Caribbean women's writings in the United States, "Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home."⁴ Moreover, as I came to discover as a result of some research in St Helena's archives, my St Helenian origin is the result of numerous processes of migrations, from the seventeenth century onwards, and the inter-marrying of former slaves (from India and Madagascar), but also of English and Welsh settlers, French Huguenot refugees, and South Africans. I am now married to a German-born, naturalised British citizen, of German-Jewish ancestry.

Sadly, despite its many similarities with British Caribbean islands, St Helena has no comparable literary tradition of its own.⁵ I have often heard it said that as regards to women, it is trauma that gives them the incentive to write. Perhaps people on St Helena have never been as traumatised as the people of the Caribbean. For this reason, I have found Caribbean literature, to my initial surprise, an intriguing substitute for reflecting on

¹ Edward R. Braithwaite (1959) *To Sir, With Love*. London: The Bodley Head.

² Tony Cross (1980) *St Helena, Including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha*. London: David & Charles.

³ United Nations Development Programme (1999) *Human Development Report for St. Helena*. New York: UNDP.

⁴ Carole Boyce Davies (1994) *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, p.113.

⁵ For the only works similar in style and content to Caribbean short stories, see Basil George (1960) *Stories from the Island of St Helena*, typescript; Keith Yon (c.1976) *Watchcum and Other Fables for Island Children*, typescript.

St Helena's colonial past and present, local community relations, education, and the role of women, amongst other issues, while paying particular attention to identity and dislocation. Nevertheless, I realise that I need to be wary of trying to integrate what are in fact the distinctive histories of two peoples, of the Caribbean and of St Helena.

Reading *Homestretch* for the first time had made me realise how I use the word 'home' interchangeably to mean both my island home, where I was born, and my home here in England. When I am in the company of other St Helenians, we ask one another if we have heard 'from home' recently, just as I refer to receiving mail, faxes, phone calls, e-mails 'from home'. Yet unlike those migrants who come to England in the knowledge that their stay is only temporary, I eventually came to England to marry and set up a permanent home. Although my husband and I were born elsewhere, we decided that rather than living in one or the other of our 'homelands', we would make our home in a country we both loved and where we had both studied. We have returned to St Helena, just as we now regularly visit my husband's family 'home' in Germany.

However, my approach to Caribbean literature is not confined to comparisons with St Helena. In 1992, following my introduction to Caribbean literature, I spent four weeks on a visit to Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago, although I did not realise at the time just how intrigued and fascinated I would become by Caribbean culture. My visit was arranged by the Seventh-Day Adventists Church in the United Kingdom, which I attended regularly in Gloucester between 1988 and 1999, and which had a largely West Indian congregation.⁶ This provided me with particularly intimate insights into the life histories and experiences of several generations of West Indians in the United Kingdom, some Caribbean-born, some British-born.

It is this acquaintance with the Caribbean, and with West Indians in the United Kingdom, as well as my knowledge of comparable St Helena experiences, which provide the contexts within which my reading of Velma Pollard's writings is set. In this respect, it is a reading which is bound to differ from that of a West Indian reader of her work. Having stated my subjective location in relation to my work, however, I do not consider it necessary for this initial self-representation to be central to my analysis of Pollard's work and for it to be carried through the remainder of this thesis.

Research was far from smooth, considering that during the time I have been

⁶ For background on the Caribbean community in Gloucester, see Gail Johnson and Simon Pizzet (1995) *A Long Five Years: Caribbean Elders in Gloucester*. Gloucester: 'A Long Five Years' Project.

working on this thesis I gave birth to two children and moved house seven times, including a spell of four months back on St Helena while my husband was completing his doctoral thesis. In order to devote myself fully to our new-borns, I twice asked for my studies to be suspended for six months, while also going part-time. At least I take comfort from the fact that in all this my lot was very much akin to that of Velma Pollard herself, who aptly explains that as a woman who writes,

The roles that have become important have been getting the children out of the way and all the rest of it, so in the same way that writing has had to just take a little pigeon hole out of my real life in terms of time: *after* the children have been put to sleep, or *after* the children are gone to school, and *after* you've done the groceries, *after* everything else, then you get a little moment [...].⁷

When Pollard learnt of the birth of our second son Rupert, she wrote to tell me to enjoy my two babies and to put my research on hold. She stressed the children were far more important and that my research could continue all in good time. In one of her stories, 'Gran' Pollard writes that "[c]hildren and grandchildren are lent to us to do for them in their need [...]. I wanted to indulge my own children with myself while their need was there [...]."⁸

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the support I have received from the Graduate School, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, including a small contribution towards my tuition fees, and from my successive supervisors, Shelley Saguaro who supervised my research from 1996 until 1999, and Peter Childs, who took me on thereafter. Peter was patient with my ramblings on and content to read anything I had written, no matter how unpolished. His comments, especially during the final drafting of my thesis, were most helpful and very much appreciated.

Nigel Rapport and my husband also provided me with detailed comments on

⁷ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.171-72.

⁸ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, p.66.

some, if not all, parts of this thesis, while the participants of a College sponsored research student summer school in 1996 at Dalyan, Turkey, provided me with the first opportunity to share my thoughts on the relationship between my own experiences of migration and my research.

Although I met Velma Pollard in Oxford in 1997, thanks to Alison Donnell, I chose not to interview her about her work, nor to ask her for comments about my thesis, although she did provide me with the details of a number of more obscure reviews of her work for inclusion in the bibliography. In our ongoing correspondence, which is of a personal nature only, she has nevertheless encouraged me in my work and has shown a steady interest in my progress.

I will always be grateful to Alison Donnell and Professor Roger Bromley for introducing me to Caribbean literature ten years ago and making it so irresistible. My thanks also go to Professor Philip Martin, John Hughes, and Syed (Manzu) Islam, my other teachers in English Literature at that time, and to Nigel Rapport, Mario Aguilar and Roy Dilley, who taught me Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews.

My dear Cheltenham friends, Trevor and Elisabeth Hearl, and Jack and Jill Shepherd, have supported me since my first arrival in this country twelve years ago, and always made me feel positive about myself. Fifi Stevens, Heather George, Pamela Lawrence, Corinda Essex, Dorothy Evans, Margaret Stimpson, and Veronica and Hawley Johnson have all given me something which I can look back on and truly appreciate. Basil George encouraged me to study English Literature in Cheltenham, and Alexander suggested that I study Social Anthropology at St Andrew's, which in turn has led me to this project.

My friends at the Gloucester Seventh-Day Adventist Church kindly permitted me to gain some insight into their own experiences of migration, identity and dislocation, as did my brother-in-law, David R. Henry.

I would also like to express my appreciation and gratitude to my parents-in-law who made this thesis possible and who encouraged me to talk about many of the issues I address. Since I first embarked on this project, they too have migrated from Germany to settle in England, bringing 'identity' and 'dislocation' alive in more than one way.

My parents on St Helena deserve special thanks for their love and support in allowing me to explore the world and for being there for me. My sister Melanie has been a steady friend, not least during some of my early years in the United Kingdom, and who visited the Caribbean with me in 1992. My sister Andy cared for Edward and Rupert

during her college breaks this year, allowing me to work away on the computer.

All possible thanks, stupendous gratitude and love go to my husband Alexander for his unwavering support.

The arrival of my little son Edward ten months into this project, followed fourteen months later by little Rupert, have made life both more chaotic and more worthwhile. They carry the strands of many cultures - may their lives be rich and versatile and may their diversity give them a stronger sense of belonging, wherever they choose to make their home.



INTRODUCTION

Jamaican-born Velma Pollard has been publishing poetry and short stories for nearly thirty years. Her first poems appeared in the 1970s, her first volume of short stories in 1989, and her first novel in 1994 (her novella *Karl* won the Casa de las America literary award in 1992). Despite this considerable literary output, in the ever-growing critical literature on Caribbean women's writing Pollard's work has not attracted any of the scholarly treatment accorded to other writers. This is particularly disappointing as the work of some contemporary Caribbean women writers has been the subject of repeated analysis. Pollard herself, for that matter, has written extensively on the writings of Olive Senior. Given this lack of critical attention to Pollard's considerable body of work, this thesis aims to provide the first detailed and contextualised study of her writings and to accord Pollard the recognition her work deserves. Because of its emphases, the final format of this thesis did not allow for an extensive discussion of Pollard's writings in the context of the social science literature on (Caribbean) migration; however I do include relevant references where appropriate. Similarly, to keep the number of texts manageable, I have excluded from my discussion the majority of Pollard's poetry, as well as her writings on linguistics. Because this is the first substantial work on Pollard, I have, however, spent more time summarising and explicating her stories than one would expect to see in a work on a more familiar author, such as Olive Senior, not least to convey some of the flavour of her writings. Moreover, as Pollard's main contribution to Caribbean literature lies in her exploration of socio-cultural issues relating to migration and gender relations, this thesis is not primarily an exercise in literary theory. What is at issue are the stories that Pollard tells and the way her work serves to dramatise the personal narratives of women and men in the Caribbean and in the Diaspora. As Pollard's writings are multi-layered, the most appropriate way to achieve an interpretative reading of these texts is hence by means of what may appear to be 'mere' plot summaries or character descriptions.

Velma Earle Pollard, whose biography is worth detailing here, was born on 26

March 1937 at Comfort Hall, Benbow, St Katherine, Jamaica, and grew up in Woodside, St Mary. She was educated at Excelsior High School in Kingston and studied languages at the University College of the West Indies, Mona. In 1968 she received her M.A. in Education, Administration and Curriculum from McGill University, Montreal, and her M.A. in the Teaching of English from Teachers' College, Columbia University, New York, in 1974. Pollard has taught English and occasionally Spanish and Latin at Kingston College, at St George's School, Trinidad, McDonald High School, Montreal, at Knox College, Jamaica, at Hunter College, CUNY, at the University of Guyana, and in Italy. In 1975 she was appointed a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of the West Indies, Mona, where she also obtained a Ph.D. in Language Education. She retired in 1999. Pollard specialises in the Creole languages of the Anglophone Caribbean, the language of Caribbean literature and, notably, Caribbean women's writing, and is a frequent contributor to academic conferences. As the ideas of home and family are important to her work, it can also be noted that Velma Pollard has three children and several grandchildren.¹

Pollard has published two volumes of poetry, *Crown Point and Other Poems* (1988) and *Shame Trees Don't Grow Here* (1992), two volumes of short fiction, *Considering Woman* (1989) and *Karl and Other Stories* (1994), as well as a novel, *Homestretch* (1994). *Karl* won the Casa de las Americas literary award in 1992. Her poems and short stories have appeared in several journals, *Caribbean Quarterly* in particular. Pollard's scholarly work includes *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari* (1994), as well as numerous papers on Caribbean literature, and she is the editor of *Nine West Indian poets: An Anthology for the CXC English Examination* (1980), *Over Our Way: A Collection of Caribbean Short Stories for Young Readers* (1980; with Jean D'Costa), and *Anansesem: A Collection of Caribbean Folk Tales, Legends, and Poems for Juniors* (1985).²

Pollard's principal contribution to Caribbean literature is found in her engagement with two main subjects, return migration and relationships (male-female and female-female), within a wider context of debates on identity and dislocation. The problem of

¹ For biographical details, see Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson eds. (1989) *Her True-True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writings from the Caribbean*. Oxford: Heinemann, p.59; Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.170. Some details are taken from correspondence between myself and Velma Pollard.

² For further details of Pollard's publications, see the bibliography.

dislocation, explored through the twin themes of identity and home (the quest for wholeness and for a strong sense of belonging), is central to Caribbean literature and a continuing preoccupation of both male and female writers. Despite variations in setting and emphasis, this theme of identity is a constant. As Merle Collins has fittingly pointed out,

Caribbean women's stories come from a variety of perspectives and I would venture to suggest that the most sensitive critic, the one with the keenest appreciation of the Caribbean woman's story, is inevitably the one who comes to Caribbean literature intent not only on an artistic analysis of the signifying word, or on assessing how much the word conforms to labels constructed outside of its existence but on developing an understanding of the society that has produced the literature.³

To develop such an understanding in relation to Pollard's writings has been the prime motivation of my research.

Given the format of this thesis (that of a Master's thesis rather than a doctoral thesis), it has not been possible to explore the contribution of Pollard's writings to general debates on literary and cultural theory. Nevertheless, I hope that this thesis, by providing the first study of Pollard's prose writings, will make a small contribution to the wider literature on Caribbean women's writings.

Caribbean Women's Literature

Whilst Caribbean writing is created out of different cultural, social and economic contexts, Caribbean writers are held together by a background of dispossession, migration, and nostalgia, which they share with the entire Caribbean community.⁴ Their assertion of Caribbean-ness is often a response by those who have become acculturated

³ Merle Collins (1996) 'Framing the Word: Caribbean Women's Writings', in Joan Anim-Addo, ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writings*. London: Whiting and Birch, p.9.

⁴ For a brief introduction to Caribbean migration, see Bonham C. Richardson (1989) 'Caribbean Migrations, 1838-1985', in Frank W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer eds. *The Modern Caribbean*. London: The University of North Carolina.

to the prejudice they encounter, to the problems of assimilation, and to the recognition of continuing cultural differences. As Douglas Midgett argues, "[t]he very act of writing in societies that are as profoundly colonial as the West Indies is initially an assertion of identity."⁵

Caribbean women writers, not least, are discovering strategies to give voice to their particular history and redefine their own experiences.⁶ According to Merle Collins,

Caribbean women's writing tends to be concerned with all that has gone into the shaping of Caribbean societies: colonisation and its consequences, the effects of slavery and indenture, the meaning or meaninglessness of independence. There is a concern with formation - formation of the society, formation of the individual - and with reclaiming and revoicing. This revoicing means [...] a revealing of the stories told by mothers, aunts, godmothers, tantes, nenens, so that many of the themes overlap with the themes explored by male Caribbean writers.⁷

In her entry on 'Feminism' in the *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, Elaine Savory states that Caribbean feminism presents "a striking complexity of identity" resulting from the experience of living in different societies, largely on account of migration.⁸ Caribbean writing is dependent not only on re-membering, but also on the multicultural layering resulting from migration. As in post-colonial writing in general,⁹ migration and dislocation, and the tension that is created as a result of the encounter of different cultures and countries, have become major themes in women's writing and a source of creative energy.

⁵ Douglas Midgett (1977) 'West Indian Version: Literature, History, and Identity', in Ann M. Pescatello ed. *Old Roots in New Lands: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on Black Experiences in the Americas*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, p.212.

⁶ For a brief introductions to Caribbean women's literature, see Renu Juneja (1995) 'Contemporary Women Writers' in Bruce King, ed. *West Indian Literature*, second edition. London: Macmillan.

⁷ Merle Collins (1996) 'Framing the Word: Caribbean Women's Writings', in Joan Anim-Addo, ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writings* (London: Whiting and Birch), p.8.

⁸ Elaine Savory Fido (1995) 'Feminism (The Caribbean)', in Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly eds. *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, Vol.I. London: Routledge, p.490.

⁹ Elleke Boehmer (1995) *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams (1997) *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Despite internal differences, a shared past underlies Caribbean literature, although it is a past needing to be told through many different perspectives and peoples. As Kamau Brathwaite has argued

The most significant feature of West Indian life and imagination since Emancipation had been its sense of rootlessness, of not belonging to the landscape; dissociation, in fact, of art from act of living.¹⁰

With the increasing ease of travel and the development of an international economy, Caribbean literature has become ever more concerned with individual lives and newer versions of identity and dislocation. Caribbean literature gives narrative and literary order to an embodiment of change, whether in its notation of the collapse of the colonial society and coming to terms with the tensions of a post colonial culture, or the diversity of class and ethnic conflicts, cultural, social, political, economic and personal changes.¹¹

In Caribbean society, where a white elite had traditionally monopolised the educational, political and commercial opportunities, until the break-up of the West Indian Federation in the early 1960s, an eventful decade in West Indian history, only a few privileged black people could hope to achieve any real status or even power. During this time, literacy and political development were closely tied. Local publications were fired by new regional ideas, while the need to adapt local education to the new political situation meant there was a literary market for books by and about Caribbean writers. Unsuccessful parents, their racial or educational disadvantages and their ambitions for their children, became an early and popular theme in West Indian literary circles - Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) being one of them¹² - many educated West Indians identifying with the struggle between opposing cultural influences.

According to Rhonda Cobham, when the break-up of the West Indian Federation in 1962 led to "a fresh dispersal of Caribbean people to North America and Europe in

¹⁰ Kamau Brathwaite (1996) 'Timehri', in Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawton Welsh eds. *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*. London: Routledge, p.344.

¹¹ For historical reviews of Caribbean literature in general, see Bruce King ed. (1995) *West Indian Literature*, second edition. London: Macmillan. Also see Kenneth Ramchand (1983) *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. London: Heinemann.

¹² George Lamming (1953) *In the Castle of My Skin*. London: Michael Joseph.

search of jobs and intellectual breathing space [...], the most significant literary voices to emerge were those of Caribbean women."¹³ Renu Juneja argues that what makes writing by Caribbean women distinctive is their focus on women's dual colonisation and marginalisation, and on the intersection of gender issues with class and race. "Writing by women shares Caribbean literature's interest in issues of race and colonialism, and in the emergence of a distinctive identity which is viewed as synthetic and hybrid, in opposition to imposed colonial norms, and rooted in the local folk culture."¹⁴ Orality functions as the formal education of women, and orality is linked to matriarchal inheritance, to a strong bonding with mothers and grandmothers who pass on this oral, folk culture.

The early novels of Caribbean women writers are often concerned with the theme of childhood, as well as with young female protagonists' attempts to come to terms with the tensions of their colonial or post-colonial cultures. But the relationship with the mother is also complex and difficult because the gaining of one's independence involves a deliberate and painful separation from the mother. The resultant tensions make the process of self-definition particularly difficult for women in this literature and associate self-definition with various forms of alienation and psychic fragmentation. These are the common threads running through the Caribbean literature since the forties and fifties and the literature being produced today.

As Pollard's work is located firmly within that tradition, it is worthwhile to briefly consider a number of other Caribbean women writers who exemplify these themes and in relation to which Pollard's work stands. The writings of Olive Senior (born 1941) and Joan Riley (born 1958) are closest to Pollard's, not least in that they were published just prior to Pollard's own. Senior who, like Pollard, is also an academic, won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for *Summer Lightning and Other Stories* (1986).¹⁵ Her best known work is *Arrival of the Snake Woman and Other Stories* (1989), which is the subject of

¹³ Rhonda Cobham (1995) 'The Background', in Bruce King ed. *West Indian Literature*, second edition. London: Macmillan, p.25.

¹⁴ Renu Juneja (1995) 'Contemporary Women writers', in Bruce King ed. *West Indian Literature*, second edition. London: Macmillan, p.89. Also see Elizabeth Wilson (1990) "Le Voyage et l'espace clos" - Island and Journey as Metaphor: Aspects of Woman's Experience in the Works of Francophone Caribbean Women Novelists', in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido eds. *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*. Trenton: African World Press.

¹⁵ Olive Senior (1986) *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman.

a critical article by Pollard.¹⁶ If Senior's strength is the short story, that of Riley is the novel. Her best known works are her three novels *The Unbelonging* (1985), *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), and *Romance* (1988),¹⁷ which have proved of considerable inspiration to Pollard, who dedicates her own novel *Homestretch* (1994) to her.¹⁸

But there is an earlier generation of writers to whose work Pollard's is closely related, such as Jean Rhys, whose writings are recognised for their contribution to the exploration of the mother-daughter bond, and specifically the effects of the loss of the maternal matrix. In her novel, her female characters are rejected first by their mother and then by their male lovers. While it appears that the men are in positions of power and wealth, and therefore women's adversaries, problems of identity and self-esteem for her women characters stem from their inadequate bonding with their mothers. They are therefore unable to form a positive self-identity, and are vulnerable to exploitation by men and even other women.

Most of Jean Rhys's fiction was published before 1940, while she was born in 1894, a whole century before Pollard published her first novel. Of her works, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) tells of a seventeen year-old girl, Anna Morgan, who migrates from her Caribbean island to live in England.¹⁹ With no connections and no money in her new and unknown world, she grows increasingly alienated as she copes with the loss of her father and her first lover. Her situation is exacerbated because of her political status as a white creole and her subsequent alienation as a 'colonial' in England. She becomes a marginal woman, surviving on the money she receives from sex. Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) explores similar issues.²⁰

The psychic dislocations resulting from such inter-generational tensions are explored extensively in Caribbean novels, frequently through breakdowns of sensitive girls, sometimes ending in death. This is the case for Tee in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack*,

¹⁶ Olive Senior (1989) *Arrival of the Snake Woman and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman; Velma Pollard (1995) 'The East Indian Presence in Jamaican Literature: with Reference to "The Arrival of the Snake Woman" by Olive Senior', in Gisela Brinker-Gabler ed. *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture*. New York: State University of New York Press.

¹⁷ Joan Riley (1985) *The Unbelonging*. London: The Women's Press; Joan Riley (1987) *Waiting in the Twilight*. London: The Women's Press; and Joan Riley (1988) *Romance*. London: The Women's Press.

¹⁸ Velma Pollard (1994) *Homestretch*. Harlow: Longman.

¹⁹ Jean Rhys (1934) *Voyage in the Dark*. London: André Deutsch.

²⁰ Jean Rhys (1939) *Good Morning Midnight*. London: Constable.

Monkey (1970) and for Laetitia's friend, Ajanee, in Hodge's *For the Life of Laetitia* (1993), for Annie in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1983), and for Beka's friend, Toycie, in Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1982). This is also the case for characters in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990), Erna Brodber's *Myal* (1988), Merle Collins' *Angel* (1987), Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969), and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1990) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), amongst others.

This is exemplified by two novels by Jamaica Kincaid (born in Antigua in 1949), *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990),²¹ which are both concerned with the problems of childhood, portraying the transitions from childhood to adolescence as disjointed and disconnected. In particular, both novels explore the troubles and complications of mother-daughter relationships. In *Annie John*, Kincaid focuses upon the ambivalent relationship which Annie has with her mother. Annie's mother, an imposing, ambitious and powerful woman, looms over the novel. Like Karl's mother, in Pollard's novella *Karl*, she is obsessed with the education of her children, an education which is to her, and mothers like her, a lifeline guaranteeing a better future. In Pollard's novel *Homestretch*, Brenda's mother is willing to send her daughter to be with her estranged father in America, to give her a good education. It is this which occasions Brenda's dislocation and her eventual search for her identity.

Kincaid's *Lucy* in turn expands on the mother-daughter relationship explored in *Annie John* to consider other relationships between women, like those between rich and poor and black, brown and white. The novel follows a young woman who leaves Antigua to work as an *au pair* in an American city. Like *Annie John*, *Lucy* addresses the alienation, isolation and dislocation of its central character. Lucy, like Brenda in Pollard's *Homestretch* is angry, but Kincaid does not offer any reasons for her anger and her pain.

Merle Hodge, (born in Trinidad in 1944) published her first novel, *Crick Crack, Monkey* in 1970.²² It tells the story of the central character, Tee, who is also the novel's narrator, who experiences intensely personal dilemmas on account of the opposition between social and cultural values resulting from her dual her upbringing. In her childhood Tee effectively inhabited two worlds, moving between two opposed black communities: one reflected by her aunt Beatrice's middle-class values; the other by her

²¹ Jamaica Kincaid (1985) *Annie John*. London: Picador; Jamaica Kincaid (1991) *Lucy*. London: Virago.

²² Merle Hodge (1970) *Crick Crack Monkey*. London: André Deutsch.

Tanties's lower-class coarseness. The conflicting life-styles Tee experiences generate acute feelings of ambivalence within her.²³

The vivid exploration of Tee's inner world, her feelings, thoughts and actions as she responds to the social and cultural environment in which the novel is set, allows the reader to share in her diverse experiences. As Hodge traces Tee's psychological development, the reader is also made aware of the two cultural systems open to the West Indian: that of the black creole culture, reflected in Tantie's way of life and that of imported metropolitan culture, imitated by her Aunt Beatrice. In the story Hodge is able to suggest the extent to which emotional involvement in either culture is conducive to the individual's success or happiness. This same opposition is also played out with fatal consequences in *Karl*. *Crick Crack, Monkey* ends with Tee about to migrate to England, which in turn offers her a way out of a perplexing cultural situation. Karl, in turn cracks under the strain and the story ends with his death.

What makes Pollard's work so different and exciting, given this literary field, is that in her novella *Karl* (first published in 1992) problems of psychic dislocation and identity are explored through a main character who is a young sensitive male, rather than a young sensitive female. Pollard hence subverts the more dominant theme of Caribbean women's writing where the focus is on women's dual colonisation and dual marginalisation, terms used to designate the convergence of colonial and sexual exploitation, and inserts in its place the focus on the dual colonisation and marginalisation of a man. Pollard hence provides a convincing reversal of, and variation on, the common take on gender, colonisation and marginalisation, allowing it to be seen from a new perspective.

The reason that the achievement of a Caribbean identity by women is of particular interest, is that gender issues intersect with those of race and social mobility.²⁴ Gender is at war in Pollard's homeland, Jamaica. The men in her stories are unwilling to commit themselves and have a tendency to be unfaithful in their ongoing relationships with

²³ Olive Senior's short story 'The Two Grandmothers', published in her *The Arrival of the Snake Woman*, explores a similar conflict and, as in Hodge's novel, it is the rural and more traditional life style which is rejected in favour of an urban, middle-class lifestyle. [Olive Senior (1989) *The Arrival of the Snake Woman*. Harlow: Longman.]

²⁴ On Caribbean perceptions of and attitudes to 'upward mobility', see Karen Fog Olwig (1993) *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis*. London: Harwood Academic Publishers, p.173-76.

women. Even when they agree to marriage, there is usually another woman somewhere in the background. Relationships are short-lived, fleeting, tenuous.²⁵

Velma Pollard herself discusses the underlying dynamics of Caribbean women's writing in two poems, 'Women Poets (with your permission)' and 'Versions' (both written in December 1979), which are published almost as a preface to her collection of short stories *Considering Woman* (1989). Before I go on to discuss general questions relating to identity and dislocation, and although I do not discuss Pollard's poetry elsewhere in this thesis, an examination of these two poems will serve as an ideal introduction to some of the key issues of Caribbean women's literature as such.

Women as Authors - Two Poems

Women Poets (with your permission)

the little man
too early home today surprised me scribbling
ahaa . . . I see you
take your little write
well let me see your book . . .
mhmm . . . mhmm . . . not bad not bad
a little comma here
a period there
that sentence can make sense . . .
almost

your friend there scribbling too
and Genie down the road
well well how nice
not mad not mad . . .²⁶

In her poem, 'Women Poets (with your permission)', Velma Pollard presents an informed and convincing snapshot of a literary 'community' marked by solidarity, three women writing in secret, who are discovered by the early and unexpected return of 'the little man'. The poem shows the constraints which women are subject to if they wish to make heard and visible those aspects of their selfhood that were previously mute and obscured.

²⁵ See, for instance, Pollard's 'Cages' in *Considering Woman* (1989), and 'A Night's Tale' and 'Altamont Jones' in *Karl and Other Stories* (1994).

²⁶ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, xi.

In 'Women Poets', Pollard highlights female bonding and the shared identity, as yet unvoiced and silently at work, which is involved in the hitherto secretive, creative life of the homemakers, now unveiled by 'the little man'. The poem affirms that creative activity frequently (perhaps primarily) takes place outside formal contexts of publication, and may be seen as an affirmation of creativity and the poets' existence as Caribbean women. Much of what may be written may never be published or even be written for others to read. Through the centuries there is no lack of records of women who wrote in secret, or who wrote anonymously, and were either only given recognition as authors after their death, or never publicly acknowledged for their contribution to the literary world.²⁷

The three women have come together in one 'home' to write their poetry. The fact that their discovery takes place in that home, makes their exposure all the more unsettling, as one would think this a most secure places, a place that would offer them protection. By making this private space 'public', it shifts and becomes dislocated. They are deprived of some of their autonomy.

The tone of the poem suggests that the 'little man' does not seem to be completely surprised to find his wife writing. Once their secret has been discovered or, rather, once the 'little man's' suspicions have been confirmed, the women's poems are exposed to the scrutiny of the male gaze: "I see you take your little write". He shows an interest by requesting to see her work. As he reads it he comments on punctuation and syntax, but as he does not acknowledge the content of what he reads, perhaps he does not understand it.

ahaa . . . I see you
take your little write
[...]
your friend there scribbling too
and Genie down the road²⁸

Although the woman poet herself says "surprised me scribbling," her partner does in fact appear to acknowledge her 'scribbling' as 'writing', suggesting that he has elevated

²⁷ Mary Eagleton ed. (1986) *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.39-46; Terry Lovell (1987) *Consuming Fiction*. London: Verso, p.39-44. Also see Joanna Russ (1983) *How To Suppress Women's Writings*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

²⁸ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, xi.

his partner's writing above that of her friends. He nevertheless appears to hold the view that any text written by a woman needs correcting. His comment "not mad not mad", which echoes his earlier "not bad not bad", may be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand he is being sarcastic, and although he tells them they are not mad he believes they are, all three of them. All three of them are acknowledged; "well how nice, how triply nice" could also mean and how 'triply mad'. On the other hand, it could be a positive appraisal, and although what he has discovered is rather unusual, it is not quite the 'madness' which others would see it as.

One should be careful to note however, that apart from some criticism and praise, no matter whether the praise is sincere or not, he does not object to his partner continuing to write at home. He does not destroy her work but looks at it and makes comments. The overall tone of the poem does however suggest that the women are being humoured and are allowed to indulge in their 'little' activity, as they cannot cause any harm.

Pollard's poem reveals the conflicts arising from women's traditional role in the family as homemakers, and the problems this poses for those women who are educated and are capable of writing creatively, but have to do so in secret, as if it were a criminal act. And if it is not the need for secretiveness, then there are other manifold reasons why writing is in competition, rather than in conflict, with women's traditional roles. As Pollard herself explains,

because I am a woman, I have seen myself as a mother, as a wife, as a person who earns, and a writer, really, only as something I do for myself. So I think it is less because of my female sex than because of my sex roles. The roles that have become important have been getting the children out of the way and all the rest of it, so in the same way that writing has had to just take a little pigeon hole out of my real life in terms of time: [...] certainly poetry is something you write and you enjoy it and so, but you don't see yourself as a poet.²⁹

At the same time, according to Davies and Fido, the reason that the poetic output by Caribbean women is growing in particular, may well be "because poetry can be

²⁹ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.171-72.

achieved more easily in conjunction with a busy life."³⁰

The part-bracketed title of the poem is particularly interesting, as "(with your permission)" could be seen to confirm the secretiveness of the women's writing, and therefore permission must be sought from the anonymous writers before Pollard can tell their story. In actual fact, the title was intended to imply a request to men for their permission for women to be poets. Pollard originally wrote 'Women Poets' because she wondered why Pam Mordecai had approached Mervyn Morris to co-edit *Jamaica Woman: An Anthology of Fifteen Jamaican Woman Poets* (1980), rather than doing it alone. In fact, the poem's original title had been 'Woman Poet, or Mervyn, with Your Permission'. However, Pollard acknowledges what she calls the "business of somebody who can look at your work and fix it"³¹ and accepts that encouragement, such as provided by Morris to Mordecai, has a value, as she admits to having experienced herself.

I wrote something that I thought sounded, well, sort of 'goodish,' [laughter] and I sent it to my sister [novelist, Erna Brodber], because we used to send stuff, not necessarily serious stuff - all kinds of things, references - anything. [...] And she showed it to Eddie Brathwaite apparently, and he thought it was - well, he probably used a lot of superlatives which she relayed to me.³²

Pollard's dedication in her volume *Karl and Other Stories* notes that it was her sister, Erna Brodber, who was the one "who saw the first pages of *Karl* and said I could write."³³ Similarly, speaking of a line in her poem 'After Cages', Pollard relates how

I had attached it to another line and Eddie [Brathwaite] just took his pencil and said, 'What about here?' And now it looks so right I can hardly remember when 'newly old' was not standing there significantly. So it does help if somebody can

³⁰ Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (1990) 'Introduction: Women and Literature in the Caribbean: An Overview', in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido eds. *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature*. Trenton: African World Press, p.7.

³¹ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.173.

³² Ibid.

³³ Velma Pollard (1994) *Karl and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman, dedication.

just look. And I think that after a while one picks up the skill oneself.³⁴

Pollard also explores the nature of the authorship of Caribbean women in her poem 'Version', in which she draws on the stereotypical male-female relationship, the superior male and the inferior female, and finely satirises the Biblical story of creation.³⁵ Indeed, the title of the poem suggests that the poem itself is an adaptation of some other work, a literary translation of sorts.

The characters in 'Version' are called Adam and Eve. Pollard has adapted the Old Testament story to illustrate man's superior status over woman, for in the poem Eve appeals to and pleads with Adam for the freedom to be accepted as a literate person.

In the Book of Genesis, God informs Eve that "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee".³⁶ The creation story also shows man's weaknesses, for when man/Adam is questioned by God, he immediately blames woman/Eve for his wrong doing. While making man feel that he is in control, woman in fact cleverly controls and manipulates him. Furthermore, when Eve ate the fruit from the tree in the Garden of Eden, she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and therefore woman gained knowledge before man did.

Eve, like the women in 'Women Poets', is discovered writing as her partner returns unexpectedly. Her instinctive reaction is to hide her work, but Adam whose curiosity is aroused, insists on seeing what she has hidden, and hence 'discovers' her work of poetry.

but Adam saw and curious
would see more . . .
and so she gave the satchel up
lines lines milady
what is this
turned poet . . . woman . . . well
amen so let it be³⁷

Again there is no criticism and no destruction of her work. In fact one could say that for Adam to say "amen" is high praise indeed. Perhaps encouraged by this, Eve responds

³⁴ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.173.

³⁵ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, xii-xiii.

³⁶ Genesis, 3:16; King James version.

³⁷ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, xii-xiii.

O Adam
make me poet please
and not no wo-man poet
let me be free
and gender-
less dear Ad . . .³⁸

The poem shows man, in this case Adam, nevertheless as a figure of authority. Only if he accepts Eve as a poet, regardless of her sex, then truly she is a poet. This reinforces man's superiority and authority.

The principal issue that these two poems raises, is the wish of those women who write in secret to be discovered, to be made authors, to receive respect and recognition and not to have their work ridiculed and destroyed. The poems also raise the question of whether black women writers have a need, or even a desire, for a man (not necessarily a published male poet, their partners, professional or unprofessional will do), to endorse their status and provide them with an identity they would not otherwise be able to obtain. In addition, Caribbean women writers face problems of 'access', which, as employed by Joan Anim-Addo, "is here used to refer to both the women writer's [*sic*] access to publication and the reader's access to that which is available through publication."³⁹ While the task of "persuading multinational commercial publishers to accept work for publication" is less difficult now than a few decades ago, Anim-Addo notes that "the struggle for publication remains, particularly for those women writers interested to explore the Creole voice."⁴⁰ In this respect, Pollard, for whom that Creole voice is of considerable importance, has done rather well, given that her work has been published by Longman, as well as by the Women's Press.

The modern feminist movement in the Caribbean has been the catalyst that has brought the woman writer to a self-conscious recognition of the need to express herself, her inner voice, in writing. To date, these writings provide the most extensive articulation of issues of gender in the Caribbean, as well as providing insight into and an

³⁸ Ibid., xiii.

³⁹ Joan Anim-Addo (1996) 'Audacity and Outcome: Writing African-Caribbean Womanhood', in Joan Anim-Addo ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writings*. London: Whiting and Birch, p.213.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.215. Also see, Susanne Mühleisen (1996) 'Encoding the Voice: Caribbean Women's Writing and Creole', in Joan Anim-Addo ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writings*. London: Whiting and Birch.

understanding of the cultural, social, economic and political contexts of Caribbean literature. Pollard herself argues that a paper of hers on Olive Senior "will support the argument that Caribbean fiction, inspired as it is by Caribbean reality, has had no difficulty in describing women who play positive leadership roles, taking their rightful place."⁴¹

This female vision of the world found in women's own writings (as opposed to orality), their version of how they themselves perceive the positions they occupy in their societies, demonstrates how important it is to pay attention to women's alternative views of women's lives, possibly allowing for a more balanced overall account of gender relations in the Caribbean.

Pollard's desire to write about women is also a clear indication of her realisation of women's needs for a cultural heritage, and in this Pollard's combination of her feminist concerns with her preoccupations with Jamaican culture makes a considerable contribution to women's writings of the Caribbean. Not least, Pollard gives voice to the oppression of women, which was one of the consequences of the male assertion of radical and political power during the rise of the Caribbean nationalist movement in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴²

Yet, the Caribbean has not gone untouched by the winds of change, including growing freedom and opportunities for women. Education, which has given an increasing number of women entry into economic independence and professional status is also altering the respective status of women and men. Women are beginning to assert their sexual equality and are no longer prepared to wait at home on their men folk, but are perceived as pursuing and fulfilling their own ambitions and desires.⁴³ In recent years, partly as a result of better educational and employment opportunities, and the influence of the feminist movement, an increasing number of women writers have had their work published. Amongst these, the work of Olive Senior, Lorna Goodison, Jamaica Kincaid and Claire Harris have been of particular interest to literary critics.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Velma Pollard (1998) 'Images of Women in the Short Stories of Olive Senior', in Helene Pyne-Timothy (ed.), *The Woman Writer and Caribbean Society*. Los Angeles: University of California, p.117.

⁴² See Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, especially chapter 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, especially chapter 9.

⁴⁴ Bruce King (1995) 'Introduction', in Bruce King ed. *West Indian Literature*, second edition. London: Macmillan, p.6.

By the end of the 1980s, access to Caribbean women's writing was aided by the publication of a number of anthologies, including the ground-breaking collection of poems *Jamaica Woman* (edited by Pamela Mordcai and Mervyn Morris, 1980), and a collection of short stories by thirty-one Caribbean women, *Her True-True Name* (edited by Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson, 1989), which Joan Anim-Addo calls "an exciting and major step in the literary history of women of the region" which "interrupted and changed patterns of access to publication by women" and "signalled within the Anglophone world, the arrival on the literary scene of a diverse body of writing from Caribbean women."⁴⁵

In the field of literary criticism similar developments were in progress. In 1988 the first International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers took place at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, with a second conference taking place in 1990 at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad. Both conferences have resulted in the publication of corresponding volumes, *Caribbean Women Writers*, published in 1990, and *The Woman, the Writer and Caribbean Society*, eventually published in 1998. Contemporaneous with these is a volume edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, published in 1990.⁴⁶ Intriguingly, Harold Bloom, the 'Patriarchal Critic' (the Adam of Pollard's 'Version?'), recently edited and introduced a critical reader, *Caribbean Women Writers*, published in 1997.⁴⁷ All in all, however, Caribbean women, it would seem, no longer need to appeal: "O Adam/make me poet please."⁴⁸

As Helena Pyne-Timothy maintains in her introduction to *The Woman, the Writer and Caribbean Society*,

⁴⁵ Joan Anim-Addo (1996) 'Audacity and Outcome: Writing African-Caribbean Womanhood', in Joan Anim-Addo ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writings*. London: Whiting and Birch, p.212-13. More than a third of the stories which appear in *Caribbean New Wave: Contemporary Short Stories*, published in 1990, are by Caribbean women writers, reflecting, according to its editor, "the impact that women have had in changing the focus and voice of West Indian writing in recent years." [Stewart Brown ed. (1990) 'Introduction', in Stewart Brown ed. *Caribbean New Wave: Contemporary Short Stories*. Oxford: Heinemann, p.viii.]

⁴⁶ For a more recent collection, see Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. (1999) *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan.

⁴⁷ Harold Bloom ed. (1997) *Caribbean Women Writers*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House.

⁴⁸ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, xiii.

through their work [Caribbean women writers] have reclaimed their homeland and are assisting in the assertion of identity, the infusion of meaning, and the transformation of society which art can accomplish. The Conference wishes to embrace and honor all Caribbean women writers, whatever their national origin or their domicile, so long as they were part of that vital recuperation in time and space dedicated to the assertion of a Caribbean unity and understanding.⁴⁹

Caribbean women's writing, hence, is about a great deal more than merely asserting one's self and one's womanhood in the context of a male dominated society, as the following sections will show.

Identity and Dislocation

J. Michael Dash states that "the point of departure of Caribbean literature has been the effort to write the subject into existence. Its master theme has been the quest for individual identity."⁵⁰ This applies nowhere more than to the work of Caribbean women writers.

However, 'identity' is a much contested keyword in contemporary social and cultural theory, as well as in cultural politics. Nor is the concern with issues of identity a recent fad, for, as Heidegger has written, "[e]verywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of every kind, identity makes its claim upon us."⁵¹

Beryl Gilroy, who was born in Guyana but now lives in England, writes that

identity to me, is not strands of effectiveness, group-belonginess or economic stability. Rather, it is the fear of being forgotten, of failing to resist the anguish of indifference, rejection and betrayal; and of being unable to fuse all the expressive

⁴⁹ Helen Pyne-Timothy (1998) 'Introduction', in Helen Pyne-Timothy ed. *The Woman, the Writer and Caribbean Society*. Los Angeles: University of California, p.x.

⁵⁰ J. Michael Dash (1989) 'Introduction', in Edouard Glissant *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, p xiii. Also see chapter 1 in Renu Juneja (1996) *Caribbean Transactions: West Indian Culture in Literature*, London: Macmillan.

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger (1969) *Identity and Difference* (trans. J. Stambaugh). New York: Harper and Row, p.26.

moments of life into a panorama of reality that could be called authentic.⁵²

By stressing human 'existence', Gilroy argues that her "search for identity" allows her to explore key themes in her interpretation of "existentialism".

The existentialist approach to analysing culture and identity engages, in my opinion, such concepts as subjectivity, choice, free-will, and individuality, thus counterbalancing the belief that society, its structure and its laws should bear all responsibility for the outcomes of individual lives. The ability to choose and to act freely and judge for oneself does not only affect existence, it also enhances human effort in the struggle for existence⁵³

But such choices are neither easy nor straightforward, for, as Jeffrey Weeks argues, "[b]y saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire." These choices, these beliefs, needs and desires, however "are often patently in conflict, not only between communities but within individuals themselves."⁵⁴

Identity is founded both in the individual person and in the culture and society to which they belong. It is not static and unchangeable, but varies as circumstances and attitudes change; and it is not uniform and undifferentiated, but has several components and forms. Indeed, according to the Jamaican-born sociologist Stuart Hall, there are two ways of conceptualising 'cultural identity'. The first holds that

our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. The 'oneness,' underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of 'Caribbean-ness', of the black experience. It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover,

⁵² Beryl Gilroy (1995) 'My Approach to Writing Fiction/faction and Prose Poetry', in Carole Boyce Davies and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie eds. *Moving Beyond Boundaries, Vol.1: International Black Women's Writings*. London: Pluto Press, p.53.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jeffrey Weeks (1990) 'The Value of Difference', in Jonathan Rutherford ed. (1990) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, p.89.

excavate, bring to light and express [...].⁵⁵

This view is expressed by Erik Erikson, who argues that "identity [...] connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself [...] and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others."⁵⁶

But there is another, more unsettling way of conceptualising cultural identity, namely as something which entails what Hall calls "not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity."⁵⁷ It is this view which recognises and focuses on "the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's 'uniqueness'." While all cultural identities have histories, they are subject to continuous transformations. "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'."⁵⁸ This is of relevance to individual identity, as much as it is to cultural identity. According to Jeffrey Weeks,

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives one a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others, and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing. Each of us lives with a variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance: [...] the list is potentially infinite, and so therefore are our possible belongings. Which of them we focus on, bring to the fore, 'identify' with, depends on a host of factors. At the centre, however, are the values we share or wish to share with others.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Stuart Hall (1990) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford ed. (1990) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, p.232.

⁵⁶ Erik Erikson (1959) *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: International Universities Press, p.102.

⁵⁷ Stuart Hall (1990) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford ed. (1990) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, p.224. Also see Keya Ganguly (1992) 'Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood.' *Cultural Studies*, Vol.6, No.1.

⁵⁸ Stuart Hall (1990) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford ed. (1990) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, p.225.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Weeks (1990) 'The Value of Difference', in Jonathan Rutherford ed. (1990) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, p.88.

In Hall's words, cultural identities are not "an essence, but a *positioning*," they are "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."⁶⁰ Hence, Hall argues, there is a need

to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the processes of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity and the process of forced and 'free' migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called 'post-colonial' world.⁶¹

In many ways identity has become the central issue of post-colonialism, not least as reflected within post-colonial literatures.⁶² As Peter Childs and Patrick Williams have maintained, the "question of identity traverses post-colonial thinking," just as the "problem of unsettled or unsettling identities [...] is an issue at the heart of post-colonialism."⁶³ Moreover, as Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh argue, Caribbean literature occupies a special place in post-colonialism, not only because "post-colonial criticism and theory had become the dominant paradigm through which Caribbean literature is constructed and read outside the Caribbean," but because "Caribbean literature in the 1990s is the consolidation of post-colonial literature as a cogent field of academic scholarship."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Stuart Hall (1990) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford, ed. (1990) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), p.225-26.

⁶¹ Stuart Hall (1996) 'Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?', in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay ed. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, p.4.

⁶² For introductory monographs on post-colonial literature, see Elleke Boehmer (1995) *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, and the seminal volume by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helena Tiffin (1989) *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge. Also see Peter Childs and Patrick Williams (1997) *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, as well as the papers collected in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin eds. (1995) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, London: Routledge.

⁶³ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams (1997) *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.13.

⁶⁴ Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawton Welsh (1996) 'The 1990s - Introduction', in Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawton Welsh eds. *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*. London: Routledge, p.438.

Given the socio-economic history of the Caribbean, it should be of no surprise that migration and dislocation, identity and a quest for belonging, should be dominant themes in West Indian literature. According to David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe,

West Indians, historically, have only travelled to work. Between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, they had been shipped from Africa and India to the West Indies to work in the plantations. In the period up to the Second World War, they were recruited to build the Panama canal and to work in the factories in the United States of America. After the Second World War there was great demand in Britain as the nation began to build broken cities.⁶⁵

Many factors may play a part in causing people to migrate. Throughout history there have been internal and external migrations, both voluntary and forced, caused by radical changes in climate, natural disasters, wars, or inspired by a desire for radical change, the search of food, better living conditions, and land, amongst other reasons. There are also those who never actually do migrate, but do keep thinking of doing so, as they too want to pursue a better life.

For the people of the Caribbean, in Pollard's own words, it was the "industrial expansion that had caused [Britain] to call the children of the empire to cross the sea."⁶⁶ Jamaican migration to Britain between 1948 and 1962 did not originate out of a historical or cultural vacuum, but within a space which had been occupied by the experience of a colonisation in which the 'Mother Country' as an organising narrative had played a key role. The 'Mother Country' was perceived as welcoming as the 'home' of a 'family of nations', which had invited Jamaicans to come. According to Mary Chamberlain

'home' as a mechanism for social control, and a metaphor of imperial loyalty, featured in the ideology of Empire and it was this ideology which was one of the distinguishing features of the post war migration from the Caribbean to Britain.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Dabydeen, David and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1997) *A Reader's Guide to Westindian and Black British Literature*. London: Hansib, p.80.

⁶⁶ Velma Pollard (1994) *Homestretch*. Harlow: Longman, p.6.

⁶⁷ Mary Chamberlain (1997) *Narratives of Exile and Return*. London: Macmillan, p.70.

Since that day in June 1948 when 492 Jamaicans disembarked at Tilbury, England, from the *S.S. Empire Windrush*, several hundred thousand West Indians, Africans and Asians came to live in Britain.⁶⁸ As Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe explain

West Indians were actively recruited to work, through advertisements placed in the West Indian journals by London Transport, the British Hotels and Restaurant Association, and similar organisations. They came to work in factories, buses trains, hotels and hospitals, in jobs traditionally of low status and low pay.⁶⁹

In concurrence with Mary Chamberlain's views, Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe argue that West Indian immigrants "came with a sense of cultural identification with the Motherland. They saw themselves as British. [...] The journey to Britain however was a journey to an illusion, for the West India immigrants faced the reality of rejection by the Motherland."⁷⁰ The immigrants felt rejected and their illusions of Britain were shattered. "They may have believed passionately in their closeness and affinity to Britain and possessed a sense of belonging, but the British were equally convinced of their alienness, their otherness."⁷¹

Among the immigrants from 1948 onwards were young writers (Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Roger Mais and others) many of whom had already published works in the West Indies.⁷² According to Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe, the writers from the colonies who arrived in Britain felt a need and duty to reveal to the British readership the human values that resided in black communities. The West Indian writer, then, was a missionary in reverse, arriving in Britain to educate and civilise the ignorant.⁷³

⁶⁸ Dabydeen, David and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1997) *A Reader's Guide to Westindian and Black British Literature*. London: Hansib, p.79.

⁶⁹ Dabydeen, David and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1997) *A Reader's Guide to Westindian and Black British Literature*. London: Hansib, p.80.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.80-81.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.80.

⁷² Ibid., p.83.

⁷³ For an interesting anthology of writings reflecting on the experience of that period and the intervening years, see Oneykachi Wambu ed. (1998) *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain*. London: Victor Gollancz.

Wherever they may live, the peoples of the Caribbean are conscious of having come from somewhere else, however many centuries ago. Because West Indians have been brought together, 'home' is somewhere in-between. This does not necessarily give them a great sense of mobility, because those who leave Jamaica usually want to return if only in death. As Winston James puts it, "the fact remains that if black people have their way very few of their corpses will be interred in British graves."⁷⁴ This is an issue Pollard addresses in several of her writings, including *Homestretch*,⁷⁵ 'My Mother',⁷⁶ and 'Miss Chandra'.⁷⁷

Carole Boyce Davies has remarked of Caribbean women's writing in the United States, that "[m]igration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home."⁷⁸ Yet, this going back, this returning, this dreaming of Jamaica and of the Caribbean, is problematic. Immigrants who only manage to return after thirty years or more, idealise their 'home', just as do those who have never actually been 'home', having been bored 'abroad'. They idealise home "to such an extent that the 'Back Home' helps fill all the emotional and ideological holes" that their 'home' away from the Caribbean does not fill.⁷⁹ 'Back Home' becomes "the ideal place, the true place,"⁸⁰ which becomes so romanticised, that the reality encountered upon one's return can be very disappointing.

'Home' is a symbol of both place and belonging, the transmission of which plays a key role in British-West Indies identities. The populated islands of the West Indies form one of the most ethnically kaleidoscopic regions in the world, making the people a vibrant composite of Europe, Africa and Asia. The novelist Caryl Phillips, who divides his time between Britain, America and the West Indies, once declared "Home is a word I

⁷⁴ Winston James (1993) 'Migration, Racism and Identity Formation: The Caribbean Experience in Britain', in Winston James and Clive Harris eds. *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*. London: Verso, p.246.

⁷⁵ Velma Pollard (1994) *Homestretch*. Harlow: Longman.

⁷⁶ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press.

⁷⁷ Velma Pollard (1994) *Karl and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman.

⁷⁸ Carole Boyce Davies (1994) *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, p.113.

⁷⁹ Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar (1988) 'Alien-Nation: Strangers At Home', in Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar eds. *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*. London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, p.11.

never, ever use," although he also maintains that his books are "a key definition of home."⁸¹

As Carole Boyce Davies argues in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, the de-centring of home and exile advances the critique of labelling, place, origin, home/lands. It is a recognition that because of their history, black women themselves have to redefine the contours of what identity, location, writing, theory and time mean, and thus redefine themselves against the constructs of Empire.⁸² Hence, according to Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe, in "the West India literature the theme of migration has been a response both to an actual historical phenomenon and to a psychological problem created by colonial relations."⁸³

Charting the Journey, a collection of writings by black and third world women, highlights the diverse issues involved in considering 'home' and 'exile'. As the editors argue in their introduction to the first part of the volume,

A Home where we are unable to voice our criticisms is not a genuine Home. Nor is a genuine Home one where you assimilate, integrate and disappear. For being invisible is the same as not being at Home. Not being at Home enough to be precisely who you are without any denials of language or culture. Until we can be both visible and belong, the word 'home' will remain for us ambiguous, ironic, and even sarcastic. We will still be 'Strangers at Home'.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, some of the arguments by the authors of *Charting the Journey* seem

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Yet, in an article appropriately called 'At last I know where home is,' Phillips tells John Coldstream how a gruelling voyage, undertaken for a new book, did give him a sense of belonging. Standing on board deck, on a bleak morning in late winter, he looked at the white cliffs and realised that he was not just relieved, but "happy to be home." [John Coldstream (2000) 'At Last I Know Where Home Is'. *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 May.] Interestingly, 'home' here is England.

⁸² Carole Boyce Davies (1994) *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, p.96.

⁸³ Dabydeen, David and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1997) *A Reader's Guide to Westindian and Black British Literature*. London: Hansib, p.49.

⁸⁴ Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar (1988) 'Alien-Nation: Strangers At Home', in Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar eds. *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*. London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, p.11.

misguided because they elevate their dislocation as if white people have never suffered from being home-less, ignored, and deprived of their freedom. Not only black people are attacked in their homes, raped, abused, deported, and so on; all peoples at some time or other in history have suffered in such a way.

The experience of migration often relates to the calling into question of many of the aspects of identity that make up an individual's personality and psychological self-image. One's social identity is also open to transformation through migration. When migration affects small communities, it can result in considerable social upheaval, for often the more ambitious and educated leave, although they are also needed at home. Gender issues also play a part and are affected by movement.⁸⁵

The articulation of a variety of identities, the migration between identities, is central to our understanding of the ways in which Caribbean women writers express notions of 'home' in their works. Indeed, the term is notable for the frequency with which it appears in the titles of books by Caribbean women writers, for example, Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*,⁸⁶ Vernella Fuller's *Going Back Home*,⁸⁷ Joan Cambridge's *Clarise Cumberbatch Want to Go Home*,⁸⁸ June Henfrey's *Coming Home*,⁸⁹ and, last not least, Velma Pollard's *Homestretch*.⁹⁰

However, in all these works, 'home' is elusive and treated in varying ways,⁹¹ just as different traditions, such as 'English Literature' as opposed to 'literatures in English',

⁸⁵ For an excellent study of the perception of and motivation for Caribbean out-migration, see Elizabeth Thomas-Hope (1992) *Explanation in Caribbean Migration: Perception and the Image: Jamaica, Barbados, St Vincent*. London: Macmillan.

⁸⁶ Erna Brodber (1980) *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*. London: New Beacon.

⁸⁷ Vernella Fuller (1992) *Going Back Home*. London: The Women's Press.

⁸⁸ Joan Cambridge (1987) *Clarise Cumberbatch Want to Go Home*. London: The Women's Press.

⁸⁹ June Henfrey (1994) *Coming Home: Stories*. Leeds: Peepal Tree.

⁹⁰ Velma Pollard (1994) *Homestretch*. Harlow: Longman.

⁹¹ The word 'home' is a term used with difficulty for purposes of analysis because it is so emotive and conjures up different images for different people. For me, for example, 'home' connotes first and foremost nurture and comfort. For others, 'home' may not have such positive associations. For a subjective and varied collection of 'homes', see Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar (1988) 'Alien-Nation: Strangers At Home', in Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar eds. *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*. London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, p.9.

may represent ideologies of 'home' differently.⁹² According to Rosemary Marangoly George, "[o]ver the course of the last hundred or so years, the concept of 'home' (and of home-country) has been re-rooted and re-routed in fiction written in English by colonizers, the colonized, newly independent peoples and immigrants."⁹³

In her outstanding book *The Politics of Home*, George argues that contemporary writing in which the politics and experience of location (or rather dislocation) are the central narratives, should be called the "Immigrant Genre".⁹⁴ This immigrant genre is born of a history of global colonialism and is therefore a participant in decolonizing discourses. Like the distance that exile imposes on a writing subject, writers of the immigrant genre also view the present in terms of its distance from the past and future.

According to George, "[i]mmigration and the fictions it engenders teach a certain detachment about 'home'."⁹⁵ In these texts, as in Velma Pollard's *Homestretch*,

identity is linked only hypothetically [...] to a specific geographical place on the map. And yet, wandering at the margins of another's culture does not necessarily mean that one is marginal. Home in the immigrant genre is a fiction that one can relocate or recreate at will. [...] As postmodern and postcolonial subjects, we surprise ourselves by our detachment from the things we were taught to be attached to.⁹⁶

The politics of location bring forward a whole host of identifications and associations around concepts of place, placement, displacement, location, dislocation, citizenship, alienation, boundaries, barriers, transportations, peripheries, cores and centres. The process of locating allows one to identify sites of resistance, examples of which are identified in my discussion of Pollard's novel *Homestretch*.

Paul White has argued that "we live in what has recently been termed 'The Age of

⁹² For a remarkable work by a white British author dealing with the problem of 'home', departure and return in a British setting, see the stories in Kirsty Gunn (1999) *The Place You Return to Is Home*. London: Granta Books.

⁹³ Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Reflections and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. London: University of California Press, p.1.

⁹⁴ Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Reflections and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. London: University of California Press, p.171.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.200.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Migration'.⁹⁷ In John Berger's words, emigration "is the quintessential experience of our time."⁹⁸ Geographical movement can be seen as a crucial human experience, which transforms the elements involved in the structured circumstances that underpin migration systems, as well as the places and people bound up in migratory experiences. Migration therefore changes people and mentalities. As Berger has argued succinctly,

Originally home meant the centre of the world - not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense. [...] Emigration does not only involve leaving behind, crossing waters, living amongst strangers, but, also, undoing the very meaning of the world [...]. [T]o emigrate is always to dismantle the centre of the world, and so to move into a lost, disoriented one of fragments.⁹⁹

New experiences result from the coming together of multiple influences and peoples, and these new experiences lead to altered or evolving representations of experience, of meanings, and of self-identity.

Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson argue that there are in fact two notions of home, "home versus movement, and home as movement", just as there are two related conceptualisations of identity, "identity through fixity, and identity through movement."¹⁰⁰ According to Rapport and Dawson,

It is in and through the continuity of movement that human beings continue to make themselves at home; seeing themselves continually in stories, and continually telling the stories of their lives, people recount their lives to themselves and others as movement.¹⁰¹

With respect to Caribbean identities this argument is partly borne out by Mary

⁹⁷ Paul White (1995) 'Geography, Literature and Migration', in Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White eds. *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*. London: Routledge, p.1. The phrase 'Age of Migration' is borrowed by White from S. Castles and M.J. Miller (1993) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. London: Macmillan.

⁹⁸ John Berger (1984) *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*. London: Readers and Writers, p.55.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.55-7.

¹⁰⁰ Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (1998) 'Home and Movement: A Polemic', in Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*. Oxford: Berg, p.30.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.33.

Chamberlain, who has argued that "the experience of migration itself developed, paradoxically, a consciousness of the Caribbean, and an awareness of its unique placement and position."¹⁰² Carole Boyce Davies likewise affirms that Caribbean identities are "products of numerous processes of migration," on account of which the Caribbean is "not so much a geographical location but a cultural construction based on a series of mixtures, languages, communities of people."¹⁰³

And it is not just the identity of a place that is important, but also the identity that a person or a group has with that place, in particular whether they are experiencing it as an insider or an outsider.¹⁰⁴ Identity must be considered with reference to the ways in which identities develop and are maintained, yet also change. I would argue that at the heart of any debate of Caribbean experiences must be a consideration of the constituent components of the identity of places, and of the forms and levels of dislocation, of 'outsideness' and 'insiderness'.

Velma Pollard herself explains that

I think you only begin to search for your identity when you compare yourself in some kind of way with another world. As long as we are here and we recognize it, this is where we are. Then you don't have to speak to the identity problem, but I think that the first thing is that for a very long time our education was outside of here. So that the people who went away were always into the identity search. I think it has carried over, even to a lot of the people who did not go.¹⁰⁵

In her prologue to *The Politics of Home*, George addresses this very issue of identity through difference, when she asks 'what are the dimensions of 'home'?' and replies:

¹⁰² Mary Chamberlain (1998) 'Introduction', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.5.

¹⁰³ Carole Boyce Davies (1994) *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, p.13.

¹⁰⁴ See E. Carter, J. Donald, and J. Squares eds. (1993) *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*. London: Lawrence & Wishart. Also see, Linda McDowell (1999) *Gender, Identity And Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Cambridge: Polity Press. For an incisive discussion of identity and place, albeit in a context very different from the Caribbean, see Anthony P. Cohen ed. (1982) *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹⁰⁵ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.178.

I would like to suggest that the basic organising principle around which the notion of the 'home' is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive. Home, I will argue, along with gender/sexuality, race, and class, acts as an ideological determinant of the subject. The term 'home-country' in itself expresses a complex yoking of ideological apparatuses considered necessary for the existence of the subjects: the notion of belonging, of having a home, and a place of one's own. And yet, in the very reference to a 'home-country' lies the indication that the speaker is away from home. This distance from the very location that one strives to define, is, I believe intrinsic to the definition that is reached.¹⁰⁶

The Caribbean is beyond doubt a place of differences: there are the different origins of its population, the many languages and cultures that are part of its history and the many different islands and countries of which it now consists. Although sharing many characteristics, the history, culture, and social composition of these places are often dissimilar. Slavery, plantation economy and immigration had a different history and different effects in each of the many countries of the Caribbean. Although there is some presence of 'Caribbean-ness' at the level of popular culture, each Caribbean country still possessively guards its own insular identity and distinctiveness.

Caribbean migratory experiences can be considered and studied through a variety of media and in a number of fields, not least literature. Indeed, I agree with Paul White's assessment that "creative literature contains some of the most effective explorations of identity issues."¹⁰⁷ By representing the experiences of particular individuals' experiences of migration, Velma Pollard's writings allow her readers to consider the nature, variety and intricacy of these experiences through literary contemplation. Indeed, Pollard writes that she has "a great desire to record aspects of life, events, and experiences which I think are worth keeping. [...] In my fiction I make these things affect imaginary people."¹⁰⁸ In this respect, Pollard's work, especially her short stories, are comparable to those of Olive Senior, whose work has been described by Alison Donnell as dealing with

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Reflections and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. London: University of California Press, p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Paul White (1995) 'Geography, Literature and Migration', in Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White eds. *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*. London: Routledge, p.2.

¹⁰⁸ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan.

those who might be considered to be on the margins of the already peripheral (in global terms) Jamaican society. The old, the young, the poor, and particularly those whose subjectivities fall between designated identities. The detail and the emotional concentration of her work convey a strong belief that these lives are interesting and worthwhile in their own right and not simply because they offer up experiences which are expedient *exempla* for contemporary cultural and political meta-narratives [...].¹⁰⁹

Arguably, the subjectivity of such lives is most appropriately explored through a particular facet of oral history, namely life stories, as exemplified by Mary Chamberlain in her extensive study *Narratives of Exile and Return*, which is based on a sample of eighty five life-story interviews across several generations of migrant families from Barbados. Mary Chamberlain argues that

The narratives recounted provide not merely rich empirical data, but are important cultural constructions in themselves. What we remember and recall is not random, but conforms and relates to this social knowledge of the world. Memory and narrative are shaped by social categories, by language and priorities, by experience and tense, by choice and context. They are also shaped by imagination, by dreams and nightmares, hopes and fantasies which, however private they may feel, are moulded by culture.¹¹⁰

The fact that life stories are constructed, such as in the interaction between teller and interviewer/listener, poses a number of important methodological issues, not least respecting the correspondence between 'real' events and the way they are narrated.¹¹¹ As C.K. Riessman warns, "informant's stories do not mirror a world 'out there.' They are constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and

¹⁰⁹ Alison Donnell (1999) 'The Short Fiction of Olive Senior', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.119.

¹¹⁰ Mary Chamberlain (1997) *Narratives of Exile and Return*. London: Macmillan, p.10.

¹¹¹ C. Linde (1993) *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press; James Peacock and Dorothy Holland (1993) 'The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process.' *Ethos*, Vol.21, No.4; Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996) 'Narrating the Self.' *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol.25.

interpretive."¹¹² It is in this regard, that there is a close relationship between life stories and the often autobiographical and fact based writings by Caribbean women.

Nevertheless, as Chamberlain stresses, this does not mean that life-stories are fictitious, for although they contain omissions, "they are not distortions."¹¹³ Instead, with respect to her research on Barbadian migrants, Chamberlain states that these life stories "are what they are: edited interviews, based on memory, which contain empirical data on the social history of Barbados [...]."¹¹⁴ And while they do indeed 'contain' such data, life stories can provide a great deal more.

Helma Lutz, for one, argues that by "focusing on immigrant women's *accounts*, a more dynamic understanding of the mental and emotional changes migrants undergo in the aftermath of their physical move, can be obtained."¹¹⁵ In particular, Lutz argues that by focusing on the life stories of these women one finds that they include "gains and losses, hopes and betrayals, successes and failures, trials and errors, interpreted and told from the perspective of today."¹¹⁶ Above all, "[l]ife-stories contain transgenerational experiences: over and above individual life-course experience they are shaped by the processing of family stories."¹¹⁷

Hence, Lutz argues,

The study of *continuity* and *change* in intergenerational transmission is crucial for a better understanding of the emotional consequences of migration and the dynamics involved in life-course changes. [...] Any attempt to understand migrants' life situation must take this intergenerational element into account.¹¹⁸

¹¹² C.K. Reissman (1993) *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park: Sage, p.4-5.

¹¹³ Mary Chamberlain (1997) *Narratives of Exile and Return*. London: Macmillan, p.12.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Helma Lutz (1998) 'The Legacy of Migration: Immigrant Mothers and Daughters and the Process of Intergenerational Transmission', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.96.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Keya Ganguly cautions that "the stories people tell about their pasts have more to do with the continuing shoring up of self-understanding than with historical truths." [Keya Ganguly (1992) 'Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood.' *Cultural Studies*, Vol.6, No.1.]

¹¹⁸ Helma Lutz (1998) 'The Legacy of Migration: Immigrant Mothers and Daughters and the Process of Intergenerational Transmission', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.105.

These family stories, these "messages of former generations[,] are mirrored in storytelling and exemplified in (moral) guidelines."¹¹⁹ It is they that provide migrants with the cultural resources they use to adapt to new environments. This, in particular, is a point addressed by Pollard's writings.

As Chamberlain points out,

Memory not only recounts; it also explains as it measures and judges. Memory not only recounts events, but offers also the attitudes and emotions which surround events, then and now. It alerts us to individual consciousness, subjectivity as well as to a collective consciousness, a culture.¹²⁰

At all times, however, consciousness, whether individual or collective, is rooted in lived experiences, in the real world of social interaction. Hence, although this thesis sets out to explore the ways in which Caribbean women's writing re-negotiates the question of identity, I am not primarily concerned with abstract models and theories, but with the 'lived-world', that is, with genuine experiences as reflected in Caribbean literature. It is for this reason, that I do at times use vocabulary that would suggest that the characters in Pollard's writings are real.

Literature can enlighten the complexities of its own contexts (national, historical, sociological, and so forth) in a manner akin to anthropological studies or ethnographies. Having reviewed Pollard's writings in the following four chapters, the ethnographic quality and significance of her work is the principal issue I shall address in my conclusion to this thesis.



¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.96.

¹²⁰ Mary Chamberlain (1997) *Narratives of Exile and Return*. London: Macmillan, p.10.

KARL: A NOVELLA

In this chapter I shall introduce Pollard's work by way of a general discussion of her novella *Karl*, which won the Casa de las Americas literary award in 1992 and which was first published in a bilingual edition in English and Spanish.¹ I have chosen *Karl* because I consider it to be central to Pollard's work, as she herself acknowledges, not least because it features many of the themes explored by her later writings, including her first novel, *Homestretch*.² In particular, *Karl* looks at the human product of a severely stratified society, caught up in dichotomies of money, skin colour and family history. The novella documents the collapse of Karl's psyche as a result of his being confronted with his status and personal history. The narrative also provides a description of the comparative lifestyles of the different classes of Jamaican society and of the beautiful Jamaican landscape against which the story of these lives is played out.

Karl, which is set in Jamaica and Canada in the early 1960s, may be described as a story of both success and tragic failure. It is primarily an autobiographical narrative by Karl Brown, a young, illegitimate Jamaican boy, son of Aunti and grandson of Gramps. Aunti, despite her name, is actually his mother, and one of many illegitimate daughters of his grandfather. Between them, Aunti and Gramps create a happy, stable and caring family household. Much of Karl's identification with location and home comes from his rural mother and grandfather who maintain continuity with the homeland and convey the multifaceted composition of Caribbean society.

His ambitious mother supports and encourages Karl to have the best education Jamaica can afford him. As Dwaine Plaza explains, "[u]ndoubtedly the most important avenue for achieving upward mobility in the Caribbean since the post-Emancipation

¹ Velma Pollard (1993) *Karl* (English & Spanish bilingual ed.; translated by Felip Cunill). Havana: Casa de las Américas. *Karl* was republished as 'Karl - a novella' in Velma Pollard (1994) *Karl and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman.

² Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan.

period is through education."³ With an outstanding academic record and great prospects in his professional career in banking, Karl is considered a success, and his education gives him a place in Caribbean society that only a few privileged black people can hope to achieve.

Karl

The title of *Karl* is as confusing as, apparently, the state of mind of Karl himself. When *Karl* was first published in 1992, it was entitled simply *Karl*. Upon its republication in 1994, it was included in a volume by Pollard entitled *Karl and Other Stories*. This, it would appear, defines *Karl* as a story. In the said volume's table of contents, however, that story is listed as 'Karl a novella'. Within the volume as such, its title page reads

Karl

KARL . . . Monologue . . . in the mind of . . . a man!!!

The running head, though, does read 'KARL A NOVELLA'. While the designation of *Karl* as a novella indicates perhaps no more than the fact that it is not a full-length novel, it is but 74 pages long, it nevertheless exhibits some of the features traditionally associated with a novella as a genre.⁴ That is, it concentrates on a single event or situation (Karl's monologue within his psychiatric unit) and comes to a surprising, yet not illogical ending (Karl's death).

As the title page of *Karl* suggests, it does indeed comprise an 'interior monologue', which is retained even when Karl speaks of himself in the third person. This 'stream of consciousness', to use another term, which aims "to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind"⁵, also comprises a significant number of flashbacks. The text is peppered with semicolons, question marks and ellipses, often defying conventional sentence structure. As such, by its very character the text conveys both the confused mind and life of Karl. This monologue only ceases with the end of

³ Dwaine Plaza (1998) 'Strategies and Strategizing: The Struggle for Upward Mobility Among University-Educated Black Caribbean Men in Canada', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.260.

⁴ J.A. Cuddon (1982) *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

the section preceding the penultimate section of the novella. That penultimate section is entitled 'Daph's Side', and presents a first person statement by Karl's estranged wife, while the final section describes a meeting between Karl's former teacher and one of his other pupils. It is only here that the reader learns that Karl did not live for long.

The novella's first seven sections consist of an extended first-person account of Karl, which provides the reader with privileged insights into his thoughts, frustrations and unexpressed emotions. The novella's seven subheadings, when listed in succession, read like a short poem about Karl. They identify and locate Karl, while emphasising the issue of identity in particular, questioning just where Karl is truly 'at home'. They are:

Enter Karl ...
Son of Aunti ...
Grandson of Gramps ...
Bright Boy
Karl ... Stranger
Karl ... Home
Karl ... Home ??????

In the section titled 'Karl ... Home', Karl is actually in Canada, but attends a Caribbean fete, which transports him back home, to Hopeville, Jamaica, the place he is proud to come from and where he was happy. On the other hand, in 'Karl ... Home ??????' Karl is living in a large townhouse in Kingston with his wife Daphne. However, despite the fact that he is 'home', his home is not a happy one but is filled with tensions. Where one would expect him to be at home, he does not appear to be so, hence the question marks. His true home is Hopeville, where he was a yard boy, not a townhouse boy in Kingston.

The reader meets Karl under disturbing circumstances, in a psychiatric unit. We first get to know him not through his words and actions, but through his thoughts, namely through how he believes he is perceived by Bredda Man, his warder. Bredda Man is very significant to Karl, as

he offers me my identification painlessly, pricelessly, in spite of this room and the cost he must recognise. Is a compliment really. [...] I take it gratefully, with both hands, but only because I had taken it myself, unoffered, long before. (5)

⁵ Ibid., p.661.

In spite of being in a private room and in spite of there being an air about Karl, Bredda Man can identify his origins. Karl feels that Bredda Man could see he was "somebody's yard boy." (5) Karl, with an education and a career that make him middle-class and place him on a higher rung of the social ladder, has already rejected those very social values that made him so. Consequently he probably felt a sense of triumph that he had shed that aura about him and that he can be identified from his roots.

As Karl awaits his release, although he does not actually want to go home, he recalls his introduction by his colleagues at the bank:

'Karl here is one of those terribly bright fellows you know; self made; went to Vineyard High in the days of those bright young pupil teachers from the country. We used to hear about them, remember? And when you saw them boy, that serious, book-centration, man . . . written all over their faces eh . . . Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! . . .' (62)

Does Karl remember that laugh as having been sneering?

Karl's participation, separation and alienation from his mother's locale, his first home, and its people, establishes a particular nostalgia for that hard but honest way of life often lost in a materialistic, cultural subsuming of identity. Karl is unable to maintain an aloof distance from 'his' people. This arises from his awareness of the so-called class position between the educated and uneducated, the acceptance of different rungs on the social ladder, but also from his inability to be indifferent to his feelings of hypocrisy towards his colleagues and to fully becoming part of the 'world' his university education could provide for him.

Aunti is very ambitious for Karl to get a good education. "Mek dih bwoy take dih Entrance, Teecha," (8) Aunti had said, without knowing how she would be able to pay the school fees. But she did find a way. Aunti continued her mid-week market at Gordon Town and from Thursdays to Saturdays she baked; she also took care of the cocoa, canes, and vegetable garden, all so that "her bright boy son could do well in his education and have a future. What a future! God bless Aunti in all her loving ignorance!" (8-9)

Realisation comes when, accidentally, Karl overhears his girlfriend Pearl telling his friends what she really thinks of him. It is that "but" and the questioning of his family members and illegitimacy, that has precipitated the fundamental change in Karl's perception of himself and others which was to change his life, as much as, if not more

than, his universal education. Pearl tells her friends that she can not see her Mama being understanding of Karl's family background. But Karl believes that those views are shared as much by Pearl herself.

'Karl want us to get engaged,' she was saying. 'He's really a nice guy you know, and I am sort of gone on him too but ... You know his grandfather went to work on the Panama Canal ... you know sort of like farm work to America. I can't see Mama dealing with that. Worse yet how she will understand why his mother is Miss Grant, and that she is a higgler in Gordon Town market.' (25)

Karl had for some time questioned his obliviousness to what should have been more obvious to him. He says, "perhaps I was a thick fellow. Perhaps I was a conceited fool. But I didn't sense any hesitation in Pearl at all when I suggested we work something out." (23)

In retrospect, Karl felt that

it was she who was to upset my apple cart which should probably have been upset years before, and send me on the first of these double-thinks, hunting behind people's honesties . . . for honesty. She made my cap start not to fit, my zoot zoot feel too tight. These days they would say she 'raised my consciousness'. I had to leave my land, Masters, to see my land . . . (23)

What is at work here is Karl's admission that he discovered his personal identity through confronting people with different values, attitudes and principles, especially those who came from different backgrounds. Pearl indirectly provided Karl with an awareness of his identity that he did not have previously. However, it would be wrong to say he had no clear sense of his identity prior to Pearl, given his comments on winning his latest scholarship.

No big difference between university and school really. Either place everybody is equal, but if you bright you more equal than others. No place in all of that to find anything wrong with yourself . . . (22)

Karl, both physically and psychologically dislocated, feels through his confrontation with a relationship at university, that his heritage could never really make him what his

education appeared to. Without his education, he was exposed to being only "a yard boy". (9) He asks himself "what could I ever be to [Pearl] indeed, stripped of all my class prizes and scholarships? Karl, son of Aunti, Grandson of Gramps, and short and black besides." (28)

As Pollard herself explains,

Very late in life I heard a friend and colleague berating an enemy with the words 'You are a scholarship boy. My parents paid for every bit of my education'. [...] To my urban, middle-class friend, being a scholarship boy was low-status, while I had thought it a matter for pride. The value of education paled there before the value of the money that could pay for it.⁶

For some, to have a good education is one thing, but to have obtained that education through scholarships, rather than by it having been paid for by one's parents, questions the value of that education and its recipient. Yet, Karl had never considered himself underprivileged. Academic success had given him a certain freedom, which he was eventually to recognise as only temporary. In referring to his move from Jamaica to Canada, where he studied, he says, "it's a long time and a big jump but when you measure it against your whole life it really isn't so big. Most of the real you is already made by the time you embark upon it." (21)

Because Karl is both hero and narrator, it is interesting that he identifies himself as "son of Aunti; grandson of Gramps; bright boy of Vineyard College." (21) There is a sense of pride in belonging to and being identified with these respected people. "Gramps was a real source of pride for me. And for him I was the brightest little boy this side of Half-Way-Tree Clock." (19) And even earlier in the narrative, "I was special, bright, teacher's 'Spesh', but popular with everybody." (9)

Daphne

Karl knows nothing but success during his school years. Consequently the reader anticipates some kind of turn of events that will lead to his downfall once he returns

⁶ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.19.

from his advanced education overseas and takes up a prestigious job. It is to Pollard's credit, however, that the surprise does not materialise as a result of weaknesses in Karl's personality. Rather it is his strength of character that makes him stumble.

Unlike most of the other males in Pollard's stories, Karl seeks domesticity, commitment and family; in part because his own father was not an acceptable model for him to emulate. The initial surprise comes from Karl's wife, Daphne, who does not want any children or anything that would hint at longevity in their relationship.

Pollard shows both a young man and a young woman who have educational opportunities abroad, but it is her female character who embraces and lives with ease the colonial culture it affords her and disregards the creole culture, whereas her male character despises the colonial culture but is unable to ignore or reject it to live out his life. Pollard explores the way in which the presence of Western cultural concepts in the Caribbean, especially in Jamaica, create the divide between the middle classes and the 'grass root' folk. The protagonist Karl emerges as a central figure of grass roots alienation following his move from the impoverished but secure life of the island to riches, professionalism and recognition.

This makes for a startling contrast with Daphne's side to things. She says, "[s]ometimes I think everything came too easy for him. That's why he couldn't appreciate certain things. Scholarship this, scholarship that," (69) in contrast to her difficulties getting funding for her nursing qualification. Although Daphne eventually got the chance to study nursing, she felt she was looked down upon once she was in England, because she did not have a high school education and because she was not UC trained. Although the resentment is obvious, Daphne is happy with the social circle she now finds herself in, as a banker's wife, whereas Karl himself loathes it. "He used to expect me, because I started out poor, to want to stay poor." (70) As Karl observes of Daphne: "... since the cocktail party thing start, Daph in her element. She really enjoy herself at these things . . . and I can't understand it. A woman who used to so love to dance and relax, now happy happy in the stiff sherry and shrimps syndrome." (37)

The husband's and wife's recognition and rejection of political issues, a lack of understanding, now conflicting but once shared interests, are also factors in Karl's eventual breakdown and death. Karl is caught in a conflict between the working-class and middle-class demands in Jamaican culture. The tension in accepting a version of Caribbean identity seems to be expressed in *Karl*, but not resolved by its writing.

The movements of the novella's characters mirror the migratory patterns of both

Karl and Daphne, beginning in the Caribbean in childhood and moving abroad in adulthood. Daphne had gone to England to study nursing, and after that she had joined the line on the new triangle: Jamaica to England, the United States or Canada, and back to Jamaica. Karl had moved from Jamaica to Canada and back.

The issue of dislocation is critical to an understanding of how Karl pursues his various identities, in other words, what it means to be a Jamaican from Hopeville, a scholar, a husband, a bank manager, and everybody's notion of a success. Nearly all of Karl's development is centred on journeying, identities, gender, nationality, heritage, sexuality and class. The novella ends with Karl embarking on a journey to his death. Daphne remarks on how she finds him:

Karl staring into space and I know him not coming back this time. Nobody telling me anything. But I know. Maybe they are not trying to fool me. Maybe they just don't know. And worse of all I am sure him don't want to come back. [...] Karl left me in his mind long ago. Long ago he found out we don't want the same things, and just like how I couldn't understand him, him couldn't understand me. (68, 70)

Daphne concludes "I know what I don't want ever again." (70)

Dislocation

The crux of the matter is that Karl never belonged. He does not belong to the psychiatric unit, he does not belong in Hopeville anymore, in Jack's Hill or with Daphne, his wife. He is alone, dislocated, displaced. This figure of the displaced, homeless person, trying to discover his own personal identity is one of the most poignant representations of the post-colonial condition. Before his death, Karl had become entirely displaced, physically and psychologically.

Karl's breakdown is symptomatic of the pains inherent in the Caribbean experience. The distrust and scornful feelings towards other people, particularly people like himself who come from a poor background, who get a good education, suggests that where one comes from, and the emotions it provokes cannot be escaped. Education can groom one, but it does not change one's roots.

In revealing his thoughts, even to himself, he can not move beyond his state of confusion and his problems. In this novella, Pollard's allegory provides me with some of the most important principles in my exploration of Caribbean literature. Pollard does not offer solutions in *Karl*. She offers sound psychological analysis, indicating a realistic attitude to educational theory and practice, and an adequate understanding of the social problems which confront Karl.⁷ In using race and colour consciousness, Pollard explores in some depth the social problems of Jamaican life, confronting not least its psychological and political aspects. Being well educated, Karl receives privileges duly assigned to a class of people who are high up on the economic and social ladder because they are correspondingly high up on the colour ladder. But Karl, the conscience-stricken hero, feels trapped by these 'inherited' privileges. The problem is that Karl cannot fully identify with the class of people he has come to socialise and work with, and rejects his poverty stricken yard boy status, because he is worried by a sense of betrayal.

At university in Canada and at the bank in Jamaica, Karl becomes aware of the shallow and hypocritical life which exists outside the realms of his book learning. However, whilst the community accepts Karl into their fold, he himself is unable to plant roots amongst the people and is only able to view them and despise them through an intellectual and disappointed eye. His colonial upbringing will not allow him to be fully immersed into the reality he has formed, but breaks under the strain. Karl is driven to madness by the tensions governing his psyche: he is unable to reconcile the past with the possibility of the future. He is unable to publicly acknowledge the position in society he has attained. In Pollard's own words, "Karl's psyche buckles under when confronted with the mores of the brown middle and upper classes."⁸

At the end of the novella, Teacher Brown, who had been a teacher to Karl, encounters another of his former pupils, Kenneth Bone. Teacher Brown reflects on how two men had found themselves in the same situation, both wanting to be outside the social circle their education had opened up for them. Ken had managed to take a different path from Karl, because Ken experienced these problems ten years after Karl, when more people were aware of the dilemmas which came with education and social

⁷ For a relevant sociological study, see Dwaine Plaza (1998) 'Strategies and Strategizing: The Struggle for Upward Mobility Among University-Educated Black Caribbean Men in Canada', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge.

⁸ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.19.

mobility. Teacher Brown says about Karl, "People didn't understand then. And because they didn't understand, they said he was mad; and because they were sane, he couldn't live . . ." (74)

Colonial Culture

Karl knows the saying that "country people say the pen is lighter than the cutlass." (11) Not only do black, rural people know that studying is easier than working in the baking sun, they also know the power of education and have great ambitions for their children. The most ironic, yet tragic thing is that all the pain and sacrifices that Aunti went through caused Karl far greater hurt.

Karl's interest in building a better Jamaica, with more equal access to wealth and opportunities, runs in opposition to that of his colleagues' views, because they in turn appropriate the power of the white elite and control those who are less privileged. Karl tries to help his people through his authority to avoid "asking for security from country people for mortgage loan." (37) Karl has moved between the world of yard boy and the bourgeoisie, and Pollard deals solidly with the Caribbean working-class experience.

For Karl, migration issues are also critical and central to the definition of identity, because he becomes an 'other' within the contexts of migration and racial politics. In Canada he needed "constant assurance that the rock is still there." (22) Receiving letters from Jamaica whilst abroad was very important. The acceptance of a Caribbean heritage does not come easily to Karl. The Caribbean being a place of change, where change is ongoing. The islands of the West Indies were seen as objects to be explored. The introduction of the plantation system of sugar cultivation at the end of the sixteenth century, based on African slave labour, implicated the society even further in a cycle of deformed human relationships. For Karl, a tortuous passage through the cultivation of a female friendship marks the beginning of a critical and wider acceptance of that heritage.

Pollard dramatises the contradictory spaces between ancestry and youth, tradition and modernity, old and new worlds. Karl is a product of Aunti and Gramp's household, a yard boy turned bank manager. Aunti, his mother, is a distinctive, tangible and important presence throughout his life. For this reason he feels an affinity with an 'old', traditional Caribbean family. He too wanted a family life, and children with his wife Daphne.

Davies argues that the "mythical norm" in society, in Lorde's words, ascribes authority to particular people "based on certain qualities that Euro-American society gives value to, i.e., one is more valued if one is white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure." We know however that "each of these categories of authority can be destabilized, or enhanced, by an oppositional positioning."⁹ That is, one has less value if one is black, fat, female, old, homosexual, and so forth. Although one could say that Karl Brown fits nearly all other criteria of the 'mythical norm', Karl being male, young, heterosexual, financially secure, Christian, he actually is seen to have less value because he is black.

Karl's tragedy is, that this self-made man is anything but self-made.

Self-made man! Self-made my neck? Somebody has to show you the pattern you must make. But when they show you and you finish making it, it's like hell to live with it for it's not really yours; not your style, not your anything. [...] Who the cap fit, wear it; who the cap don't fit had bloody well better wear it too. Is a pity you don't find out is a steel cap till you spend so many years getting it. By the time you find out to live, is time to die . . . almost. You can't remake whole chunks of yourself after so many years have gone into making them . . . but you could try! Then the holy battle royal starts when the two men in you start to fight - the man you feel you are in truth; and the man your life had made you and everything in the circumstances around you demand that you have to be . . . (63)

The novella focuses on one man's inability to escape an inherited colonial mentality. Karl's ambitions are crushed by his inescapable social circumstance. By the time Karl is a young man and a successful banker, he is paralysed by his inability to act upon his beliefs. When he finally snaps and assaults a white colleague, he is arrested and placed in a psychiatric unit. His scholarships and success as a scholar seem as incidental as his birth.

Indeed, the question of identity is central to *Karl*. The deploying of Karl as an unfulfilled man provides a starting point from which to address a problematic aspect of social reality, namely people's failure to reject the establishment and take a different path in life. Karl is an early example of how one progresses from being a "yard boy" by way

⁹ Davies, Carole Boyce (1994) *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, p.153-54.

of access to universal education. His education in turn causes opposing social and cultural differences. The society that his education placed him in made Karl both the critical insider and critical outsider, who saw with an eye for detail the many idiosyncrasies and perversions wrought on a Caribbean slave society. The politics of a Caribbean identity is at work here, and colour, class and privilege are being examined. Karl, both the hero and the narrator, is taken on several journeys within Jamaica and Canada. It is an experience that is related to family identification and history, and Karl's multiple identities are the source of the debate which Pollard unfolds.

Karl's education had given him a freedom he did not know how to use. Karl is a colonial creation, but unlike Michael in Caryl Phillips *The Final Passage*,¹⁰ who is constantly dreaming about a better tomorrow, rather than about the realities of dealing with the here and now, Karl is a success who wins scholarship after scholarship and establishes himself in a professional career. His problem is that he cannot reject the establishment he despises. Karl ends his life alone and broken and Michael, in *The Final Passage*, ends his life poor, alone and broken. He had created no institutions and no business, whereas Karl had been successful in gaining wealth and status, making Michael's and Karl's stories tragedies of a certain time. Karl and Michael are tragic heroes.

Karl is unable to become part of the educated professional elite because of his transformation from yard boy to a gentleman, that is, to a better class position. His inability and opposition is based on political grounds which come out of a consciousness honed in Black political struggles which force him to reject the class that exploited the black people. However, once he has attained the very position of these people, he appropriates their mannerisms and style. Because of this, Karl carries a more acute resistance to colonialism than his wife Daphne.

Davies says "Caribbean identity is the necessity of accepting all facts of experience, history and personhood in the definition of self."¹¹ It is the loss of Karl's old Caribbean identity that he is unable to accept and that causes him to fall into a downward spiral.

¹⁰ Caryl Phillips (1985) *The Final Passage*. London: Faber & Faber.

¹¹ Davies, Carole Boyce (1994) *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, p.122.

Conclusion

In her novella *Karl*, Pollard does *not* offer us a female-centred narrative, but a male-centred narrative that is largely in the first person. Nevertheless, *Karl* includes almost all the elements I have identified as characteristic of Caribbean women's fiction, for in her writings Pollard emphasises identity, dislocation, migration, landscape, collective unconscious/conscious, memory, and community, bringing forth a whole host of identifications and associations with concepts of place, placement, displacement, location, dislocation, citizenship, alienness, boundaries, barriers, transportations, peripheries, cores and centres.

Karl contains the history of three generations, including female-headed households, absent fathers, illegitimacy, family and community relationships, while conveying a sense of the orality of folk culture through extensive dialogues in dialect and through sectional headings that emphasise the novella's theme of identity and draws on folk wisdom and proverbs. The plurality of forms and concerns is matched with multiplicity of political perspectives which play against each other to provide an internal corrective against simple-minded judgements. What makes *Karl* so distinctive and significant is that in trying to illustrate problems of identity and dislocation, Pollard demonstrates the interplay between trying to live at ease in a Creole and colonial or postcolonial culture. Jamaica in the 1960s gives the novella its political and historical context. It was a decade of significant change that politicians, educationalists, writers and the general community could not ignore. It was a decade that saw the collapse of the West Indian Federation in the early 1960s and a move towards national independence. Historical change provided new material for writers and they represented their personal understanding and insights in their work.

Karl shows the opportunities and achievements of Karl's generation, but also the limitations to which that generation was subject. As Pollard herself comments, "I understand the frustrations of the Karls of Jamaica. I grew up in a place where education was thought to be the key to every future."¹² For Pollard, the question implicit in *Karl* is whether the Jamaican society of the time in which the story is set really

¹² Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.19.

supports "the upward mobility of the little man."¹³ Pollard has written one individual's story of achievement and excellence in education, as well as a story of the frustrations of people trapped in rigid, pre-ordained class and social structures. People with a Caribbean background can recognise these themes from their own histories.



¹³ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.20.

HOMESTRETCH

Velma Pollard's first novel, *Homestretch*, which was published in 1994, explores the themes of identity and dislocation through the experiences of 'return migrants' and 'repeat migrants' and their comparisons of life in England, the United States and Jamaica.¹ The novel chronicles how these migrants come to reconnect with and accept their cultural heritage. The novel's title alludes not only to the last leg of the 'race' of migrant life, the return home, but also to the way home s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-s across the sea to places like England and the United States.²

The perspective of *Homestretch* is basically historical, dealing with the period of emigration from the Caribbean since the 1950s, as seen by Pollard through the eyes of both men and women, young and retired. This perspective gives literary expression to Elizabeth Thomas-Hope's assertion that

The term 'migrant' includes a wide variety of persons, and 'migration' a wide range of spatial behaviour. Nor is the system static. Within the life-cycle of a household a number of migration types may occur involving one or more members of that household.³

In addition to providing an historical insight into return migration, Pollard's treatment of 'return' in *Homestretch* is idiosyncratic, not only reflecting the individual temperament of her characters, but also her own ideals. In this respect, the novel is both realistic and idealistic in its telling. That is, *Homestretch* is idealistic in so far as Pollard

¹ Velma Pollard (1994) *Homestretch*. Harlow: Longman. For reviews, see Jean Francis (1994) 'Homestretch – A Good Literature Text'. *The Jamaica Observer*, 29 April–1 May; and Sheilah Garcia-Bisrott, (1994) 'Homestretch – A Novel About Jamaica'. *The Sunday Gleaner*, 11 September.

² Interestingly, there is just a single reference in the novel which echoes the title of the story: "David hadn't said it, but he had begun to feel depressed since they started the home stretch." (19)

³ Elizabeth Thomas-Hope (1998) 'Globalization and the Development of a Caribbean Migration Culture', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.197.

aims to show the positive potential of migrants who return to invest in their communities. As she herself says about the novel, "it is about my ideals for a society which now exerts itself in the dual pursuit of money and drugs."⁴

Return migration has only recently become the subject of detailed attention in the sociological and anthropological literature on Caribbean migration. As Mary Chamberlain argues convincingly,

the pattern of continuing contact with those 'back home' has [...] been a central feature of Caribbean migration [...]. Regular visits, return and re-migration, bifurcated migration, circular migration have all become part of the lexicon 'of Caribbean migration [...].⁵

Although economic circumstances have long been seen to provide the contexts that influence any decision to stay, migrate or even return, such decisions are usually based not only on a given individual's perceptions of their own personal goals, but are influenced by a wider set of values and social circumstances. As Karen Fog Olwig has found in the case of young Nevisian men, emigration is seen as a means "to fulfill their contradictory obligations," namely to help their families while also establishing their own independence.⁶

Moreover, as Mary Chamberlain also maintains, once "family histories are taken as a perspective, then the motives for migrations, and questions of identity, become more complex, ambiguous, and culturally specific."⁷ Particularly,

what may appear to be an individual, economic motive in migration often involves a family history of social and geographic mobility [...]. From this perspective, migration is seen as the norm, not as departure from it, and the image of the

⁴ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.21.

⁵ Mary Chamberlain (1998) 'Introduction', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.8.

⁶ Karen Fog Olwig (1993) *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis*. London: Harwood Academic Publishers, p.164.

⁷ Mary Chamberlain (1998) 'Family and Identity: Barbadian Migrants to Britain', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.149.

migrant searching for an identity [...] becomes irrelevant.⁸

Given such recent debates, it is of particular interest that Pollard's writings on return migrants focuses not on institutional restraints and determinants, but rather on how these migrants personalise and internalise their condition and on how personal, family, and community values influence their decisions.

For one, *Homestretch* is an account, in Pollard's words, of the "altruistic behaviour of ordinary people,"⁹ such as Jamaican-born husband and wife, David and Edith, returning residents, who decide to go back to Jamaica after spending thirty years of their lives working in England. *Homestretch* explores the contrast between those who choose to emigrate to England and those who do not, and the reasons why David and Edith left Jamaica in the first place, but later chose to go back 'home'. In particular the story investigates the multiple dimensions of that choice and the considerations that swayed them to return to Jamaica even after spending thirty years in the United Kingdom. Their return is also the story of the positive and encouraging ideals they develop for their local community and society. As a means of probing culture and individual psychology in British society, Pollard furthermore explores David and Edith's adjustments, adaptations and assimilations to migration.

The novel also recounts and describes the painful experiences of Brenda Smith in the United States and then in England, which make her feel physically and psychologically dislocated from 'home', although she eventually manages to reconnect with Jamaica.

Other characters in *Homestretch* are David and Edith's niece, Laura, who moves freely between Jamaica and England, as well as her cousin, Anthony French, who works in the United States. Both are 'repeat migrants'. Laura is the illegitimate daughter of David's deceased sister, who had died just as Laura was about to finish high school. David and Edith had taken care of her since. They paid for school fees and boarding, and she had even lived with them in England while she did her postgraduate work. They loved her as their own, were fond of her and cared for her. Migration for her is a rich and rewarding experience. She is adaptable and moves easily between places, cultures

⁸ Mary Chamberlain (1998) 'Family and Identity: Barbadian Migrants to Britain', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.149.

⁹ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.21.

and languages.

Anthony is very attached to Jamaica, making annual visits, while hoping to permanently settle there some day. His regular and deliberate migrations between the United States and the Caribbean are ones of persistent re-remembering and re-connection. These journeys show migration as consisting of greater complexity than mere outward migration and return.

But *Homestretch* is also about Charley and Myrtle, two very important characters in Pollard's novel, for they represent those people who remained in Jamaica and have enjoyed and made good out of their humble but satisfying lives. They represent stability and contentment, and those who do not want to migrate, but are vibrant and happy in Jamaica. Given that diasporic experiences are the principal focus of Caribbean literature, it is important to stress Pollard's uncommon, but valuable, interest in those West Indians who have stayed 'at home'. Charlie and Myrtle observe the comings and goings of local people, and their story is the lens through which the return residents and return migrants are inspected by Pollard.

While *Homestretch* is set in Jamaica, the novel is a narrative and a map of departures and returns, as its characters reflect on their experiences of life in England and the United States, and on their journeys from one to the other. These reflections on life abroad, such as through the eyes of David and Edith, are very poignant, although they are inspired by the Jamaican setting which serves as a site of renewal. Yet the principal focus of the novel is how Brenda, David and Edith view and reconnect with their island home.

In his comparison of the short story and the novel, Helmut Bonheim writes that

Short stories tend to ironic endings, which novels do not. Novels, by contrast, end in weddings: almost all of the classics of the English novel do [...]. Probably the short story does not permit the back and forth, the advances and the hindrances, usual to the development of a love affair leading to marriage.¹⁰

Although it does not end in a wedding as such, the Bonheim's claim is nevertheless apt, as *Homestretch* does indeed trace the 'back and forth' and the 'advances and hindrances' experienced by migrants in their love affair with Jamaica. This is particularly true for one character, Brenda, whose life is unsettled by migration, but who reaches a greater

understanding of herself and her Jamaican culture at the conclusion of the novel. Jamaica and her have, in a sense, been wed.

While *Homestretch* covers much of the same ground as Pollard's short stories, its format, that of a novel, offers greater scope for exploration. As Bonheim stresses, the "novel can afford a fuller exposition, because of a wide cast of character and a more extended time scheme."¹¹ The novel comprises six parts, composed of a total of twenty eight titled chapters, within which Pollard's unravels her characters' varied life stories. Much of the story is written in retrospect, allowing Pollard to reflect on her characters' lives over a period of about thirty-five years.

Written in the third person, *Homestretch* is situated firmly within the realist tradition of the novel. Yet, what is noticeable about Pollard's style, drawing once again on Bonheims' work, is that approximately 40% of the text is written in dynamic modes (report and speech), rather than static modes (comment and description). These dynamic modes, according to Bonheim, "are conducive to an open effect", which static modes are not.¹² Indeed, *Homestretch* does not seek to provide the kind of closure associated with static modes. While the characters in *Homestretch* develop and, by the end of the novel, do appear to reach a degree of accommodation with their situations, Pollard does not suggest that further developments and upheavals may not follow.

Migration and Return Migration

"Him sick bad." (3) The opening remark of *Homestretch* is in the vernacular of the Caribbean and immediately identifies the cultural context of the novel, although, as one reads on, one discovers that the setting of these opening sentences is not the Caribbean after all, but Heathrow Airport.¹³ A little girl, the one who made that remark, notes with some concern that the man who is "carefully dressed" looks very ill and is in a wheelchair. A retired couple are leaving England after some thirty years to return home

¹⁰ Helmut Bonheim (1982) *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, p.167.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p.135.

¹³ Pollard makes Heathrow Airport the subject of a brief sketch, 'Heathrow in Retrospect', which introduces her second collection of poems. [Velma Pollard (1992) *Shame Trees Don't Grow Here ... But Poincianas Bloom*. Leeds: Peepal Tree.]

to Jamaica to enjoy their retirement.

Pollard carefully describes David and Edith's appearance, recording in detail what they are wearing, and she carefully describes their body language and facial expression. Although they are travelling for many, many hours, David and Edith are likely to have dressed in such restrictive attire for several reasons. People whom they had left behind will have constructed an image of the benefits which emigration brings with it. If the immigrant does not meet certain expectations, if they do not look better than when they left, they will destroy what the people left behind aspire to. David and Edith probably also feel under an obligation to embody the dream of the people they left behind, to demonstrate that they have achieved something and now return better off for having once left Jamaica.

As Dwaine Plaza has fittingly remarked about Caribbean migrants to Canada,

For others seeking affirmation about their own success in Canada involved making numerous return visits to the Caribbean. By making these excursions back 'home', individuals were able to validate first hand that they had indeed 'progressed' more than family, kin, or friends who had remained behind. Getting back to the Caribbean also meant for some having a long-term plan for returning 'home' to live permanently. Part of this long-term dream was also to put up a 'dream home' as a symbol to others that they had indeed migrated and were now able to return as a success.¹⁴

David and Edith belong to a generation who migrated in search of opportunity. They are one of many couples who migrated to Britain in the 1950s and worked to ensure that they had access to more resources than they had had at home. They have completed a movement of exile and return. David "had left from Port Antonio one morning. Here he was now returning to Kingston one evening." (6) With migration, each place shifts, is redefined and reconstructed, because over time and upon reflection it takes on new meanings, just as different aspects of a place and of one's own and one's family's past receive new emphasis.

Upon his return to Jamaica, David feels a "bone-deep tiredness [...] after serving

¹⁴ Dwaine Plaza (1998) 'Strategies and Strategizing: The Struggle for Upward Mobility Among University-Educated Black Caribbean Men in Canada', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.262.

so much time in so comfortless a place." (5) His

eyes took on a faraway look. His heart lurched against his chest, then subsided to a steady rhythm. His mind ran to his leaving, thirty years earlier. He had not thought then that it would be so many years; five, perhaps, or maybe ten. (5)

It seems that only since coming back, has David really questioned himself about why he left, and what it felt like leaving. He recalls

embarking on something they couldn't begin to understand. [...] The motherland had been crying out for labour. [...] It was industrial expansion that had caused them to call the children of the empire to cross the sea. (6)

In going to England, David and Edith were following a familiar route to the 'Mother Country', taken by everyone in the colonies in pursuit of skills, professions and the fulfilment of potential talent.

In retrospect David felt he had "gone to England to become a child again." (7) He had to learn to take orders again which he found difficult, so the adjustment was not easy. It was difficult learning to dress for the weather and difficult to save coins for the heater.

'It seems like England was made for work when it comes to black people, and that rain and cold comes with it. A luxurious thing like stretching your body and stretching your limbs in some warm medicinal water doesn't have any place there. At least not for us.' (16)

It was upon David's return to Jamaica that his friend Charley suggests to take him to Milk River, which would probably help to heal his body. Charley wonders why David had not visited the baths in England, hence David's reply. What David requires for a complete recovery from his illnesses and for his all-round well-being are home surroundings, family care, and local remedies, for upon retirement, tragically, David had a stroke and is partially paralysed before returning to Jamaica. As David observes, "The exit had been far less gentle inside as well as out. He had been a young man then, excited, on the brink of something new and good. [...] It wasn't nice to be struck down weeks before you returned home after so long." (5,7)

David and Edith's return is not presented as a spontaneous, autonomous act, but as a carefully planned and organised manoeuvre which necessarily involves other family members, just as their exit had been carefully planned and thought out. There is a belief in the value of return, even though the commitment to going 'home' is often deferred.

David and Edith planned to stay in England for five years, maybe ten, but they ended up staying for thirty. Although it was reported that the 'Motherland' had been crying out for labour, skilled labour, and although the travel agents were reinforcing this by saying that nearly anything one could do was a skill, they did not embark on their trip to England without much consideration and research. Edith had taken a course in practical nursing the summer they had made their decision to leave, although she was a qualified teacher. They felt her qualifications might be challenged as a teacher but not as a nurse. In the event, in England Edith had been able to find employment before David did. His skills as mason, carpenter, builder, which they thought would be useful, were not. It was not his trade but his education and general knowledge which had eventually earned him a job.

While David and Edith had seen the majority of migrants leave family members behind, they themselves did not face the complication of leaving children with various relatives till they could send for them. Nevertheless, there had been the emotional turmoil of tearing themselves away from family and friends. David recalls:

England had looked good from afar. People who travel and return never tell you the whole story. The truth was that the people who had returned had not really been to England. They had gone to war, in the RAF for example, and had pictures of themselves in uniform in their living rooms. Even Mass Nate, who would walk about on Poppy day with his medals and talk about the trenches, though he was clearly in the lower ranks, made the travel thing sound exciting. They couldn't tell you the whole story because they didn't know it. (30)

The 'reality' of England, the problems - of employment, accommodation, racism and loneliness - were unexpected and compounded by a sense of outrage and disappointment. Most migrants who encountered these problems concealed them in their letters home. There was the practical and emotional need to maintain contacts with 'home', indeed to have a home.

The traditional image of the Caribbean migrant is that of a single male. This is an image reinforced in literature, such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. Yet women as

well as men migrated. Indeed, Pollard dedicates *Homestretch* to Joan Riley, amongst others, who has stated that her novel *Waiting in the Twilight*

was written to celebrate the courage and loyalty of one woman and a whole generation of women, who took ship and sailed into the unknown to build a better future for their children. And for the sake of putting at least a small part of the record straight where the West Indian woman in Britain is concerned.¹⁵

The decision to go, and the logistics of leaving, are not isolated, individual events but the result of joint decisions. The family, for instance, through loans, through material support, and through childcare, enabled and supported the migration of its individual members. David and Edith had let their house and various friends had looked after many of their personal possessions until they came back.

For David and Edith 'home' is the place they leave and eventually return to. It is a remembered space, a place to be away from which required sacrifices. Yet these sacrifices were made with a view to a time when they would return to an easier life, creature comforts, and security in old age. For thirty long and, in David's words, "comfortless years" they saved "for one dream after another; house, car, and eventually return." (7) Now they are people of property, with a town house in Kingston which they are letting and their family home 'Edaville', fitted out with all the latest electrical household equipment. Unlike those who had to sell what little they had to find the fare to go to England, David and Edith had been lucky.

They hadn't sold their house. They had never thought of England as anything but an opportunity to make some money. Certainly not a place to settle in forever.
(46)

Those of their Jamaican friends in Birmingham who had bought into a housing scheme, were still waiting for their houses to be built. Now David and Edith are back home, they have friends whom they left back in England eager for news of them. "Everyone was interested and hungry for news of them, as if they were guinea pigs or a pilot project everyone else was looking to." (44)

¹⁵ Joan Riley (1987) *Waiting in the Twilight*. London: The Women's Press, p.vi.

When Laura visits David and Edith for the first time in their 'new' home

she had brought a few gifts and a lot of news. They belonged to a generation that was yearning, every last one of them, to return home. To be buried under their own vine and fig tree, they liked to say. (44)

David's illness had frightened them into worrying about making it home alive.

It had been a very near thing. Suppose he hadn't lived to come back? Of course, he wouldn't have known. And he had begged them to send him back, not bury him there. He had had enough in the bank to take care of passage and funeral, and more. He was back alive and was feeling so much stronger already. Almost as if just being back in this country was medicine. (31)

During Heritage Week, when the festival celebration would be taking place, David and Edith host a party to celebrate having been home for a year. This is Laura's idea and it provides the opportunity for the retired couple to see many people they have not yet been reacquainted with and for others to see them. It is also an opportunity to invite all their cousins and friends that they could locate, and to provide the opportunity for David and Edith to witness to other people of their own generation that migration has been good for them. It gives a good impression and hope to the younger generations who may wish to leave Jamaica, to return one day at least materially better off.

There are many guests at Edaville for that get-together.

Laura had done an excellent job of digging relatives and friends from out of the woodwork. She and David and Edith were occupied full time, greeting and hugging them. [...] People were falling on each other's necks as friends or relatives met after many years. [...] Over-sixties who hadn't had a chance to call on David and Edith since their return, people in their twenties and thirties, Laura's friends and relatives, children and grandchildren of these two groups. A little one four weeks old was sucking happily away at the mother, while his brother aged two was asleep on a couch. (96-97)

Generations of family and friends have welcomed the invitation and have come to celebrate the return and retirement of David and Edith. Even those who were not even

born when they left Jamaica have come to greet them.

The 'get-together' is a great success. It is well attended, beautifully hosted, with music and dance, and a wide range of Jamaican cuisine. That cuisine, and the Jamaican music, are also intended to show that thirty years of life outside of Jamaica did not diminish their knowledge of local culture. In some respects, David and Edith seem to aspire to present certain things as they believe tourists coming to Jamaica would expect to find them. They may have also done it for Brenda, or perhaps to be creative in their preparations for the 'get-together'. When Laura and Brenda arrive at Edaville, David and Edith's house

Brenda started to laugh.

'What you laughing about?' Laura wanted to know.

'Just the sight of the coconut tree and the natives underneath cutting and drinking. I mean, I know these nuts didn't come from these trees, but the whole thing is out of a tourist brochure. I mean nobody expects it to be quite like this.'

(94)

It amuses David somewhat that their guests questioned their return. Lying together in bed that night David says to Edith,

'You notice how everybody going on as if we do terrible thing to leave England and come home?'

'Except Charley and Myrtle.'

"You have to go there to know there"

'But seriously,' David said, 'I wonder if they know how many years we have taken off? In fact, at least me, I would surely be dead already if we hadn't come.'

(107)

Charley tells David that "people round here say anybody go to England come back mad," (20) to which David replies:

'Well, let me tell you, my dear, I wouldn't doubt that, and if I find out that I am mad too, I wouldn't be surprised. Is not two pence worth of life over there, you know. The white people them not easy. You have a hell of a time to live with them and still remember that you are a person. You shouldn't even look at them hard if you want to keep your sanity. Is a good thing me and Edith was big people

when we went.' (20)

Jamaicans who have never emigrated themselves but who witness the return of David and Edith, who in their eyes seem to have 'made good', seem to think they are foolish to have come back home. When their cousins and friends see their new transit van, all the new electrical equipment for the home and the workshop, and nice clothes, they see luxuries that they feel they can only aspire to but will never actually have themselves. However, the material wealth with which David and Edith return does not reflect and indicate in any way the struggle, hardship and loneliness they experienced away from home. It does not in any way tell the true story of emigration. As David has said of others: "People who travel and return never tell you the whole story." (30)

The personal cost of migration can indeed be high. While they were in England, instead of becoming closer, emotionally and spiritually, David and Edith became 'dislocated' not only from Jamaica, but also from each other, although there was a silent recognition of dependence of one upon the other. Each of them had to make special adjustments and had to cope in a difficult workplace and with different pressures. As they were each busy adapting to their own unique environment and situations, and as they stopped talking about their work at night, tension grew between them. David feels he has lost something very special and endearing which he has had with Edith, namely that deep sense of sharing that made each feel that they were a pillar of support for one another. Having returned to Jamaica, when David hears Edith unpacking and putting things away,

He could imagine the care with which she was putting each item in place. Such a meticulous woman. And, a good woman too. But again, he was thinking about what he thought they had lost. Not just the laughter. [...] By the time they got together, they were so damned tired it was hardly worth the while. So they had lost that as well. And the talking. Lord, how they used to talk in the old days. Maybe what they were going through in the mother country was so bad it was unspeakable. What a mother! (31-32)

Back 'home' in Jamaica David and Edith recover the sense of sharing they had lost, and life proves very enriching. When Brenda remarks to them that "Birmingham feels like hundreds of years away, doesn't it?", David replies, "Tell you the truth, sometimes we don't remember it for days on end, no true, Edith?" (94)

When David and Edith are unable to integrate and become a part of the community in Birmingham where they live, their displacement in England becomes particularly apparent. Emotionally, England never become their home, even though they lived there for thirty years. Life in Britain made it clear to them that they were strangers there. The men at the workplace never spoke to David outside of it. However, reflecting on the difficulties and pleasure of life at home in Jamaica and in Birmingham, David and Edith claim that even in England "they had remained community people in Birmingham. The West Indian community." (33) Back in Jamaica, David

sat there slowly putting away tools, but coming across the occasional packet of dominoes and remembering the fellows who would join him to recapture a little bit of home. That was how he came to know about the Caribbean and to feel the brotherhood that sounds like nonsense sometimes on politicians' tongues. The fellows used to say that, since that everybody in England thought they were Jamaicans, they might as well get to know them well.

So now everybody knew ackee and saltfish, bammie and fry fish from playing at his house, and he had become a Sunday morning souse man. [...]

If it hadn't been for those boys, he didn't think he could have made it. The discussions at the tea break, morning and evening, the unwinding over dominoes on the weekend at home, or more frequently at the West Indian Community Centre, gave him strength to tolerate the pressure of the other days. (29-30)

It was far away in England that Jamaica emerged as a focus of identity.

Residents and Returned Residents

David and his long-standing friend Charley are of the same generation and grew up in the same neighbourhood. They had also started school together. Later Charley married Myrtle and David married Edith, who was a little bit younger. Charley and Myrtle remained in Jamaica whilst David and Edith emigrated to England. Even thirty years later, these two couples have all the warmth, ease and affection of a longstanding and solid friendship. Those thirty years without the sound of each other's voices and the regular contact of knowing what is happening in each other's life, has made no

difference in their relationships. There is no gap. No one can doubt the sincerity of their emotions when finally they do meet again, get together and put the past thirty years into some kind of perspective, while looking forward to enjoying the rest of their lives before them.

Edith and Myrtle react like school girls to each other's presence, and Myrtle greets David with "Maas D! Bless my eyesight! How you do?"

The woman was tall and well built; somewhat on the heavy side. David etched out a rectangle of face from among the flesh that he saw, put a slim body on it and there was Myrtle, Charley's sweetheart, later wife. All that in the time it took for them to hug each other and for her settle down in the chair next to his.

'Not as good as you, Miss Myrts.' She gave a little chuckle.

Yes that was Myrtle. That hadn't changed. (9)

Then Charley bursts through the door reciting,

"I met a traveller from an antique land who said" and David chimed in: "Two vast and trunkless slabs of stone stand in the desert,"¹⁶ Charley boy, these slabs can hardly stand.'

They fell upon each other, Charley forming a kind of brace for his friend. Charley was ramrod straight and smiling as he always did. As if he didn't have a care in the world.' (9)

And this is followed by Charley walking into the kitchen and hugging Edith against his waist.

I consider this meeting between the two couples to be very important, above all for the strong emotions it conveys: the delight in and warmth of their greeting and the sheer enjoyment of remembering. Their reunion is about bringing together thirty years of past and present social history and about the effort to recount very intensely who they were and now are. This is crucial to the story, as change is something that is a constant in the Caribbean, however oxymoronic a statement this may appear superficially.

¹⁶ This is a reference to Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias', about the fact that Empires come and go. [Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818) 'Ozymandias', *The Examiner*, 11 January.] I am grateful to Peter Childs for drawing the source of these quotes to my attention.

Charley and Myrtle have never felt the inclination to leave. Instead, they have remained in Jamaica, have witnessed people leave and return, and have witnessed the social and political changes over the decades, in their neighbourhood and the country at large. Charley and Myrtle provide a focus of stability amidst the movement of people who leave the island.

They also represent, in themselves, a successful, happy, healthy and content family. They have managed to live comfortably without foreign contribution to their lives. They are happy with their children's careers and lives too. In many ways, their quality of life in Jamaica makes David question even further whether the sacrifice was indeed worth it at all. His friend Charley seemed none the worse for not having left.

Weary, in poor health and concerned for the future, David questions the very fundamental and critical decisions he made thirty years ago to go to England. He also questions the quality of the life he led there, not least after seeing his friend Charley who looked 'like a young man to him now.'

Nevertheless, back home again, David appreciates all that he can be grateful for and pleased about, not least his rapid recovery from his stroke and his wealth, despite the cost. And yet,

he couldn't put his finger on what he had gained from all the years he had spent. It wasn't as if they had had a whole heap of children to see through school or anything. True, they had property now. Laura had been in charge of their buying a townhouse in Kingston, and between the rent for that and the pension both of them were getting, they wouldn't want for anything. And he should be grateful.
(31)

David and Edith's eventual return to Jamaica restores the spirit in their marriage and their relationship, and they become far more engaged and responsive people than they were in England. To David, England exemplified work and money, but no leisure; Jamaica, work and more work, but also love, care and community. David certainly prefers Jamaica and after his swift recovery back in Jamaica he has purpose, ambition, appreciation, and a strong sense of belonging. Shortly after the return to Jamaica, Edith and David have experiences of being 'reborn'. Their delight in the climate, landscape, their diet, and the generally catching up with local events and their friends, have given them a new vigour for life. Their personal relationship improves immensely and they become active members of the community, doing voluntary work primarily for children.

In due course their dedicated and indispensable community work rewards them and others for their decision to return back home.

Since David and Edith have been away for thirty years, they would inevitably have expected many changes to have taken place in Woods Village where they had lived previously. However, they had not been prepared to see anything that had deteriorated, or in their opinion changed for the worse. Change would have been gradual and perhaps even unnoticed by many of the residents, such as Charlie and Myrtle, but David and Edith were seeing these changes for the first time thirty years on. They survey and scrutinise the landscape, the people, the new families in the area, the new churches, the dilapidated buildings and houses, and the grand and more prosperous newly built or extended houses.

Eventually, the ageing David and Edith have to come to terms with the changes that have taken place in their village during their absence. They foolishly blame themselves for all the decay and lack of progress which they encounter and try to return many fold to the community the material gain which they have been blessed with during the years. The effort, work and commitment which David and Edith, upon their return to Jamaica, put into improving the lives of many of the children in their community seem to express Pollard's ideals for return residents. As a column in the *Gleaner* reports a few months later: "Community/School involvement - returning residents create a model." (36) David and Edith have experienced thirty years of working and living in less than ideal conditions and circumstances, yet, instead of just taking it easy and enjoying their retirement in beautiful surroundings, such as the many home comforts they worked for for thirty years, they employ their time and money to help others. As it happens, Edith's enthusiasm does in time prove inspiring for Brenda also.

After years of working every single day, Edith is concerned what inactivity would do to David and worried about living with someone who was bored. She is delighted when he comes up with the idea to make much-needed furniture for the school. David's project with the boys and Edith's with the girls give these children useful skills, not least vocational work for those who are less academic.

David and Edith were doing the school a big favour, but they felt as if a big favour was being done to them. Leaving a district that had had so much going for it, and returning to find it dead had been surprising and depressing. They had expected the district to move up in more than electric lights. In fact, it seemed to have moved down.

They hadn't discussed it with each other, but secretly each of them felt sort of responsible, almost as if they shouldn't have left, as if they had abandoned something that had needed all the help it could get to maintain itself. As if they were partly responsible for the decline. It wasn't a reasonable feeling. (36-37)

Once the project has taken off, David virtually becomes the woodwork teacher for the school. Janet, the head teacher, insists that God had sent them and their idea at just the right time as they so badly needed seating. Edith also arranges for a special collection to be taken, during the All Souls celebrations, for a make-over of the church.

Janet states, "I'm glad you are here, Edith. You know, I had forgotten how we used to dress church. Now is only for weddings and those are so rare in this church." She even approaches Edith about teaching "the bigger girls domestic science, [...] how to set a table, how to eat with a knife and fork, how to make a bed [...] but to make it work like a sort of club" (35) Edith goes along with this plan on one condition - "that the girls would dress the church every Saturday. The way they used to do it when she was young." (35) In this instance, by reversing the changes that have taken place, Edith is trying to recapture the way things were prior to her migration. She is displaying her resistance to change but at the same time asserting some influence. David and Edith can be seen almost to want to bring back the village to how they remembered it, reversing many of the Americanisms they recognise, and amending and changing a little here and there. Other folk like what they see, begin to recall how things used to be and how they too had preferred it that way. As David explains to Laura and Brenda, "Those were the days, my child, [...]. That time we really had a community." (110)

Laura asks, "So Aunt Edith, you are back here to make over the district. You sure you thought of everything? School, church, what next?" (114) Indeed, there are larger issues to tackle still, for at all hours of the day, Edith can see young children from her hilltop home fetching water from the stand pipe.

She found herself feeling sorry for them and then wondered if she was becoming a tourist, always sorry for the locals. For didn't she herself at those ages carry at least the water that was used to bathe her? No, she wasn't worried about the water carrying, but about the time of day and what they should be doing instead.

It was easy to feel that a whole part of the nation would be left behind forever if, when children of their age in other parts of the country were going to school, they were either carrying water themselves or going with their mothers to

get it. She might have to take that on too. [...] Must be able to find somebody who could. Must be able to write a petition to some agency and get help. Only if everything failed would she offer to pay the salary. A slice out of the rent from the townhouse might do that. If, for a few cents, you save part of a generation, what's the odds, she was thinking. (38)

There is no doubt that many people are pleased to have David and Edith back home again. People from Rock Spring and Dry Land were saying that "Woods Village had gone to sleep, and that Mass David and Miss Edith had come to wake it up again. They said they were waiting on their own awakening, but had no idea who would do it." (39)

Edith's plan to start the Basic School again had her writing to the Ministry of Education and the Faculty of Education at the university. A newly refurbished building would accommodate this but until it was repaired the vestry would be used for the basic school. David said of his wife to his niece's friend Brenda,

'That Aunt Edith is one determined lady. Brenda, the basic school thing has been on Aunt Edith's mind from the moment she got back here and saw little children carrying water in school time.'

'I think she's even getting them to serve both breakfast and lunch for the children,' David chimed in. 'Of course, she will have to put her hand in her pocket to get that part off the ground first.' (112)

David and Edith are certainly making a large and generous contribution to their community and especially to the local school and children. And the village even seems to have found favour with some politician, when a new tarmac road to the village is suddenly built.

On balance, David and Edith's migration to England and their return to Jamaica is presented by Pollard as a positive experience and even as an encouraging example for others, not only of their own generation, but also for a younger generation of repeat migrants.

Dislocation

Apart from recounting the experiences of David, Edith, Charlie and Myrtle, *Homestretch* also recounts the physical and psychological dislocation of Brenda Smith, whose dilemmas with 'home' allow Pollard and her readers to explore the question where home is for those who have been encouraged to leave their original home, but do not find a new home elsewhere.

Brenda, at the age of fourteen, is uprooted from her first home in Jamaica and makes the journey to New York to live with her immigrant father. She experiences her adolescence in a household with him, his partner and her two daughters. Several years later her father migrates to Britain and marries a nurse, and Brenda is uprooted again. Brenda is caught between exile and home, and between the cultures of three countries, Jamaica, the United States, and England. She also suffers blatant racism from both the latter societies.

Whilst much of Brenda's story is focused on her life in the United States and England, which is seen through flashbacks from the perspective of maturity and her later experiences in Jamaica, the narrative is framed by her intense rediscovery of herself, her cultural heritage, and of Jamaica, which occurs when she eventually returns there several years later as a 'tourist' and journalist.

Brenda's life is reviewed in chapter six of *Homestretch*, appropriately entitled 'Brenda retrospective'. It includes her departure from Jamaica to the United States, where she completes her high school education, and her brief return to the island three years later. Brenda has not been able to return to Jamaica since then, some several years ago.

Brenda's first home, both emotionally and geographically was in Porus, Jamaica, with her biological mother and grandmother, who provided her with a secure and loving family background. This was Brenda's family home for fourteen years. Both her mother and grandmother are most interested in her education and when, from the age of fourteen, her emigrant father also expresses an interest in Brenda's education and invites her to the United States (because he said he would like to take over her education), she is supported by her mother to accept her father's invitation and migrates to the United States to be with him. Although she was born illegitimate, she does have her father's family name of Smith. She does not really know her father, who had emigrated to New York, but has seen him a few times when he has come to visit Jamaica, and has enjoyed

the feeling of elation a child gets when a relative is visiting from abroad.

Brenda's new home in the United States, with her father, Ivan Smith, and his Afro-American partner and her daughters, is rather different from her old one, not least because it is abroad, but also because in Jamaica she was raised in a household consisting of three different generations of the matrilineal line. Brenda's new family is made up of a male and female adult and the mother's two daughters, much along the lines of the so-called traditional English family. She effectively walks into a readymade 'family'.

Yet Brenda is far from happy with and in this readymade family and her new home, as she does not have a supportive, secure and loving home environment, living as she does with a father she barely knew before and a stepmother who dislikes her. She misses both her mother and grandmother, the routine, the familiarity, the landscape, and the weather.

A strong woman, according to the American poet Adrienne Rich, is one who has experienced the supportive empowering of another woman:

I am talking here about a kind of strength which can only be one woman's gift to another, the bloodstream of our inheritance. Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughters, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness.¹⁷

Rich's words seem so applicable to this particular case, as Brenda, by leaving Jamaica, is separated both from her biological mother and her 'mother' country, a separation which evokes in her extreme anxiety and a very strong sense of 'unbelonging',¹⁸ of cultural and psychological alienation.

Every day at Brenda's school, she has to go to the 'home room' to be with other West Indian children in the school. There are boys and girls of all ages from all territories of the Caribbean in that home room. They are supposed to get to know each other and to feel at home for that brief period, since they are supposedly all from the same place. Indeed, both Brenda's teachers in the United States and David's work mates

¹⁷ Adrienne Rich (1995) *Of Woman Born*. London: W.W. Norton & Company, p.246.

¹⁸ This term is taken from the title of Joan Riley's novel of the same name, *The Unbelonging*, published in 1985 (London: The Women's Press). According to Carol Boyce Davies, the term "best captures the issue of displacement." [Carole Boyce Davies (1994) *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London: Routledge, p.100.]

in England consider the Caribbean as one large homogenous mass. Brenda though does not feel at home with these children and frets that she is missing classes that are important.

During Brenda's time in the United States, a Jamaican-born immigrant, Joy Stewart, becomes almost a surrogate mother to her and comes to her 'rescue' at a very critical time. She offers her advice, affection, friendship, and support, as well as a sense of worthiness and rootedness almost, that even her own father and step-mother cannot provide. When Brenda and Mrs Stewart meet for the first time they discover that they like each other; the older woman understands Brenda's frustration, bewilderment and anger. They realise that they know the same Caribbean island, the beaches, the sunshine. In fact Brenda and Mrs Stewart share an uncanny sense of belonging to Porus, Jamaica, that unites them. When Mrs Stewart says, "I know your grandmother. I used to buy ortaniques from her at home'," (66) it must have sounded like sweet music to Brenda's ears. And when Mrs Stewart confirmed that she was indeed from down Porus way and she was born there, Brenda must have seen Mrs Stewart as an angel come to protect her. In retrospect Brenda believes she could not have coped with life in the United States, or been able to get excellent grades in high school, without Mrs Stewart. Nor could she have gained the love and respect she developed for her mother when learning of her dilemmas and achievements.

Brenda's encounter with Mrs Stewart also put her on the path of education she was to follow. As Brenda tells Laura several years later,

'You know what eventually saved me? An evening job with my father's employer. I'm sure she didn't need me, but she saw my dilemma and wanted to help. She is from Porus and knows my grandmother. She got her daughter to help me with my lessons when I was supposed to be working. God bless her. I graduated from High School with straight As after a very inauspicious Junior High career. I don't know what would have happened if she hadn't intervened.' (90)

I think it is worthwhile to mention in this context that both Brenda's mother, Joy Chambers, and Mrs Stewart have the same Christian name, Joy. Both women are important to Brenda, mother Brenda in similar ways, bring joy to Brenda's life, and are held in high esteem by her. One Joy is her biological mother and the other takes on the role of surrogate mother. The two most important women, other than her grandmother, to have been there for Brenda, especially during her childhood and early teen years, are

of the same generation and from the same place. They are undoubtedly a 'joy' to her, and Pollard uses that name to reinforce what they mean to Brenda and what they provide her with.

By the time Brenda has finally settled down and got used to the new educational system (with the assistance of another woman, a Mrs Saul), she has to move on to yet another new 'home' in another country, England, her father having married. Although he is no longer a stranger to her, he is still rather aloof, and to her disappointment a warm, loving father-daughter relationship still does not really develop. This time though her father is happily married to a Jamaican-born nurse and she often hears him laugh, which was something he had not done in the United States. In fact, in England her father and her new step-mother turn out to be an anchor for her and to provide her with security. Her time at college and university brings with it new and different types of accommodation. Her 'home' in the United States is now completely gone, but her father and step-mother's home in England is there for her whenever she chooses to use it. It also becomes a place of convenience, gives her a base, and in some ways a place of belonging somewhere in a foreign land.

Nevertheless, Brenda's move to England proves to be a very lonely experience, where she does not have any Jamaican friends. As Brenda looks as if she is from Jamaica, she is expected by her counterparts to speak with a Jamaican dialect, hence at her Further Education College, she is snubbed for her American accent. When other Jamaicans hear her American accent, she is no longer considered one of them.

When Brenda went to the United States she was perceived as someone from the Caribbean Islands, yet when she opens her mouth in Britain, her accent identifies her with African-Americans. It seemed to her that black people there have something against blacks from the United States, for animosity lingers between West Indians, Afro-Americans, and Africans. Each group feels superior to the other, and consequently, they make much of their cultural differences which prevents them from embracing their similarities and shared experiences.

'[...] as soon as I opened my mouth the Jamaicans proceeded to laugh at me. It took me a little time to find out that they thought I was putting on how I talk. I didn't even realize I had an American accent, and they never talked to me enough to hear that I sound just like them when I talk patwa, so I just kept myself to myself and that's how it has remained.' (78)

Clearly, the colour of one's skin can only go so far in determining one's cultural identity and even one's national origins. And while the way one speaks can allow others to identify where one is supposedly from, people can lose some or all of their original accent, when they live abroad.

When Brenda meets Anthony French, of whom I shall say more later, at David and Edith's get-together she has already been in the Caribbean for two months and an opportunity presents itself for her to tell her story of migration and 'unbelonging'. Anthony is surprised to learn that Brenda went to High School in New York and he is interested to know if she preferred England to the United States. Upon reflection Brenda admits,

'I don't know now.' She paused. He didn't try to fill the space, so she continued: 'When I went at first, I was devastated. Felt totally isolated. I was at a critical age. Seventeen. Time for herding and just forced to leave the few cliques I had been a part of.' (100)

Brenda is slightly embarrassed to tell him that she had not actually found a niche until she went to university, because her peers could not deal with her accent.

Brenda has rather ambivalent feelings about all the places that have had a fundamental bearing on her growth and development. Nevertheless, when she was confronted with ridicule, racism and loneliness, Brenda does feel comforted to know she had a 'little' island to go back to. Jamaica was always within reach, if only metaphorically. Her family home, the home where she was raised by her mother and grandmother is still there and so are they. Jamaica has been Brenda's anchor in many respects, yet when she visits she feels that the country of her birth has also rejected her. She, in turn, rejected Jamaica. This has caused a deep sense of rootlessness and despair, of belonging and 'unbelonging'.

In fact, when Brenda is first introduced to the reader at Norman Manley International Airport in Jamaica, she is only *heard* and only then spotted, remaining initially un-named. Pollard here uses a second airport scene to introduce a character in her novel, David and Edith having been introduced in a scene at Heathrow Airport. In both airport scenes other people observe the three characters before the reader learns of their names. Whereas David and Edith's behaviour and demeanour at Heathrow are dignified, respectful, calm and composed, Brenda's is anything but that, with her black

woman's loud, angry, abusive, and rude voice; the volume and anger of that voice and the content of her language draw attention to her.

Two lines away, a young black woman was stringing together words that were entirely unsuitable for that location. Unsuitable, in fact anywhere. She was telling the customs officer about parts of the anatomy he couldn't possibly possess. She was swinging her head fiercely from side to side, so that the narrow lengths of plait were moving like long rat tails in and out of her eyes. (51)

Brenda obviously feels a need to be heard and to express her anger. She is clearly disturbed, unsettled, near to hysteria with fury. Negativity and powerlessness seem to consume her very being. Perhaps she expects preferential treatment. In her own country, her own people appear to be in support and favour of those very people who have made life difficult for her. A white woman in front of her in the queue does not have her suitcases opened and searched. Again Brenda seems to be sought out for attack. Now Brenda is attacking 'her people', for sending her away; and for the suffering she experienced away from home. It is almost a reversal of roles, when an innocent person is at the receiving end of the years of Brenda's pent-up anger and disappointment, yet chooses to ignore her verbal abuse, anger and rudeness, and calmly carry out his job. The journey back home for Brenda merely escalates her sense of rootlessness and 'unbelonging' and serves as a painful reminder of her outsider status in the United States and England, and of her struggles to survive racial insults.

The customs officer does not reply to her taunts, accusation, slander and rudeness, but anyone within this public space hears Brenda's loud and angry voice. It is significant that Brenda is introduced in this way, and in such a place, for public spaces for speech have generally been identified with masculinity, rational discourse and developed logical arguments.¹⁹ Pollard has deliberately constructed Brenda as an example of what Carole Boyce Davies calls the "angry black woman".²⁰ According to Davies, the denial of black women's voices produces that emotional memory and stress which can implode or come out in explosive ways. "Indeed, while some women have been silent or silenced, many

¹⁹ Carole Boyce Davies (1995) 'Hearing Black Women's Voices: Transgressing Imposed Boundaries', in Carole Boyce Davies and Molar Ogunjide-Leslie eds. *Moving Beyond Boundaries, Vol.1: International Black Women's Writings*. London: Pluto Press, p.4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

black women have spoken incessantly without fully being heard."²¹

This then is how the reader meets this "young black woman" (51) whom Laura, David and Edith's niece, recognises as Brenda Smith, someone she had known in Birmingham several years before and with whom she had spoken briefly in the waiting room at Heathrow. Laura first met Brenda during the latter's last term at her Further Education College, an encounter which turns into a Saturday soup ritual for many weeks. One day, one of them is unable to come because of another commitment, and they drift apart until they meet again at Heathrow several years later.

Brenda is coming to Jamaica for three months, all expenses paid, to write a piece on heritage for a black monthly magazine. Brenda could not be persuaded to do a Ph.D. after her Masters degree, as she needed to get out of the academic environment, having felt used by an African law degree student, with whom she had a relationship, but who had no intention of marrying her. She signed up to be a trainee editor with a big publishing house and from there she started freelancing. When Laura asks, "You're doing research?" Brenda replies:

'In a manner of speaking. I work for this small journal. Calls itself Yard. It's really West Indians trying to find a place to educate themselves and the community around them about the islands. They want to do something on Heritage and they want me to write on Jamaica. So I will be here till the end of October.' (87)

Laura finds it interesting that they should be prepared to send someone who feels so negatively about Jamaica, for after all, Laura witnessed Brenda's anger at the airport. According to Brenda, the journal did not really have much choice.²²

'They needed someone with the time and the interest. It had to be someone who would spend from August to October in Jamaica and not mind. And they like the way I write. It was a Godsend for me. I hadn't seen my mother in a very long time and she need my help particularly at this time. She is getting ready to make some changes in her life.' (87)

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interestingly, Pollard is very critical of journalists, who, she says, "mostly report the negatives, ignoring the positives which are there if you look for them." [Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.21.]

Brenda realises she has her problems with the United States, England and, more importantly, Jamaica, yet she appreciates the opportunity to return. After all, she confirms, having left at a fairly early age she has not travelled everywhere in Jamaica and has only seen its cultural events as a child.

‘I have never, as an adult, been around for Heritage Week. I had been here for a few weeks in July one time when I was living in New York and won a prize ticket. And I remember Festival and Independence from my schooldays here.

‘The chance to come home has come to me very rarely.’(87)

If the novel’s introduction of Brenda highlights the ‘alienation’ she feels upon returning to Jamaica, as the novel progresses, so does Brenda. Returning to Jamaica as a journalist, she is financially comfortable, highly educated, and sophisticated, the facets of her life seem to fall into place and some kind of overall perspective on Brenda’s path in life begins to take shape.

Reconnections

Laura befriends Brenda once again and their friendship is on a different footing the second time round. The colourfulness of the Jamaican environment within which Brenda moves once their relationship is re-established is depicted by Pollard in meticulously observed detail. Laura somehow is sorry that she had been rather critical of Brenda initially, and that she was not more alert and sensitive before and had not taken more time for Brenda back in England.

Laura now invites Brenda to visit and stay over at her Aunt’s and Uncle’s house, Edaville, for the get-together on the Sunday of Heritage Week, which will be followed by a visit to the festival at Mento Yard. That get-together helps to remind Brenda of her childhood and her grandmother’s cooking.

It was an unusual production. Ancient items of Jamaican cuisine, some hardly remembered, were represented - dukunoo, gizada, puddings of every sort. Brenda recognized smells and flavours from her childhood, and her holidays in Birthright came flooding back. (97)

Perhaps she even comes to recognise Jamaican culture as her 'birthright'.

At the get-together Brenda is introduced by Laura to as many people as possible and takes the opportunity to hear the stories of returned residents who were not as successful as David and Edith, to see and admire the views from Edaville, to hear some old stories from David, and to hear about Mento Yard, the visit to which leaves Brenda speechless for quite a while as she is entirely mesmerised by the dancing, singing and laughing. "‘This is not just Mento Yard,’ David said. ‘No,’ said Edith, ‘it is a cultural feast.’" (121) Even Edith, in her retirement, is introduced to musical instruments and dances that she did not know or had only heard of.

Above all, the get-together affords Brenda the opportunity to meet thirty-year-old Jamaican-born Anthony, who eventually renews her trust in male relationships and allows her to find a sympathetic person to share her stories of migration with. Perhaps above all, he allows her to see, grow to love and respect her country, its people and herself. Anthony takes her to places she has never been, and introduces her to food she has not had the opportunity to try before. He takes her to Negril where she had been just once as a child, as well as to Montego Bay, St Ann's Bay, Mandeville, Middlequarters, Westmoreland and St Elizabeth. He knows where she can sample the best peppered shrimps, fry fish and bammie, and the best conch soup. His interest in local history, his enthusiasm for Jamaica, his love of its food and people make him perfect company for Brenda, who admits that

'I am getting to know this country for the first time. How have you managed to keep up? I mean this knowing it so well?'

'I grew up here, you know. And I came home every summer and Christmas, and most of the spring breaks when I was a student. Now I come home once a year. I love this place.' (155)

It is Pollard's selection of different migratory characters, such as Anthony, which allows her to portray the complications resulting from one's 'exile' from such a distinctly Jamaican culture. Anthony lives in a black neighbourhood in the United States, where he has lived for ten years now, having won a high school scholarship to study Industrial Engineering at Stanford University in California. He is employed in a factory which makes plastic containers.

Anthony returns to Jamaica at every opportunity and at least once a year. He knows it would make his parents happy if he came back to live in Jamaica, something he

would do if an appropriate and well-paid job presented itself. He is planning to come home to settle down eventually and is certainly not going to wait until he has retired. In fact, he wants any children of his to grow up in Jamaica. Meanwhile, he keeps himself informed on events in Jamaica through his regular visits. He loves Jamaica and is concerned that whomever he marries must love Jamaica too, for he could never settle down with anyone who does not, although he has a girlfriend who has yet to visit the island. He wants to enjoy his Jamaican culture and is determined not to live in the United States indefinitely. He tells Brenda, "Look if I could find a challenging job with a salary I could live on, I'd come." (101)

One does wonder though how hopeful Anthony really is about an early return, as he seems very keen to observe David and Edith and perhaps to learn from them in case he too will only be able to afford to return to Jamaica once he has retired. Commenting to Brenda how wise it was of David to bring a pick-up truck which was only forty-five percent customs duty, Anthony admits: "Watching them down there is an important study for me. I came by myself last week and spent time looking at what they are doing." (101)

Anthony moves with ease and confidence between the country that offers him employment and the country of his birth, which he feels he has a very special relationship with. He delights in the black cultural carnivals and festivities he discovers in the United States and enjoys learning and comparing notes on 'black/white relations' and the dispersal of black people geographically.²³ It is through Anthony, principally, that Pollard touches on issues of racism and migration, for he comments to Brenda,

'I am always surprised about how little we know about each other. I mean, we black people. These people from Belize look African, you know. Like us. But they are Carib, too. It's like how the people from Loiza could be from Jamaica till they start to talk.' (133)

As Anthony and Brenda sightsee together they compare notes on their different experiences of other nationalities. Anthony is observant and well informed, and his love and passion for his country is evident. He recognises those who are tourists and those who are not. When Brenda comments that she does not see too many tourists at Port

²³ On account of his interest in history, geography, and local customs and cultures, as well as in people and how they make meaning in their lives, Brenda calls Anthony an "anthropologist". (134)

Royal, Anthony says, "Only a few dry land ones from time to time." (139) That is,

'People who either live here or who have recently migrated, but who are showing off and behaving as if everything is strange to them, as if they are foreigners. In other words, tourists who are not from across the sea.' (139)

Brenda is enormously grateful to Anthony for the way he has planned to show her Jamaica and for all that she has seen and enjoyed so far, and she tells him: "I believe I am becoming somebody else." (136) Brenda has gone through a journey of self-recognition and healing.

At the end of the novel, Brenda likewise explains to Laura in a letter written from England following her three months in Jamaica:

At the risk of sounding corny, I want to thank you for giving me Jamaica. [...] It was you that started me off trying to examine myself, etc. Then the whole Independence thing and Heritage, etc, and your aunt and uncle!! I want you to know that the experience of being with you and your family (including Anthony) has been the most salutary thing to happen to me. (181)

Having returned to Jamaica for those three months, Brenda found that Edith, David, Laura and Anthony all have a great sense of pride in being Jamaican-born and bred, and love the island for its culture. They are in no way blind to its problems of drugs, money, politics and crime, but its distinct culture and the lives they have there are rich and fulfilling. In particular, Anthony and Laura do not experience any fundamental feelings of 'placelessness' in the United States, England or even Jamaica, while to Brenda the transitions involved in her migrations were detrimental to her sense of place and belonging.

As Brenda explains in conversation with Laura:

'For among other things, I am trying to come to terms with this rock and to sort of claim it again.

I know you think I am hypercritical. Almost as if I hate it. I have been thinking about that a lot too. Attending festival activities, watching hundreds of children performing in a way it must have taken teachers with the patience of Job to get them to perform. And I know how much teachers earn. There is a lot of

commitment here still.

'Then the Alumni affair and watching how passionately you all feel about St Anne's, no matter what else you have experienced, was very sobering. I believe half of my rejection of Jamaica ...'

'Rejection?'

'Yes, rejection ... is a feeling deep down that it rejected *me*, and gave me what? England and America. And then the few times I have come, this place seems so disorganized compared with them that, again, I resent that. Almost as if I am saying, "Look how inept you are, and you spat me out. Can't even clean up your act". Then of course I resent America and England, especially England where I was most conscious. Look, it is too difficult, I can't explain it. I am just trying to work it out myself.' (88)

Through Laura and Anthony, Brenda is able to re-evaluate human relationships, the economic, political and cultural aspects of Jamaica, and to appreciate her heritage and herself. She has become empowered through her search for her cultural identity; painful and traumatic though it was.

Brenda's reunion with her mother and grandmother, and her (re-)acquaintance with Jamaica, its beauty, national dishes, and community spirit, enable Brenda to renew life and to bury her restlessness, her frustrations, her feeling of 'placelessness', and her feeling that she does not come from 'anywhere'. She has a place in the world she belongs to and has come from even though she may now be living in England. It is for this reason that when Brenda hears about all the things Edith and David are doing for their community, it inspires Brenda too to help others. In spite of all the negative feelings towards Jamaica which she has experienced, Brenda realises that she has been empowered by her search for self-identity to help others to understand and appreciate Jamaica, and to come to know and experience for themselves that which is also their heritage. As Edward Said has suggested, exile is "fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past."²⁴ Not wanting anyone else to suffer as she has done, she decides that she wants young British people of Caribbean parentage to visit Jamaica, the land of their parent's birth, and to know they are indeed from 'somewhere', that they have roots and should not feel as 'placeless' as she had done.

²⁴ Edward Said (1984) 'Reflections on Exile', *Granta*, Vol.13, p.163.

'I have been thinking about something. Let me try it out on you. There is this youth club I help with in London. Most of them are British of Caribbean parents. I am thinking that a trip out here during their holidays, to coincide with Independence, mightn't be a bad idea, and I would like them to have a country experience. [...] Right now, is just an idea.' (114)

David and Edith support the idea.

'Brenda,' said Laura, walking over to hug her, 'why did you think of that? That means you believe there is something worthwhile in Jamaica after all?'

'Laura, you don't know the half. I don't want those youngsters to continue to feel the way I felt. Placeless. Like you don't have anywhere, don't come from anywhere. Certainly not England.' (114-15)

Remarkably, this conversation takes place even before they take Brenda to Mento Yard. Edith goes on to say,

'We have a little debt to pay too, you know. The pension we are living off is not too bad at all. We should give back something, and who better than to the children of the children of the empire? Work on it, Brenda. We are behind you.' (115)

Work on it she does, and *Homestretch* finishes on a positive note with a subsequent visit of Brenda's to a country which had once grown alien to her, the land of her parents and of her birth, but of which she is now proud and which she is sharing with and introducing to others. When Brenda arrives with a group of seventeen youths, there is a ship at anchor awaiting her cargo. "'Cement,' Brenda said. 'We export it.'" (188) 'We', she says!

'Cement' here hints at the experiences of bonding, with other people and with Jamaica, experiences which the novel's main characters have all undergone at some stage or other. Indeed, the novel's beginning and its ending are carefully chosen, bringing the story full-circle, for when David and Edith are leaving the airport having just returned to Jamaica, David too sees a ship at anchor awaiting her cargo of cement.

Brenda is the real heroine of Pollard's novel. Despite the racial, cultural and gender conflicts she suffers in the United States and England (and even in Jamaica itself,

in some respects), she is able to emerge as a speaking subject, once others have helped her to affirm her identity. Brenda is able to move forward when she has an understanding of her Jamaican, American and English experiences, past and present.

Conclusion

Homestretch is a story of identity and particularly of the need to discover a culturally secure world. It is also a story concerned with childhood, illegitimacy, education and dislocation. It is about the desire for a 'better world'. The migrant voices in *Homestretch*, the voices of Brenda, Laura, Anthony, Edith and David, tell of the long-distance journeys, relocations, changes, conflicts, powerlessness, and loneliness that severely test the emotional resolve of migrants. These voices tell the reader of new visions and experiences, of the familiar and unfamiliar, and of the pleasant and unpleasant.

My analysis of Brenda, but also of Edith, both of whom are very different, takes as its concern the necessity of locating and identifying oneself (one's self). This positioning comes out of the fact that historically there have been few avenues for the full hearing of black women's testimonies. Laura represents an audience to whom Brenda gives her testimony. Likewise, Edith talks to Myrtle, a woman of her generation and time. Brenda's voice and 'speech' may have been dismissed and ignored at the airport, but in telling Laura her story, her testimony was affirmed and supported.

Pollard's project in this deceptively simple novel is a remarkably bold one. The narrative becomes not only a journey for David and Edith and Brenda, but for her novel's readers also. In order to appreciate their experiences fully, the reader must journey with them, undergoing the same active process of recognising and reassembling cultural signs. Their journeys, migrations, and returns are a representative of the journeys of many others, beginning with the journeys of all the 'children of the Empire that crossed the sea.'

Homestretch therefore combines the recovering of history with the task of inscribing a specific group of people into literature: the West Indians in the United States and Britain. In her writings Pollard emphasises issues of identity, dislocation, migration, landscape, collective unconscious/conscious memory and community. Pollard's need to reminisce and her explorations of history lead to the identification of the pain implicated in one's perception and experience of time.

It seems it is difficult to see images of the Caribbean without thinking of loss and separation. One of the novel's characters, Brenda, associates memories of early childhood with the loss of a time and place which symbolised freedom and innocence. The loss of time and perhaps place too, are significant to other characters, such as David and Edith.

The novel introduces the significance of family relationships as a determining factor in the decision to return. In striking a balance, the nature of family relationships is perhaps the most important element. Personal relationships can play a crucial role in causing people to stay or to go back. Life in England and the United States is particularly questioned, as are problems of national identity, political independence, and the underlying implications of economic exploitation. Characters who consider returning, place a high value on what they have left behind, amongst other things, the tropical sunshine and local cuisine. When they actually return, they value many things they have lost, as much as those they have found. The United Kingdom is perceived as a land that not only embodies change, progress and materialism, but also stability and tradition.

Although this is an oversimplification, in some respects, *Homestretch* appears to combine the themes of two of George Lamming's novels. In his *The Emigrants* (1954)²⁵ George Lamming looks at the meaning of the journey to England which was undertaken by thousands of West Indians during the 1950s. The book explores the conflict between the idea of England and the reality of England as it was experienced by these migrants. *Season of Adventure* (1960)²⁶ takes the form of an interior journey, a quest for identity sparked off by the ceremony of souls which is witnessed by its main character. The story is a search for the cultural foundations of a 'true' West Indian identity.

Pollard provides a literary response to topical issues and offers a narrative and a richness of imagery that captures the bitter-sweet complexity of Caribbean social history. The novel examines the blend of local customs and family reunions. It is about migration, poverty, carnival, local practices, discovery and exploration, development and change. Pollard does not gloss over the complexity of the social history of Caribbean peoples and hence does not offer naïve and simplified solutions for the cultural rootlessness and political despair faced by them, although she does offer compassion.

²⁵ George Lamming (1954) *The Emigrants*. London: Michael Joseph.

²⁶ George Lamming (1960) *Season of Adventure*. London: Michael Joseph.

Above all, though, *Homestretch* is about peoples' struggles to find their identity. We can see David and Edith and Brenda take charge of their lives, making them more fulfilling, enriched and satisfying lives. The creation of new meanings makes possible the happiness they yearn for. These three characters can recall their identities, for through their past roles, life had reconstituted them many times. In many ways David and Edith have been each other's hero at those times when it really, really mattered. Laura becomes Brenda's heroine, before Anthony puts the 'icing on the cake', so to speak.

Pollard's characters are highly individual people, with their own choices and responses to general situations. Her portraits are careful psychological studies, in which the social and the personal interact to create characters, but where stereotyping and over-generalisation are avoided. Pollard's novel is not a purely women-centred text: the world described is both a male and female world. In Pollard's novel, both her female and male characters are her main protagonists. Her male characters are tactfully portrayed. David and Edith share the world and its personal, domestic, emotional and social reality; its personal, economic and political dimension. We see the world through both their insights, unlike in Riley's novels, which describe a very female world.²⁷ Pollard's work seems more balanced, and *Homestretch* is a more positive and hopeful work. It is not presented as a tragedy, but, in its treatment of Brenda, as a reconstruction of one character's very traumatic life.

It is worth commenting, in this context, that Pollard nevertheless dedicates her novel *Homestretch* to Joan Riley and "in memory of my parents Ernest and Lucy Brodber for whom community was everything. This reference to 'community' being everything for her parents is indeed most indicative of one of Pollard's principle themes in her novel. The fact that much of Pollard's critical literary analyses of Caribbean literature are on Riley's writing, further shows that she is a great admirer of Riley's work.

In *Homestretch* Pollard creates a story that allows people who have emigrated and become dislocated to be united eventually with their histories, and their pasts; to achieve an inner peace of belonging by finding their selves. Understanding becomes a continued process of correction and learning, as people make attempts to understand and create

²⁷ See for example the following: Joan Riley (1985) *The Unbelonging*. London: The Women's Press; Joan Riley (1987) *Waiting in the Twilight* London: The Women's Press; and Joan Riley (1988) *Romance*. London: The Women's Press. For a relevant discussion of Riley's work, see Isabel Carrera Suárez (1991) 'Absent Mother(Land)s: Joan Riley's Fiction', in Sushelia Nasta ed. *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*. London: The Women's Press.

order from amongst the disruption caused by the association with new places and new people. *Homestretch* shows above all that re-visiting a former homeland can be a challenge, and an experience of bitterness, nostalgia, rediscovery, adjustment, healing and relocation.

Homestretch is an optimistic work. Much of the novel is about celebrations, meetings, and encounters, about the re-establishment of friendships and acquaintances, and about the recounting of past experiences. And despite hardship and struggles, Jamaica is also a place of healing, as evidenced by David's rapid and steady recovery from his stroke, by the renewed relationship with his wife Edith and, not least, by Brenda's acceptance of her cultural heritage and identity.



SELECTED SHORT STORIES I:
CONSIDERING CARIBBEAN WOMEN

Caribbean literature is particularly distinguished for short-length works of fiction as well as longer, yet disjointed, novels. These works purposely document the social features of their environment and culture, and the short form used serves them well. Indeed, regardless of the preferred shape of this literature, these works tend to explore events that affect individual people.

In her two collections of short stories, *Considering Woman* (1989)¹ and *Karl and Other Stories* (1994)², Pollard explores female-male relationships and graphically describes familiar Caribbean role models and the lives of many different kinds of Caribbean women. At the same time, she manages to articulate in her work a powerful sense of the island as a space of belonging and to affirm Caribbean island culture and living, fraught though it may be with contradictions and weighed down by history.

In this chapter and the following I will be exploring selected stories taken from *Considering Woman* ('Cages', 'My Sisters', 'My Mother', and 'Gran') and from *Karl and Other Stories* ('A Night's Tale', 'Miss Chandra', 'Betsy Hyde', and 'Altamont Jones'), which offer detailed, knowledgeable, and caring snapshots of the lives of several generations and a wide range of Caribbean women and men.

Identity and the quest for wholeness and belonging, which are central to Caribbean literature, are at the heart of these stories, including the experiences of migrants, as found in her novel *Homestretch*. Pollard's writings are also concerned with relationships and human nature in general. For the Caribbean woman, who has to confront not only sexism, but also racial discrimination, identity is certainly problematic.

¹ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press. For reviews, see Evelyn O'Callaghan (1991) 'Review of Velma Pollard, *Crown Point* and *Considering Woman*'. *Jamaica Journal*, Vol.24, No.1; and Patricia Harkins-Pierre (1997) 'Review of Velma Pollard, *Crown Point*'. *The Caribbean Writer*, Vol.11.

² Velma Pollard (1994) *Karl and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman.

It cannot be one-dimensional, nor can it be taken for granted.

Whilst Pollard explores the consequences of unsatisfactory relationships, particularly in the stories collected in *Karl and Other Stories*, she also points to the possibility of more respectful gender relations, if only by the way her female characters begin to assert their sexual equality and become more economically independent. Pollard herself says in a brief 'Note' introducing *Karl and Other Stories*, that "*Other Stories* are comments on the lives of people with a variety of experiences on different rungs of the social ladder."³

Considering Woman is a fitting title for a collection of short stories each of which has at its centre a female character. The book is divided into three sections, 'Parables', 'Cages' and 'Tales of Mothering', with each section divided into a further three sections, all of which have varying numbers of subheadings in turn. The extent to which these sections and subheadings define the limits of the stories in *Considering Woman* is a matter of conjecture. The main sections are preceded by two previously published poems, 'Women Poets' and 'Version', which I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The book concludes with an 'Afterword' about the Creole language and 'Notes' in the form of a glossary.

'Tales of Mothering', which occupies a good two-thirds of *Considering Woman*, consists of four portraits of three generations, entitled 'Sister I', 'Sister II', 'Mother', and 'Gran', which illustrate the different life experiences of several generations of Caribbean women. These 'tales' as Pollard calls them, for they defy classification as conventional short stories, reflect the sense of exile which Caribbean women can experience in a foreign country or a strange place. For the grandmother in 'Gran', for instance, even a move from the country to the city is an experience of dislocation and exile.

I have already argued that storytelling provides migrants with the cultural resources and moral guidelines they use to adapt to new environments. Indeed, despite debates about its exact classification, the short story as a genre is a descendant of narrative forms such as myths, parables, fables, and anecdotes, amongst others. As such, the short story is a particularly apt medium for conveying a particular insight, message, or moral, unlike the novel, with its commonly more complex structure and wider range of characters and

³ Velma Pollard (1994) *Karl and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman (no page number given).

situations.⁴ The short story is likewise suited to the exploration of how a particular event or set of circumstances affect a particular individual at a particular point in time.⁵

Although not all short stories by Caribbean women are necessarily autobiographical, it is persuasive to argue, as Evelyn O'Callaghan does, that "women are concerned with bringing the personal (private, emotional issues) into the public arena (literature)."⁶ Given this concern with the impact of the social and cultural environment on individuals, the short form used serves Caribbean writers well, and Caribbean literature is indeed distinguished for short-length works of fiction (not merely because these are more suited to the publishing environment within which Caribbean literature is commonly published - journals and anthologies).

Pollard's opus of short stories consists of the seven stories included alongside *Karl* in her *Karl and Other Stories*, as well of the pieces included in *Considering Woman*. While the stories included in the former are fairly well defined, each bearing a distinct title, those included in the latter are not as distinct. *Considering Woman* comprises three main parts, 'Parables' and 'Cages', which consists of three pieces each, and 'Tales of Mothering', which consists of three titled sections numbered I to III, some of which in turn consist of several titled pieces.⁷

As each of these pieces which come under the heading 'Parables' is about a different character, and as there is no continuous plot, these can be considered as three separate stories. The same argument applies to the some of the pieces which come under the titled sections of 'Tales of Mothering', such as the two pieces under the heading 'Sisters'. The sections entitled 'My Mother' and 'Gran', however, despite the latter's subdivisions, make up a continuous narrative each and must hence be counted as a stories in themselves. This is also true for the three pieces which come under the heading 'Cages'. On this basis, Pollard's *Considering Woman* can be considered to consist of eight distinct stories.

Of the titles chosen by Pollard for these fifteen stories, five consist of or contain personal names, four of kinship terms, two are non-personal, while four denote a genre. This shows that Pollard's principle concern is with individuals and with family

⁴ J.A. Cuddon (1982) *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

⁵ Helmut Bonheim (1982) *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

⁶ Evelyn O'Callaghan (1988) 'Feminist Consciousness: European/American Theory, Jamaican Stories', in L. Fiet ed. (1988) *West Indian Literature and its Political Context*. Rio Piedras: University of Puerto Rico, p.32.

relationships. Her focus on identity and personal experiences is also borne out by the fact that ten out of Pollard's total of fifteen stories are written in the first person, while only five are written in the third.

The stories in *Considering Woman* vary in length from one page ('Sister II') to thirty-nine pages ('Gran'). Some stories, such as those under the heading 'Parables' draw on Biblical narrative modes and elements of magical realism. Others, such as 'Cages', contain a section which consist primarily of dialogue. The most realist of these stories is arguably 'Gran', which is also the longest. The stories in *Karl and Other Stories* vary in length from five pages ('Altamont Jones') to nineteen pages ('Betsy Hyde'). Compared to the stories in *Considering Woman*, these stories are written predominantly in a realist mode. Perhaps the most unusual is 'Georgia and them there United States', which opens with the transcript of a letter. Possibly the most notable feature of all her short stories is that all direct speech is written in Jamaican Creole, of various strengths, depending on the speaker, as are all instances of interior monologue. This is an aspect of Pollard's work to which I shall return in the conclusion to this thesis.

Lastly, Pollard's use of 'open' and 'closed' beginning and endings is of interest. According to Helmut Bonheim, for a story to have a 'closed' beginning means that it "does not begin immediately with an action, but that the reader is supplied with a background of both place and time, that the hero is introduced and characterized, and that antecedent events are summarized."⁸ In the case of the stories in *Karl and Other Stories*, five have open beginnings, as opposed to a mere two with closed ones. In contrast, of the stories in *Considering Woman*, only three have open beginnings, while five have closed ones. Consequently, the frequency of open and closed beginnings is almost equal in Pollard's short stories.

A similar analysis is possible for ending of her stories. According to Bonheim, in the case of an open ending, as opposed to a closed one,

action and dialogue continue to the very end; conflicts, if any, are left unresolved or insoluble [...]. The action is suspended rather than concluded. [...]

⁷ For the purposes of this analysis the two poems which introduce the volume have not been counted.

⁸ Helmut Bonheim (1982) *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, p.91.

Possibilities suggested in the course of the story are left unexplored or at least unresolved.⁹

In the case of the stories in *Karl and Other Stories*, five have open endings, while only two have closed endings. Of the stories in *Considering Woman*, five have open endings, while three have closed ones. According to these figures, the majority of Pollard's stories have open endings, which is contrary to the trend found in short stories.

Taken together, Pollard's stories and tales demonstrate that the short story as a genre is far from easily straightforward. As such, Pollard is able to adapt the short form to her particular ends, just as she does with the genre of the novel in the case of *Homestretch*.

I begin my discussion with 'My Mother' and 'Sisters', as these contain variations on the migratory experiences already discussed with reference to Pollard's *Homestretch*. This is followed by a discussion of two stories which provide a record of the struggles of woman of an older generation, who did not migrate but coped with the hardships of rural life. One of these two tales, namely 'Miss Chandra', is published in *Karl and Other Stories*, rather than in *Considering Woman*, from which the other stories are taken.

My Mother

'My Mother' is a particularly unusual 'tale' as it emphasises problems of identity and dislocation stemming from a mother's absence.¹⁰ While it is the problem of the 'absent father' which is most frequently remarked upon, the 'absent mother' has become sufficiently established to have become a theme in Caribbean literature. In 'My Mother', for instance, Miss Angie's daughter migrated to the United States in search of work and left her daughter to be raised by her grandmother.

Sociological research reveals that "the generational leap-frogging of childcare,"¹¹ to

⁹ Ibid., p.119.

¹⁰ A version of 'My Mother' first appeared in 1974 [Velma Pollard (1974) 'My Mother'. *Jamaica Journal*, Vol.8, No.4.] The story was also published in Stewart Brown ed. (1990) *Caribbean New Wave: Contemporary Short Stories*. Oxford: Heinemann, as was Olive Senior's story of the same title, 'My Mother'.

¹¹ Mary Chamberlain (1998) 'Family and Identity: Barbadian Migrants to Britain', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.150.

use Mary Chamberlain's term, is considered quite a normal and acceptable practice. In *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* Olive Senior states that,

While child-caring is usually a shared responsibility between mother and others, in many cases another does become the substitute mother, moving from caring for to rearing the child. One contributory factor is the process of migration, which is a characteristic feature of Caribbean family life. Women - like men - frequently migrate from their home villages to the towns, to other islands and to the metropolis in search of work, leaving children with relatives for longer or shorter periods.¹²

'My Mother' is principally about absent mothers who leave their children with their own parents or another close relative to seek better employment opportunities abroad, not least to earn the extra money needed to raise their children and to pay for a good education. As Mary Chamberlain argues,

The motive for migration may therefore have to do more with maintenance of the family livelihood, and with the enhancement of status and experience, within a culture which prizes migration *per se*, and historically has perceived it as a statement of independence, than individual economic self-advancement.¹³

'My Mother' skillfully and subtly hints that in many cases this kind of sacrifice is not always in a child's best interest. Such children have no memory of their mothers if she left home when they were at a very early age and, moreover, as in this tragic tale, when she never comes home because she dies abroad.

The main characters in 'My Mother' are referred to as 'my mother' and 'my grandmother', by the narrator of the story. All remain without a personal name until towards the end of the story, when the narrator is referred to as "Dat's de little wan she lef wid Miss Angie." (31)

The granddaughter was about five or six years old when her mother left her with her own mother, Miss Angie. The granddaughter only knows of her mother through

¹² Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, p.10-11.

¹³ Mary Chamberlain (1998) 'Family and Identity: Barbadian Migrants to Britain', in Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.159.

what she receives in the way of cash and clothing. Miss Angie is left with the awesome task of raising her granddaughter well, so her daughter's sacrifice would not be meaningless. The burden on Miss Angie to raise this child stops her from being a proper grandmother, because she has to be the mother, disciplinarian and legal guardian, which robs any grandparent of the opportunity of 'spoiling' their grandchildren.

While, Miss Angie provides her granddaughter with a sense of identity, at the same time she reminds her of her dislocation. Each month they make the journey from Anne's Ridge to the bank to sign for her allowance which she receives from her mother who now lives and works in New York. The granddaughter dreads these unsettling journeys which are accompanied by her grandmother's lectures about her supposed ingratitude, just as every month she is instructed to write a letter to thank her mother for the money she has received. She had expected her mother to return some day soon, but sadly this never becomes a reality.

Every year we expected my mother home on vacation and every year she wrote that she was sorry she couldn't make it. But she always sent, as if to represent her, a large round box that people insisted on calling a barrel. It was full of used clothes of all sorts, obviously chosen with little regard for my size or my grandmother's size. (29)

These words are echoed later in the story

Every year we expected my mother home on vacation. But she never came. The year I was in third form they flew her body home. (30)

When her mother finally does arrive 'home', the timing is not hers. She comes home in a coffin. While the annual sending of clothing in a box had become a representation of the mother who does not make it to Jamaica for her vacation, ironically that mother now returns to Jamaica in a box herself, only a representation of her former self.

When my mother left Jamaica I couldn't have been more than five or six, so any memory I had of her was either very vague or very clear and original - carved out of my own imagination with patterns all mixed up, of other people's mothers and of those impersonal clothes in the annual barrel. The woman in the coffin was not my mother. The woman in the purple dress and black shoes (I didn't even know

they buried people in shoes), the highly powdered face, framed by jet black curls and covered lightly with a mantilla, was not like any of the images I had traced.

(31)

The degree of dislocation of the mother is emphasised most starkly in the description of the appearance of her coffin, and of herself, in death.

When the coffin arrived it was clear that nobody from Jamaica had touched that coffin. [...]. The whole thing was foreign - large, silvery, straight from the USA. And when they opened the lid, in the church, so she could lie in state and everybody could look and cry, it was clear that my mother too had been untouched by local hands. She had come straight from the USA. (30-31)

There is a certain atmosphere surrounding the awareness that the coffin has arrived from the USA without being tampered with by anyone from Jamaica, which emphasises the foreignness and the impersonal praxis of the whole thing. In addition one feels there is a kind of awe for the size and shininess of the coffin, although the gaudiness of it hits a raw and tender nerve. There is a jarring uneasiness about the arrival of the coffin and the funeral service and burial. The people who attend are both friends of her grandmother and spectators who wish to see how the dead are returned from a foreign country, should they too one day die abroad and be sent home. As most Caribbean people who emigrate see their migration as only temporary, many prepare for their body to be sent home should they die before they can make it back home alive.

For Miss Angie's granddaughter, her mother's funeral marks a new beginning. Her mother's burial and her subsequent visit to New York allow her to glimpse and respect the mother she barely knew, other than through her own imagination and the annual barrel of clothing. When she makes her own journey to New York, she immediately feels dislocated, feels the foreignness and alienness of the place. It is at Fourteenth Station, New York, that the narrator has a glimpse of the life her mother must have lived. It seemed to have been a life that is hurried, unthinking, mechanical and repetitive. As the daughter sees the passengers leave the station, she notes the black people in particular. They all move hurriedly.

Everyone was running and everyone looked frightened. But you could see that all this had become natural. This speed was normal and because they couldn't see

their own frightened faces, they couldn't recognise their fright. (28)

At Fourteenth Station she is finally able to grieve for her mother:

I had never known my mother. I had known her money and her barrels and my grandmother's respect for her. I had not wept at her funeral. But that morning, in the subway station at Fourteenth Street, in the middle of nowhere, in the midst of a certain timelessness, I wept for her, unashamedly, and for the peace at Anne's Ridge that she never came back to know, after the constant madness, after the constant terror of all the Fourteenth Street sub-way stations in that horrifying work-house.

I saw my tears water the maiden-hair fern on her grave to a lush green luxuriance. I was glad I was a guest in the great USA and a guest didn't need a wig. I would take no barrels home with me. I saw my mother's ancient grave covered again with its large and gaudy wreaths. Like the mad old man in Brooklyn, I lifted from a hundred imaginary heads a hundred black and curly wigs and laid them all on the ancient grave. And I laid with them all the last shapeless, ill-fitting clothes from the last barrel. The last of the women had hurried away. I wept for my mother. But I rejoiced that the maiden-hair fern was lush and that we had no longer need for gaudy wreaths. (33)

At the train station she can only stare at the blacks. She sees the cheap, black curly wigs the women wear, the frightened expression on their faces, their hurried automatic movements. The look on their faces and their running had all become natural, it had become an inseparable part of them. They were so busy coping with survival and fitting in, that they were too caught up in the pace of hurrying and performing. They had become robotic and seemed unemotional, detached and dislocated. They had probably lost their sense of national identity and pride. The daughter sees her mother for the first time in all those tense women's faces, in all those heads hiding their age and gentleness beneath the black, curly wigs.

The arrival and departure of people at the subway station at Fourteenth Street plays a significant part in the story. It is where the narrator sees her mother's face for the first time, it is where she weeps for the first time since her mother's death, and where she buries and lays to rest all the images of disguise and cast-off clothing, the camouflage of her mother's life, the regrets and the could-have-beens. The daughter does not feel

the need for a disguise, or the need to make out that she belongs in New York. She has nothing to hide and does not want to adapt by making any adjustments to her outward appearance. "I was glad I was a guest in the great USA and a guest didn't need a wig. I would take no barrels home with me." (33) She is not in need of anything to represent her.

The image of the maiden-hair fern that the daughter chooses to place on her mother's grave is also very interesting. 'Maiden' suggests being untouched, new, virgin. It enforces a new beginning for this young orphaned teenager who was tarnished by the contents of the barrels of used clothing. Someone who has a new-found insight into things she did not see before. After her mother's death, her daughter appreciates many things she had not been mature enough to comprehend before. In particular she appreciates her grandmother's dilemma in raising her well so her "daughter's sacrifice was not to be meaningless." (29) She appreciates her own home in the Caribbean and the life she herself has in comparison to that of her mother's. The daughter emerges from the story more mature and more in touch with herself, more sure of who she is and what she will and will not allow in her life. She has learnt something about the life of black immigrants in the USA and she knows she belongs in Jamaica, for as she says herself, she is only a guest in the 'great' USA.

In 'My Mother' Pollard sets out to shock her readers by the very unusual way a young girl comes to meet her mother. The story poses many questions, particularly for those mothers who are content to leave their children with relatives, particularly their own mothers, whilst they leave to work abroad. Many mothers may do this for what may seem to them in the best interests of the child, but a mother's love and emotional attention are so much more important than material things. To move from the country to the metropolis might be a better option than to actually leave the country, for this way child and mother have a far higher chance of meeting up and getting to know each other. The story certainly invites one to ponder the possible consequences of migration and of not being able to return 'home' ever.

'My Mother' is also about the need to conform, to adapt, and to try and fit in like the other people of that generation of immigrants of which the narrator's mother was a part. The narrator's generation has a different view point. Having asserted their identity and having a national pride in who they are, they do not hide behind a veil.

My Sisters

'Sister I' and 'Sister II', the first two tales in 'Tales of Mothering' (part of *Considering Woman*), are primarily about women trying to come to terms with their post-colonial status and with womanhood. The two women are caught between places, cultures, and classes, never identifying clearly with a place other than their original home. It is this marginality which reflects the experience of dislocation of black women.

In 'Sister I' Pollard illustrates how the inability to adapt to a new 'home' can lead to despair and feelings of wretchedness, with a very tragic and even fatal result. In this tale, the unnamed mother is unable to escape her destitute and disillusioned life, leading her to a tragic, devastating, shocking and disturbing decision - suicide.

The nameless woman's existence is the embodiment of a living hell. As a woman, as a wife and as a mother, her life must have felt utterly worthless; an existence she could not have wished for her children, so much so that she took them with her to her death. Her suicide exposes the limits of this woman's endurance of life. The misery, pain and isolation of being in a place with which she is unfamiliar, and into which she did not integrate, left her with no communal or neighbourly support. No sympathy is really asked and none is actually given. The position of this woman is revealed most emphatically towards the end of the tale when a woman who lived in the same building as her says, "you can imagine the loneliness she was in to make her do a thing like that? She was young, you know, about twenty-five with those two little children." (25) This does suggest that 'the neighbours' in some way or other could relate to the young victim, enough at least to conclude that loneliness drove her to take such drastic action. Her 'neighbour' did not think it was marital or financial problems that drove the woman to her death, but 'loneliness'.

This also suggests that the victim's neighbour identified with the victim in some way or other: she too is a woman of colour, she too is living in a place to which she herself has once migrated, although she copes and has made friends. Nevertheless, she feels too self-conscious to talk to the woman in the elevator. "But you know how foolish you feel making conversation with all those white people staring silent?" (25) One wonders why, if the neighbour could identify this much with the victim, she really did not make the effort to approach her and become friends.

What makes the woman's suicide, and her murder of her own children, the more shocking is that according to Claudia Jones, "black women have been the guardian, the

protector, responsible for caring for the needs of the family, and shielding them from the atmosphere of terror, segregation, brutality."¹⁴

One does ask oneself if there is greater strength shown in taking one's own life, which must take considerable courage, than in trying to persevere day after day. Perhaps, the mother at that time felt that she was still protecting her children by taking them with her where she was going. It is truly a tale of sadness and tragedy, yet it could also be to some extent a story of 'triumph', for the decision to end her and her children's lives was the woman's own, and it is she who carries it through to its tragic end. In this respect at least she was the master of her own affairs, as shocking as it may seem to others.

Unlike the horror of the first tale in 'My Sisters', 'Sister II' is a tale of a woman's 'triumph'. The story records a brief conversation between the narrator and a male colleague, who reports that his young wife has left him to return to Mali, Western Africa. Her husband is left bewildered.

'I give her house. I give her food. Music and English lessons. What more she want?' (26)

This though is not how his wife had viewed their relationship, as the narrator recalls to herself:

'He prays too much,' she had said. 'He's old; he has to pray. He near to die. Me young. Me not pray so much.' And later, very solemn now, 'Marriage is hard. I miss my family. I miss my books ... and all this English! ...' (26)

Here then is a young woman who feels dislocated in the Caribbean, for this has not been her home from birth, nor is the language her own.

The narrator has no sympathy for her colleague, wondering "what parents, religious custom, what harsh rule could tie a young girl to an educated stud." She cannot help "marvelling at this little girl" and her decision to return home. "I laughed inside. This end was fine indeed." (26)

¹⁴ Claudia Jones quoted in Buzz Johnson (1985) *I Think of My Mother: Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones*. London: Karia Press, p.103-4.

Miss Chandra

'Miss Chandra' provides Pollard with "another opportunity for describing the hard-working Jamaican woman," as do her novella *Karl* and her tale 'Gran'.¹⁵ The story captures the hardships of a poverty-stricken rural Jamaica of many decades ago, while at the same time celebrating the resilience and strength of a hardworking, downtrodden and despised woman of that time, a woman who survived rejection, as well as mental breakdown caused by hardship, loneliness and poverty.¹⁶

The story's content and vivid descriptions are so compelling that the reader can see that Pollard has captured a piece of Jamaican social history in the late 1930s and 1940s, a century after emancipation, at a time when Pollard herself was still a child. The masses of the people were land-less, semi-literate and without the vote. There was an appalling lack of social facilities, low wages, insanitary housing, and hungry people, as well as a high level of crime. The Mayor of Kingston, Oswald Anderson, captured this state of affairs in 1938 when he wrote:

Poverty walks the island, and it is the first time that is seen in our country. It is not because the people do not want work, but it is the working-man and the peasant farmer alike who are in the grip of dire poverty [...]. The boast in Kingston, now, is the establishment of a Food Depot for School Children, where they can obtain lunch at the rate of 1d a day, while no dog in the homes of the employers could be as miserably treated. There is plenty of want and it calls for plenty of pity.¹⁷

It is against this background that Pollard's portrait of this 'kind' Jamaican woman should be read. Pollard, like Caribbean women writers in general, writes from knowledge and experience, and in doing so inscribes history. As she states herself,

I have a great desire to record aspects of life, events and experiences which I think

¹⁵ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.20.

¹⁶ My frequent use of 'celebrate' and 'celebration' is in keeping with the "African-American discourse of celebration and resistance." [Akiba Lerner and Mark LeVine (1996) 'An Interview With Adam Yauch'. *Tikkun Magazine*, November-December.]

¹⁷ Oswald Anderson quoted in Delia Jarrett-Macauley (1996) 'Exemplary Women', in Delia Jarrett-Macauley ed. *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism*. London: Routledge, p.42.

are worth keeping. I grew up in rural Jamaica in the forties. In the fifties I went to school in the capital city, Kingston, but continued to spend all my holidays at home in the country. I write from a memory of those times and those places.¹⁸

The reader first encounters Miss Chandra at the funeral of a Miss Eliza. This funeral service serves to celebrate Miss Eliza's life, in addition to allowing her family and friends to pay their last respects. As Karen Fog Olwig explains, funerals in the Caribbean also provide occasions "where relatives who normally are scattered in distant migration destinations and therefore rarely see one another have a chance to meet and renew former ties."¹⁹

However, in this instance, the funeral service is appropriated by Pollard as an occasion to celebrate the life of one of those attending that funeral, Miss Chandra. Having spotted Miss Chandra, the narrator of the story finds the words of the funeral hymn, "Change and decay/In all around I see," inappropriate and cannot sing along. This is because with Miss Chandra before her, who once knew "decay" and "had reached such calm and peace, such wholeness, you couldn't miss it if you tried," what they knew today was not 'decay'. It may be 'change', but not the 'decay' which the narrator knew Miss Chandra had experienced and which had almost destroyed her, although she was the victim in the entire situation.

Pollard makes re-memory central to the narrative of 'Miss Chandra', which journeys back in time to her earlier life of several decades ago. It is the narrator who, by bringing together the various parts of Miss Chandra's life, re-members her, makes her whole again. Here at Miss Eliza's funeral service, the narrator to her own astonishment recognises Miss Chandra, the once poverty stricken, lowly, mentally disturbed woman, finding instead among the congregation a well-groomed and apparently very normal one. As the narrator fills in all the parts she can remember of Miss Chandra's life, it is as though the person before her becomes complete and whole. The narrative is about dislocations, about separations, about remembering.

As a child, the narrator had always been aware of Miss Chandra, who lived with her husband and her five children, two of them 'bafan children', in a very small house on

¹⁸ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.17.

¹⁹ Karen Fog Olwig (1993) *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis*. London: Harwood Academic Publishers, p.172.

a piece of rented land. The family used to sell peppers and callaloo, which was easy to grow and cheap to buy. They lived off the land and her husband was seen with the cutlass in his hand or, early in the morning, "riding the squeezer." (101) The narrator remembers it as the only squeezer she had ever seen in her life. The squeezer allowed him to squeeze the juice from the sugar cane, which Miss Chandra boiled to make sugar for the children's tea. The simple fact that the narrator can recall that "people said Miss Chandra had to boil the juice every morning to make sugar to put in the children's tea,"(101) indicates the indignation felt by the community who knew this. Surely if they could afford more, she would not have to do this daily.

The family's lowly status is also evident from the fact that Miss Chandra and Maas Eli are not land owners. When the land is sold on which their house is built, Miss Chandra and her family have to find somewhere else to live. The narrator admits she had not been aware until then that there were such people who did not have their own land and concludes that perhaps this was why she "got the feeling people looked down on them." (102)

Nor will Miss Chandra and Maas Eli have been in a position to buy the land they built their new house on, which makes them unlike their neighbours. Miss Chandra's family not only move off the land, they also dismantle their house, including the floorboards, and take all the materials with them to rebuild it elsewhere. The narrator can recall quite vividly her surprise when one morning the house just is not there anymore, finding instead an empty space. When she shouted, "Miss Chandra house gone!!!" (102) no one showed any surprise. No land they decide to settle on will ever be secure, as they will most likely once again be forced to move on and set up home elsewhere. They are essentially nomadic.

Miss Chandra was certainly not a 'woman of substance', unlike Dorlene in 'A Night's Tale', found in the same volume of Pollard's short stories. Miss Chandra's husband was a mere menial labourer who planted and harvested two vegetables, extracted juice from the sugar cane with his squeezer, and smoked ganja. Meanwhile, Miss Chandra was seen sweeping her house over and over again.

She was a woman you could look at and know that she was living below what she was accustomed to. Maybe it's because I knew that Maas Festus was her brother. Not that he took any notice of her. Maybe not. She just looked too delicate for the kind of life she was living - hard work, hard work, hard work. Cutlass work. She looked like she was made for a lighter thing; like a pen. Her skin looked so

soft; like it would break if she worked too hard. Except it didn't. (102-3)

Not only had Miss Chandra married beneath herself, but she had married an outsider, for it would appear that her husband was not a local man. No one seemed to know of any family connections of Maas Eli, Miss Chandra's husband. "[N]obody ever pointed to anybody saying, 'That is Chandra husband sister,' or, 'That is Chandra husband brother.'" (102) On account of her husband's unbelonging to the village, she was ignored by her brother and her neighbours.

When the police came to their house and took her husband away, and "put him in jail for ganja," Miss Chandra was left to raise her five children, without even her husband's minimal contribution.

So it was just Miss Chandra and the children raising some fowls now and selling eggs to put food in five mouths and herself make six; and the two *bafan* children not able to help themselves, just dragging on the floor dribbling. (103)

This lowly family descended into destitution and no one offered them any help or support. The narrator noticed at the time that no one came to Miss Chandra's aid. She was unsure if social welfare existed then to intervene. The church might be about love and charity, and loving your neighbour, but Miss Chandra and her five young children were ignored.

Well our church wouldn't do it, for, you see, Miss Chandra didn't belong to our church. I don't think she belonged to any church.

But Miss Chandra looked like the kind of person who would have belonged to our church at sometime. In fact I had reasoned it out long before that she was a member there but had to leave when somebody fall her. [...]

Anyway, I figured that something happened and Miss Chandra had to leave our church and she never bothered to take up any other church. (103-4)

The likely reason is that Miss Chandra would have been dis-fellowshipped by her church when she became a single parent. "In fact two people must be fall her, for her two bigger children were not Maas Eli; and according to their names at school, they had

different fathers."²⁰ (103)

The lack of support shown to Miss Chandra by her community is in stark contrast to the portrayal of Jamaican community life and neighbourliness found in Pollard's novel *Homestretch*, which I have discussed in chapter 3. While *Homestretch* expresses Pollard's ideals for a close knit, caring and kind community, it also records the impact of the changes which occurred between the late 1930s, when 'Miss Chandra' is set, and the late 1980s, progress with social welfare services, sanitation, and so forth, resulting in less envy and greed, and a greater willingness by people to help each other out. In addition, as far as illegitimate children are concerned, society has become more relaxed, tolerant, and more willing to accept sexual freedom.²¹

Miss Chandra even had to bury her handicapped children herself when they died, and she was only able to bury them in shallow graves behind the kitchen. The terrible odour coming from her yard proved to be a cause for investigation, and after the remains of two of her children were found, Miss Chandra was taken away. What happened to her remaining three children is unclear. It is striking that the narrator is the only living person who still knows about Miss Chandra having buried her own children.²² "And now all the people who knew about it are dead. Except me." (105)

Even before the above incident took place, the narrator recollects that Miss Chandra "had gone mad." (104) Apparently Miss Chandra's 'madness' was not unheard of, as it is compared to that of a Miss Maria.

'Chandra head pull up. Complete.' She had gone mad. Not silent mad like Miss Maria who would dress herself in her long white embroidery clothes and walk barefooted all about with wild flowers in her hands. Loud mad. Stand up outside of her yard with her waist tied up tight, wiggling her body and singing loud for all to hear, 'Two pan cover kyaan shet/two pan cover kyaan shet,' and extolling again and again the virtues of the 'fountain below (her) navel', which fountain, she said, was retained exclusively for Eli. (104)

²⁰ Miss Chandra must have given them their respective father's surnames, rather than either her own or their stepfather's.

²¹ Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey.

²² In fact, Miss Chandra recognises the narrator, whom she greets at the funeral service, even though she initially greets her in her mother's name.

Only some twenty years later did it become apparent to the narrator that by singing what she did, Miss Chandra was rejecting any suggestion of a lesbian relationship. Deprived of affection and attention, burdened with the concerns of the reality of caring and providing for herself and her children, lacking the means to visit her husband in prison, and without support or help of any kind, it is not surprising that Miss Chandra became unbalanced under the strain. Here Pollard is representing the painful images of loneliness and emotional need.

'Miss Chandra' is a particularly sorrowful story, but it illustrates so well the lowly status once experienced by Caribbean women. If this woman had married a 'local' man, would her neighbours have helped her out when she was fending for herself and her children all alone? She had her grief and loneliness and no one to share it with. She was an impoverished mother who was ignored and 'invisible'. It was almost as if she just did not exist, she was a nobody, a struggling woman living off the land and raising her children on her own, while her husband was in prison. The church, in spite of all that it represents, not only ignored but rejected her. Miss Chandra's neighbours found it easier to ignore her, than to offer her kindness and friendship, even a neighbourly basket of poultry, garden, dairy produce. Miss Chandra was a woman who survived for a considerable time without either hope or the means to live decently.

The narrator tells the reader that when she was a child she "simply was sorry" for Miss Chandra, but now that she is older, this has turned into "real sorrow" for a woman who was trying to deal with "the reality of filling the practical needs of her family and bearing the pain of loneliness and sexual neglect." (105) Miss Chandra lost her husband to imprisonment, and later lost her sanity, home and children. She was a woman who lived in a society where her emotional wellbeing and her sexual relationship were destroyed by humiliating economic conditions.

Only when she received medical care and support for her condition did she get her life back together and, eventually, triumphs. In the knowledge of Miss Chandra's life story, one can imagine the narrator's "disbelief and joy at this woman who, having weathered seventy harsh summers, had reached such calm and peace, such wholeness, you couldn't miss it if you tried." (100) One can also see why the narrator could not focus on the funeral service, but instead recalled all that she remembers about Miss Chandra. Not only had she survived, but she was nicely dressed and looking well. After all, at first the narrator had not recognised her, but then she "started to stare shamelessly for suddenly [she] recognized, under the demure collar with the little brooch, under the

heavy grey hair pulled back to accommodate the flat-topped hat, Miss Chandra." (100)

It would also seem that Miss Chandra was 'restored' to the identity and status that the narrator wished for her.

I am sure Miss Chandra never knew why I hugged her and squeezed her so between the Jerusalem and the burial site. From her composure and her dress and the flat-topped hat above the bun, it was clear that she had found Jerusalem this side of the great divide. (106)

Miss Chandra's new identity gives her an air of refinement and a delightful and happy composure. Her attire and her whole persona is so very different. She has certainly been blessed and looks at ease and at peace with herself.

'Miss Chandra' opens with a funeral, and closes with the celebration of the life of another woman, who was once as good as dead, but who had the will and strength to survive. Miss Chandra carried on when there was no hope, eventually attaining inner peace and calm, as well as her rightful place in society. In 'Miss Chandra' Pollard celebrates and pays tribute to a remarkable Caribbean woman, one she may well be remembering herself.

Gran

The final tale in *Considering Woman* is 'Gran ...', which is a fitting piece of writing with which to conclude this chapter, not only because of its excellence, but also because Pollard herself has stated that

'Gran' is my favourite piece of short prose, partly, I believe, because it is closer to being autobiographical than anything else I have written. I decided to write about my grandmother because I loved her, but also because she represents one kind of Jamaican woman, the kind that is called the backbone of this country. I wanted people to know about this kind of woman.²³

²³ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.17. Although I had already come to the

Even without any knowledge of the autobiographical character of 'Gran', it is striking that Pollard holds the kind of woman she is writing about in the highest esteem. There is so much admiration here for Gran, who is elegant in her wisdom and understanding of human nature, an admiration also shown in Pollard's first collection of poems, *Crown Point and Other Poems* (published in 1988), which is dedicated to her grandmother, Eva Elizabeth Harris, who is the subject of the first and last poems in that collection, 'Crown Point' and 'To Gran ... and no farewell'.²⁴

In this short story the reader is being challenged not to look at literary or cultural artefacts in the abstract, but to look at concrete aspects of a woman's life, and to read about her and her life. Analysing 'Gran' has become an exercise in identifications, to recognise the life experiences and historic transformations directing a story which spans several generations. It is a document of a particular chapter of Jamaican social history. Pollard admits that in her writings she desires to preserve and record the past.

I have a great desire to record aspects of life, events and experiences which I think are worth keeping. [...] It is very easy to lose a sense of the past and have each generation evolve a notion of what existed at a time before the present. I consider that a tragedy.²⁵

Pollard's tale 'Gran' is composed of six distinctive parts which shift between the narrator's childhood and her adult life. Although it has a conversational opening, it is both a kind of epitaph and a piece of social history. It is about the narrator's early childhood which, as a grandmother herself, she now recalls as she makes her journey up the hill to her grandmother's former home, Comfort Hall. The story captures reminiscences about particular childhood episodes, episodes now seen through the eyes of an adult. It is also about the present, about what the narrator finds there as she arrives, for many years have passed and inevitably there have been changes.

The opening paragraph of 'Gran' is most intriguing, and constitutes a miniature

conclusion that 'Gran' was probably largely autobiographical, it was good to have had this assumption confirmed.

²⁴ Velma Pollard (1988) *Crown Point and Other Poems*. Leeds: Peepal Tree. Incidentally, Merle Collins too has written a short story called 'Gran'. [Merle Collins (1990) *Raw Darling*. London: The Women's Press.]

²⁵ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.17.

tale in itself.

When we were little, remember, the world was full of pastures and pastures were full of cow-dung. Everybody's farm had its own little pasture which everybody else used as a short-cut to get from one field to another, or from one yard to another, or from either to the main road. And every morning each pasture seemed to have as many hot new loads of dung as it had cows; and every morning flies crowded anxiously around each hot new load. Everyone knew that if you were ill-mannered and tried to pass the flies unnoticed, they all rose up at you and pitched mercilessly in your eyes, on your nose and even on your lips; but if you greeted them as you passed they left you alone. And so we went our way through pasture to school, or shop or neighbour's house and slowed down near each load murmuring, 'Good morning, good morning, good morning.' (34)

Judging by this opening paragraph, the world in which Pollard grew up, the world of her grandmother, was one of community, of school and shop, and of neighbourliness, where people crossed each other's fields and manners were expected even by flies. It also foreshadows another time, a time when people would leave for new pastures and migrate abroad, if only to find that those pastures too were 'full of cow dung'.

Given their detail, such early childhood memories, not least the detailed and emotional memories of Gran herself, are undoubtedly Pollard's own. Indeed, at some stage the story's narrator, the granddaughter, is actually addressed as "Vel", (64) and it is as such that I shall refer to her in my discussion of the story, to distinguish between Pollard the narrator and Pollard the author.

As Douglas Midgett explains, some West Indian novelists

explore the island environments and experiences through vivid portrayals of rural and village life. These works, occasionally referred to as childhood novels, deal in varying detail with coming of age in these settings. In the process, they examine the relationship between the growth of their actors and their comparatively diminished settings.²⁶

²⁶ Douglas Midgett (1977) 'West Indian Version: Literature, History, and Identity', in Ann M. Pescatello ed. *Old Roots in New Lands: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on Black Experiences in the Americas*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, p.214.

This is certainly true for Pollard's 'Gran', in which the island's natural environment plays a key role, and which is peppered throughout with the word 'remember'.

In 'Gran', Vel narrates her recollections of and feelings for her grandmother which are occasioned by her return to the site of her grandmother's house, almost as a visitor, several years after her grandmother's death. She recalls her grandmother's life and her own, recalls numerous childhood memories, and lives out many events and stories in her mind.

The story recalls the past and stands still with the present. One of the most striking images, or 'memories', in 'Gran' is that of the tangerine tree situated very near the top of the hill to Vel's grandmother's house. The tangerine tree is still there, although her grandmother has now passed on. The tree had been a place to sit and dine, and a place to proclaim your arrival. "It was from there that you announced yourself after the long trek up the hill. It was close enough for anyone in the house or even in the kitchen to hear you." (41) The tree is obviously of great significance to Vel, who sees two branches in the tangerine tree as forming the letter 'V'. As a child she may well have seen this as forming the initial of her first name.

'V' in the tangerine could also stand for 'vista'. It is like the place from which Pollard writes this story or at least gleaned the inspiration to do so. It is here where she pauses and thinks of her journeys and her visits to her grandmother's house.

If you thought of yourself in relation to the 'V' in the tangerine tree, you could see time rushing past your eyes like the landscape through a speeding bus window. It wasn't so long ago, or was it? you could stand in that very 'V' and rest, and then ascend with two vast lunges forward to a point from which you could pull in the laden branch and sit and quietly gorge yourself on as many yellow, soft-skinned fruit as you could take. (40)

'V' is also for 'violence'. Pollard conjures up images of female sexuality, violence and cannibalism in her aesthetics of the tangerine, and the manner in which the fruits are eaten. The tangerine tree did not just have tangerines, but had 'mothers' and 'babies'. Pollard conjures up the pleasure experienced in the eating of the fruit; there was a kind of ritual to how they were eaten.

Tangerines were endlessly fascinating. Some of them had babies, not all; and you couldn't really tell from the outside whether they had; if there was a navel at the

base you thought yes but this test failed so often, it was like a rule of grammar; or of course it was the rule of life; not all women have babies. The baby was exactly like the mother, when ever you found one; same shape, same colour, but sweeter when you tasted it, and of course much smaller. (40)

Yet, Pollard also conjures up the imagery of cannibalism in the eating of the tangerine: "After the baby, you attacked the mother." (40) The terms 'baby' and 'mother' give an inescapable human dimension to the description of the fruit, apart from also being a common way for children to denote small and large objects, while the notion of 'attack' adds rather violent overtones to the description of the eating of this tropical fruit. Hunger could give way to eating hastily, hurriedly, devouring the fruit to satisfy an initial hunger. Pollard does after all say "when the edge of hunger was off and it was no longer necessary to shove pegs into your mouth at a time, you started to enjoy the aesthetics of the tangerine." (40) The way in which Pollard views the fruit is akin to the way some people tend to view other people. They have a tendency to think of themselves first and to 'devour' others. Only when their needs are fulfilled do they take the time to look at others more closely and attentively and see what they are 'made of'.

In addition to the 'violence' of eating the fruit, Pollard provides a mellower and softer description of the aesthetics of the tangerine, using biological terminology that takes on sexual overtones and is more filled with 'life'.

A tangerine, a sort of triple womb: juice living in hundreds of tiny cells protected by their own cell walls; sitting together in a fruit-tissue womb; pegs sitting side by side in a heavy yellow rind womb. (41)

There is an uncanny overlap of 'human nature' and 'nature'. "Nature is birth repeated a hundred times over." (41) The fruit tree with its spreading branches is a place of rest; one is therefore inactive, non-sexual even. In eating, one is active, sexual. These are of course the reflections of an adult, not those of the child who once climbed the tangerine tree.

Pollard devotes considerable space to describing her fascination with the tangerine tree and its fruit. From the texture and formation of a particular branch to the aesthetics of the tangerine and the activities it marks for her. The tree in itself is a symbol of life, fruitfulness, activity, both change and continuity. The tree, which remains standing after Gran's death, is a link between the past and the present. It is a 'family tree' with roots

and branches, a blood line, Vel's matrilineal line, which connects everything for her. The tangerine tree is a marker of identity, a place of rest and recall. As the tangerine tree seems to be all that remains unchanged, it at least is able to give Vel something positive to come away with from her possibly final visit to her grandmother's old home at Comfort Hall.

On the one hand Vel regrets coming back, for although she was prepared for changes, nothing had quite prepared her for what she did find. There is nothing there to remind the narrator even dimly of a house. The whole structure had long crumbled and the materials had long been carried away, for others had found use for them. Vel remembers the aspirations family members had once had for the site: "My aunt had hoped for a hospital here; she couldn't ever picture this." (37)

The oven-house of her grandmother survives and is now home to some "swarthy old women". But Vel cannot understand "which place could have been poor enough to have anybody from there to this?" (37) The women were sleeping on a number of dirty old rags and were evidently trying to live off the uncultivated land, "cooking always bananas from the trees behind the kitchen; always small now, stunted and diseased as succeeding generations of bananas will always get without fertiliser [...] and without care." (37) When the conditions which some people have to live in are as bad as this, has there been any real progress in Jamaica? So vividly does Pollard describe the situation, one can almost see "these shrivelled old women, ugly in all their dirt and deprivation," the "inexorable filth," the "buzzing of the swarms of flies," "the filth" and "the dust." (35, 38) This is "a new last picture of Comfort Hall. It was no longer Gran, clean, beautiful, but senile and lonely, but five pale old women. [...] Memory knew lush landscape, healthy fruit and Gran in all her different faces." (38) Vel cannot fathom how with time the scene that she had longed for for all these years had come to this.

I was [...] thinking that I shouldn't have come. I should have kept my images right down to the last guilt-ridden encounter that would never now be last again. [...] there is nothing so great about tomorrow or about today for that matter. After this it would be difficult to see the past with any honesty or truth. Everything would wear a halo now for it had come to be compared with those old women [...]. (38)

What awaited Vel on this historical journey does not get rid of the guilt she feels, because her last visit to her grandmother's house was hurried.

My final guilt-ridden visit to that great old lady dogged me through young womanhood to maturity years after she had taken up residence in heaven running errands for her God. My mother was perhaps four years buried; and I was visiting; a fleeting visit; all I could manage from my exile then. Comfort Hall a mere dot on my busy schedule. (65)

Being in such a hurry and with little time and space in which to see, she had overlooked the fact that gradually life at Comfort Hall was slowing down. A male cousin was farming the land and living with 'Gran' at the house, "but didn't like looking after her." (65) Vel found her grandmother lying alone in a room. "She babbled something incomprehensible, not the lightest gleam of recognition in her vague eyes." (65) Although she knew that she should stay the night and should have added the little touches that her grandmother would have appreciated, she had to leave.

I wanted to stay [...] and put things in order the way she liked me to in the old days when I loved the calmness of the holidays there; tidy her drawing room, put new flowers in the vases; change her pieces of old crochet work for other pieces of old crochet work smelling of Khus Khus root from her special chest in the corner ... and straighten the chairs, dry-rotting now from lack of use. [...] But I couldn't, for my sins. I had to hurry to catch the bus back to my own life my own children waiting in the city this brief holiday. I, like her children before me, was pursuing single-mindedly my own life, my own family ... (66)

The guilt felt by Vel over the years that she had not given enough time to her grandmother, may have been addressed by Pollard through this story. After all these years, she is able to put into words the love and admiration she had felt for her grandmother.

Recalling a time when Gran was about sixty and she was about ten, Vel describes Gran as a venerable widow who is honoured and respected. "In the district there was a kind of awesome regard for Gran." (49) She was venturesome, vigorous, a woman of great verve. She raised her children single handed and was both a mother and a father to a family of seven. She was enterprising too and saw to planting, harvesting, baking, and to deliveries. "Gran wasn't a leaning and dependent kind of woman." (51) She was in charge of the running and working of the mill house that is no longer operating today, working from sunrise to sunset supervising the cutting of cane and the making of sugar.

She was a baker too, who used a cottage oven, supplying bread and pastries to all the local shops. Gran worked hard all week and spent almost the whole of Sunday in church. She had a propensity for hard work, was known for her kindness, generosity, and had a "reputation for Christian morality." (49)

According to some people Gran was "too much like a man and like take things in her own hand. [...] When they said she was masculine, they couldn't mean her face though, for that was soft and mobile with a charm that was inescapably feminine." (51) How different Gran's face would appear years later when she had had to be moved to the City to receive medical attention, removed and dislocated from the comforts of her home, 'Comfort Hall'. The city, after all, was "where the best doctors were found ... unless of course you know that doctor and medicine are, most of the time, in the mind ..." (67) No longer was her face 'soft and mobile'.

The face of her in the city was agonised; not the smooth face and brow I had seen; the face that wrinkled only when the vague eyes searched my face for a sign to help them pick me out in the confused file of images of three generations deep ... Her home face was at peace [...]. (67)

Instead, in the city there was a

near terrified look on her face because she longed for hills that were grass not asphalt [...]. They tell me she was restless too with worry, whenever they kept her in town, lest she draw her last breath anywhere but on the land that had known the joy and the sorrow that had made her in fifty years or more. (67)

For Gran her local city is as alien a place as the foreign city is for the narrator of 'My Mother'.

Is it sometimes unwise to return after being away for so many years, for by returning one can experience great pain and disappointment? What one remembers from one's childhood can over time become idealised, while the reality of a place can become dim, just as present day reality can turn out so unlike what one has stored in one's memory. As Vel concludes for herself, "I shouldn't have come. I should have kept my images right down to the last guilt-ridden encounter that would never now be last again." (38)

Yet there is a positive side to Vel's return, as it allows her to reminisce about visits to her Grandmother, the delight and pleasure of these visits, and her affectionate feelings for the strict yet loving woman. She recalls what her grandmother did, how 'important-looking' she was, her ideals and aspirations, her basic routines of the week, but more importantly, the special relationship between a grandmother and her grandchildren.

Gran was close to us with a closeness that parents can't really feel. A whole generation has to pass before blood links take on this passion. Parents with their concerns that are practical, that allow us to be all the things that make grandparents proud, can't afford it. Our school successes were Gran's personal victories. She expected them. (47)

The story is a tribute to Pollard's grandmother. It records and acknowledges the love she had for her, especially now that she is able to appreciate that love with the experience and wisdom she has gained over the years. Despite the decay Vel finds at Comfort Hall, the tangerine tree is still standing, as ageless as her grandmother once was. Unaffected by the decay, the tree provides her with a focus that helps her to collect her thoughts and memories. She uses the time that she has well. Although she may question her wisdom in returning, and although she may take different images away with her, those special innocent childhood memories of her Gran are unlikely to have become affected.

Although much of 'Gran' is distinctively Caribbean, this story of remembering could also be universal. It is in many ways a philosophical story. It is only with maturity and experience that one begins to understand and appreciate the lives of one's grandparents, or the mind of our elders. It is only later, often too late, that one may experience the burden of guilt. I have wept with Pollard in this story as I can relate to her pain, and to feelings of guilt and regret, despite all the wonderful and cherished memories both she and I have of our grandmothers whom we so adored.



SELECTED SHORT STORIES II: OTHER PEOPLE'S STORIES

In the short stories contained in her 1994 volume *Karl and Other Stories*, Pollard provides a narrative and literary examination of the frustrations and conflicting desires affecting the lives of the women of the Caribbean.¹ In this respect, her stories are usefully read in conjunction with Olive Senior's book *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*, which demonstrates how the interplay between economic changes and cultural factors has produced contradictions both in women's lives and in their positions in society.²

Pollard's short stories, including those in *Considering Woman*, suggests that in general women as well as men accept sexually defined roles. As Elsie LeFranc observes,

Male and female perceptions about each other display not only mutual distrust and suspicion, but also the continuing subscription to the traditional expectations about behaviour. For example, man should be the dominant hunter and the woman the submissive and respectful home-maker and child-rearer. It is of some interest that both sexes hold similar views.³

For instance, in Pollard's 'A Night's Tale', Dorlene is an economically

¹ Velma Pollard (1994) *Karl and Other Stories*. Harlow: Longman.

² Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey. Senior provides a detailed study of women's lives and work in many countries of the Caribbean, including interviews and in depth life histories, amongst other research in anthropology, literature, history and sociology, all of which challenge stereotypical perceptions of Caribbean women. Also see Pat Ellis ed. (1986) *Women of the Caribbean*. London: Zed Press; Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey eds. (1995) *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*. London: James Currey; and Filomina Chioma Steady ed. (1981) *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*. Cambridge, MA: Shenkman.

³ Elsie LeFranc quoted in Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, p.170.

independent, self-employed woman with money and property. Her husband moves into her ready-made home with her, and when it is revealed that he has been cheating on her, she kicks him out, just as does Mrs Jones to her husband in 'Altamont Jones', a story in the same collection. Dorlene and Jacob's relationship in 'A Night's Tale' is at first, clearly one that is based on mutual trust, rather than suspicion and distrust. Dorlene is the one who informs the reader that she wants a man and of the criteria which he should fit. However, they take on more traditional gender roles once they are married and Dorlene becomes pregnant. She stays at home to raise their child, although she does continue to work from home. Pollard shows that there are exceptions, but happy people such as they are can still become unsettled by the pain and humiliation of infidelity. Infidelity and female self-employment are two key issues in Caribbean culture and women's literature.

The short stories I have chosen to focus on in this chapter, 'Betsy Hyde', 'A Night's Tale', 'Altamont Jones' and 'Cages', raise questions of identity by exploring how the trials and tribulations of their relationships have shaped very different women's lives. Most of the female characters in the stories that I have selected are married women, who in their marriage have suffered from the experience of betrayal, abuse, loneliness and isolation. Betsy Hyde, in 'Betsy Hyde', experiences throughout her marriage the controlling attitude, violent temper, and ungratefulness of her much older husband. In the case of 'A Night's Tale', 'Altamont Jones' and 'Cages', the women suffer because of the extra-marital behaviour of their husbands.

Out of these women, only Dorlene and Mrs Jones appear as active, decisive subjects despite their 'ruin'. Betsy Hyde, the subject of mental abuse, is only free to make decisions and function as a free thinking human being after her husband's death, with much encouragement and support from her daughter Hope. While Dorlene and Mrs Jones suffer at the hands of their unfaithful husbands, when they are confronted with their husband's infidelity, both women pack their husbands' personal possessions in suitcases and put them (the cases and their husbands) outside their houses. Joan just settles into her cage.

Betsy Hyde

In Pollard's short story 'Betsy Hyde' the title character is tricked, exploited and generally

abused by her husband Jed throughout their long marriage. The story spans the many years of Betsy's life, from her brief courtship with Jed to her eightieth birthday in a Nursing Home.

Jed is an ex-serviceman returned from the first World War, confident and handsome.

His gold teeth flashed in the sun. His bronzed skin deepened to red. His just-back-from-contingent twang sidled up to her

'Ov a foine handbag a brought back from Paris, for the girl I'm goin to marry, and tink is you.' (113)

But Jed turns out to be a controlling and abusive husband. Along with his continuous and relentless criticism of both his wife and her illegitimate daughter, Hope, his demands on their time and energy wear out both of them.

She found herself thinking it was a maid Jed wanted to marry to keep his house neat. And that the company policy suited him. She was cleaning all the while. When she wasn't cooking. The frail little-girl cringed every time he shouted, almost as if she objected to her mother being shouted at or rushing to obey. At first she thought it was just like everything else, rough at the beginning. But it didn't improve. (119)

Betsy endures this degrading relationship because she can, if nothing else, look down on other women who are unmarried.

In a sense it didn't really matter what Jed did or didn't do. Nobody could take away what he had given her. She was Mrs Jed Hyde (Betsy, if you knew her well). Marriage was what real people had. The others had come-by-chance children with patchwork names and thank God she was out of that. She could even allow herself to feel pity for the other women in the yard she used to live in. They lived with men but they weren't married. Even if the unsuspecting world called Mr and Mrs So-and-So. Their children were the children of Mr and Mrs just like all the other married-in-the-church-people's children only until they had to apply for something like scholarships or passports. (120-21)

Yet, Betsy's own daughter by a previous relationship, has a different surname to Betsy, a fact which Betsy is painfully aware of. That daughter, Hope, only joined her and Jed upon Betsy's mother's death. Although Betsy had kept Hope secret from Jed, he does not mind taking her into his home, although "from Hope came into the house it seemed like Jed change." (118) Betsy and Jed have no children of their own, a fact she cannot understand, although "She decided that God has His reasons for everything and she wouldn't question it." (121) In old age, Betsy reflects on the fact that "[t]hese days, young women doing anything, having them child and living alone, some even adopting child and living alone. 'What a way things change,' she would say, every time she hear one these stories." (125-26) When she was younger, it was important to find a husband to be a father to the child.⁴

Even when Jed was old and sick and Hope came to the house to help out, he was still abusive towards her.

Meanwhile Jed called her ungrateful bitch no matter how much she did. She fix the house, ungrateful bitch, she shoulda do more then that. She give money regular like clockwork to top of the pension, ungrateful bitch. (125)

But despite this behaviour, Betsy remains steadfast, accepting her lot:

all Betsy could do was dab her eye and give her little nervous laugh and say, 'God will bless you, mi love. Never mind.' Everybody have to be them own psychiatrist and do what they can. Some cry; some break up plates; some sleep all the time; Betsy laugh. (125)

In spite of the many years of anger and frustration, when both Betsy and Jed are quite old, Betsy worries that if she was the first to die, Jed will have trouble coping as a widower. She continues to pray for him to go before she does. It may well have been all this worrying which brings about a heart attack.

Jed dies unexpectedly, "as if God decide to put a hand." (126) It is only now, after Jed's death, that Betsy Hyde discovers peace and quiet. Ironically, and to her surprise,

⁴ For a discussion of marriage in the Caribbean, see chapters 5 and 6 in Raymond T. Smith (1988) *Kinship and Class in the West Indies: A Genealogical Study of Jamaica and Guyana*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Betsy is able to live quite comfortably, for Jed's meanness had caused him to stash away a considerable amount of money which is now hers.

Looking back over her life, Betsy concludes that her daughter has done so much better than her, although even Hope has not realised her potential to the full.

She was thinking of Hope who was bright, successful and even happy. But she had always felt she had married too early. She felt growing up with that ogre of a man had something to do with it. If she hadn't gone through so much she mightn't have married so early. How would it have been if the step father she had been provided with had been a kind and loving person? She might have furthered her studies and been a doctor or lawyer. (131)

While Betsy may wonder in her old age "[w]hat would she herself have been like if she hadn't had to jump at the behest of that someone all those years," she had accepted her fate as God's will and doing, from her lack of a child with her husband, to Jed's death.

'A Night's Tale'

'A Night's Tale' examines some of the issues affecting Caribbean women: sources of livelihood, female-male relationships, domestic and family life, socialisation and interactions with men and the wider community. The story convincingly narrates the very typical Caribbean story of a successful, self-employed business woman, who finds the husband of her prayers, and at first enjoys a loving and fruitful marriage.

In 'A Night's Tale' Pollard has managed to include the significant and critical chapters of Dorlene's life: her aspirations, courtship, marriage, work, and prosperous enterprises. The story is about two Caribbean people who appear to have all the ingredients for a happy and successful marriage. They are hard-working, self-employed business partners with prosperous enterprises, and a joint savings account, evidence of their trust in each other. They have a baby son, the fruit of their love, and Jacob even has a good relationship with his step-daughter Pauline.

The opening sentence of 'A Night's Tale' captures the imposing presence of the central character, Dorlene. "When I met Dorlene she was a woman of substance in every sense." In this one sentence, the reader is put on alert and in some way prepared to meet this impressive woman. Before the reader gets to know anything else about the

central character of the story, they learn that she is another remarkable woman, another particular 'kind' of Caribbean woman, that Pollard has chosen to write about.

Dorlene does indeed have substance and a presence about her:

Decades of ground provision gave her that liberated bulk that poured out of her dress: tight, flesh trembling against edge; or loose, flesh hanging against cloth. Decades of freshly sliced *casi* stewed with salt-fish gave the skin that smooth and shiny texture like highly polished mahogany; except the face, shadowed now with deep anguish marks and the brow furrowed with too much thinking how to make this end meet that. (75)

But there are other reasons for describing Dorlene as a 'woman of substance in every sense'. She is someone who has achieved something, who is to be desired, and who is of an organic sensuality, with her smooth unblemished complexion and generous size. She is a woman of wealth and prosperity, she is a woman of property, a woman of talent and ideas, of creativity. She is an entrepreneur and a self-employed businessperson, she is innovative and decisive. Dorlene is a potential role-model for many other women. But above all, "Dor was a fine down-island piece of woman." (76)

Dorlene is a strong, hard-working and determined woman. She has her own house and land and savings too. "Anything Dor put her hand to prospered. Luck but I suppose, hard work and determination too." (80) The classic example of the self-employed Caribbean woman is the 'higgler' or 'huckster', who supplies the local markets with food. Throughout the Caribbean, the 'higgler' had become a formidable figure, an icon of female independence, whose lives and economic activities have been the subject of several studies.⁵ Pollard draws on this proto-type of self-employment, on the 'higgler' as an entrepreneur in the informal sector, to show Dorlene as a woman engaged in income-earning activity organised and pursued by herself.

She has a lunch wagon set up near the crossroads and carries lunches that she herself has made to the "down-island men" who are building houses for "white people" on the top of the hill. She too aspires to such a location and property. Although the workmen flirt and joke with her, there is nothing to suggest they are disrespectful. She is certainly not intimidated by them. The boldest of the workmen whispers, "Lord, a

⁵ Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, p.107-08, 132-33.

coulda kill meself inna dat," (76) as he touches her. Pollard injects humour and sexual overtones with, "mind you if she ever took him on and one of those thighs possessed him he mightn't see the light of day again, for he was a particularly small man." (76) However, as all the workers are 'down-island' men, Dorlene rejects each one of them. She wants a man in her life again, but she wants "a native born man, a belonger" and "a young man no need to eat grapefruit to cut you courage." (76) Perhaps not least in the choice of a partner for life, in Dorlene's pursuit of a man, issues of identity and dislocation powerfully come into play. Although Dorlene herself was originally from Antigua, she does not want someone like herself who had migrated, but one who is 'native born', and a young man at that.

Insofar as women are usually chosen and do not actively seek their partner, Dorlene breaks with the usual pattern. Eventually she finds her man, who is indeed younger than herself and native born. Jacob tells her one night that he would like them to get married, but as he himself admits he does not have a place of his own and does not believe in "the old fashion business about woman having to move to man house." (78) By the time Jacob suggests marriage to Dorlene, they are already in a sexual relationship.

'But mi big woman, you know, and you a boy,' and he had laughed his lean sided laugh, and asked, 'Mi sleep like boy or man?' She didn't really answer, but her whole body shook with laughter that infected him, too. 'What good fi sleep good fi married,' he said, and switched off the light. (78)

On account of her savings, Dorlene is able to set her husband up as a taxi driver. She could see he would make a 'good taxi man' as he was cheerful, had a good sense of humour, and was presentable. The 'taxi business' and her 'food wagon' thrived and grew into a prosperous business. "And courage was high and the loving was good." (79) They enjoyed many evenings admiring their view from the hill, "natural stars one place, electric stars the other". Whilst Dorlene watches the moon rising bright, she gives silent thanks that she has "found a man to work hard and stay with her so." (79) And when they discover that Dorlene is pregnant, they decide to "shut down the wagon for a while" (80) and use the time she will be at home to build a flat and extend the main house. Meanwhile Dorlene takes up sewing, an enterprise which also does well.

Despite all of these successful enterprises, through motherhood Dorlene acquires

an even more important and significant role. According to Olive Senior, in the Caribbean

Parenting as an activity for women is highly regarded [...]. Even in marriage, a woman regards the children as her responsibility; children are the focus of her primary emotional investment as her primary faith continues to be in her kin; men will come and go but the family will always be there for her to fall back on.⁶

As it stands, from an economic point of view, Dorlene is head and manager of her household and its economic affairs. Dorlene derives power and authority from being innovative, ambitious, creative and resourceful, and she exercises considerable power and authority. In addition she is the older and more experienced adult in the relationship. After the birth of their baby, Jacob decides that he wants to make a greater contribution to the home and therefore he suggests going to the United States to make some extra money. Perhaps he feels stifled after the baby is born and needs some space, or he feels sidelined by the developing mother-baby relationship.

Jacob's decision to go to New Orleans to make some 'extra money' results in him seeking affection elsewhere. Incredibly, the lodger whom Dorlene befriends in her husband's absence, turns out to be her husband's lover, who has preceded him to Jamaica by six months. Jacob's infidelity destroys their marriage and robs Dorlene of some of her wealth. Jacob and Jane, his lover, deceive Dorlene and he steals money from their joint business, while they plan for their future and live off her. Jacob leaves Dorlene badly off, with none of the savings they had worked for together. However, with her skills, stamina, determination and hard work, Dorlene once again makes ends meet. Just how Dorlene manages to do this is disclosed by her to another woman, perhaps her solicitor, when making preparations for her will.

'This house you see here Mam. A leave the top flat to mi son. The middle one is fi the girl - she have to keep her walls - she have a roof as long as him have floor. And down the bottom, dem fi rent it out and use that money pay the tax. The man have the truck. Me no grudge him it. The white woman soon thief every red cent from him Him gwine need that ...' (75)

⁶ Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, p.189.

Dorlene's large house, which is now converted to flats, is shared equally between the children, Dorlene deciding who should have which flat.

Leaving the truck for her estranged husband may be seen either as a token of her affection for him, or perhaps as merely stemming from a lasting sense of loyalty. Dorlene could have sold the truck by now, but because he was the one who drove it, she evidently sees it as his, and does want him to have it. "His truck look new and shiny still although is years now him have it." (75) Dorlene had gone as far as buying another truck to continue the business. Moreover, given that Jacob has left her for a 'white' woman, Dorlene is concerned that this woman will be the ruin of Jacob, that "The white woman soon thief every red cent from him." The irony is that this truck is the very truck in which Jacob drove away with his lover, only to return in it when he collected his suitcase. Dorlene is providing Jacob with a vehicle to give him mobility, after all, she herself states "him gwine need that ..." (75)

I find it very interesting that Dorlene is seen to be concerned about Jacob's welfare, by wanting to leave him the truck, and prepares for him so have something for the future. I do not think a bitter and angry woman, one who has been deeply hurt, could still care enough to want to do this. Dorlene has remained faithful to his memory for the last five years even. "Jacob gone five years now. And you know I never take another man." (86) I can only conclude, that even after all this time, she still loves him, and perhaps would allow him back into her life if he returned.

Altamont Jones

In 'Altamont Jones', Pollard explores the issue of return, whether to one's spouse or to one's home (as in her novel *Homestretch*). While all of the characters in the story are somehow displaced, it focuses on one individual, Altamont Jones, from whom it takes its title. Mrs Jones plays a minor role and seems to lack the vibrant personality of Dorlene. Pollard portrays her instead as a humiliated, hurting and angry woman, who nags her husband with her suspicious about his infidelities. Velma Pollard nevertheless raises the tension between Mr Jones and his wife until the latter takes a dramatic and final decision.

There are three incidents I want to address in the story: Mrs Jones's confrontation with Mr Jones at the beginning of the story; Mr Jones's effort to haul a response from the bartender about his affair, and finally Mr Jones's breakdown when he finds his

suitcase at the gate to his home.

The opening sentence of 'Altamont Jones', "'Ef you don't want to live here you can blasted well leave, you know!'" (132) once again flags up Pollard's concerns with 'identity' and 'dislocation'. Although Mrs Jones is still in her own house, it is no longer the home she had with her husband, just as Mr Jones' lover, the 'red gal', may well find herself displaced by being ditched and dumped.⁷

However, judging by a conversation in a local bar, it appears as though Mr Jones does not necessarily take pleasure in sleeping around. He seems confused, hence asking advice from his local bartender. He confesses to having loved his wife, but that he has found some peace and solitude in the company of the 'red gal'.

'Mr Abrams!

'Do you think I should slept upstairs wid dat dam red gal?' As the Bartender stammers, Mr Jones repeats his question again and again.

'Mr Jones', the bartender recovered himself, 'that's a decision you have to make for yourself; me nor nobody ...'

'Before I slept upstairs', Mr Jones interposed, responding again to his invisible conductor; 'wid dat damn red gal, I prefaaaaaaar to slept with my wife...'
(134)

Having apparently come to some decision, Mr Jones leaves the bar.⁸

This scene also begins to heighten Mr Jones's sense of dislocation. He no longer feels his place is solely with his wife, but at the same time his place is not with the 'red gal' and he is pulled in two different directions. The final scene, in which Mr Jones is falling over his large suitcase just inside the gate to his house, ends the story and his ties to Mrs Jones. The narrator observes Mr Jones sitting on his suitcase and weeping. "He was weeping like a frightened child." (135) The tears could be for many things: the realisation of losing his wife just when he was returning to her forever; the relief of not

⁷ Both the expressions, 'ditching' and 'dumping', indicate the dislocation experienced in the break-up of a relationship; the 'ditch' being at the edge of the road, not at its centre, the 'dump' being a site of refuse on the edge of a town.

⁸ The meticulous detail and description of the people at the bar is remarkably vivid and persuasive in its telling. In this respect it indicates that this may well have been an actual incident Pollard once observed and which may have provided her with an exercise in creative writing, almost as if Pollard had set herself the task of describing the individuals and their setting encountered by her on a certain occasion.

having to tell her it was all over; that Mrs Jones had made the decision for him and she had the upper hand. Perhaps Mr Jones is so overwhelmed by his 'freedom' that he just gives in to his emotions. The scene strikes a particular chord, because there is no one quite so dejected as a homeless person.

It is interesting to note not only that Pollard uses a male narrator for this story, but a narrator who is himself dislocated, for when he sees the weeping Mr Jones he states, "I should have gone up to him. I should have put my hand on his shoulder saying, 'Brother'. But, like the traditional guy from the city, I did nothing." (136)

Cages

'Cages', published in *Considering Woman*, is made up of three parts, 'Cage I', 'Cage II' and 'Cage III', which tell the stories of Joan, Jean and Joy. The stories are about these women's search for their freedom, or rather, their belief that at the very least think they deserve to be free, although they do not do anything about it. Following the title page is a quote by Derek Walcott, with a 'comment' by Pollard:

'You beasts must love your cages after all . . .'
(Walcott, *Joker of Seville*)
?????? Joan, Jean, Joy

One could therefore conclude that if these women are prepared to put up with their lives as they are then they "must love [their] cages after all." However, relationships and particularly marriage are all consuming, complex, delicate, yet strong, and binding.

Joan appears in each part of 'Cages', in the first as a paranoid wife, in the second as a friend to Jean, and in the third as a victim of infidelity and exploitation, yet at the same time as an 'honourable wife'. 'Cages' is primarily about two married women who seek an alternative to the loneliness and drudgery of their marriages, but while one of them only thinks about doing so, the other actually does. It is also about Joy, who is involved with Joan's husband Hugh. Joy's colleague Lucian feels that by doing so, she is potentially depriving herself of a more deserving and enriched life, because she does not have a male partner in her own right.

'Cages' is particularly interesting in the way different generations of women view marriage. In 'Cage II' Jean acknowledges her mother's concern for her, saying

Listen Mummy, I have a feeling this generation of men and women can't make it. We are caught in a funny in-between something. But don't worry. The next generation will. This generation of women asking for bread and the men offering crumbs. Now we can feed, house, clothe ourselves, we looking for something more. And most of them never learned to take the trouble. You know I have been talking to Charles every night for three weeks now. And I don't think it's just because he is a new friend; for I am not telling him my life history. It's just plain starvation for adult company. And if he were my husband, ten chances to one he wouldn't want to talk to me. I wonder what is in marriage now for "inside women". "Honorary wives"?' (16)

Both Joan and Jean are stifled by their marriages. But while Joan only contemplates leaving Hugh, Jean informs her husband that she is not coming home to him anymore because she has found someone else. Joy, on the other hand, who is Hugh's lover, receives his love, affection, respect and protection, which his wife Joan deserves.

Joan, like Betsy Hyde, is a woman who is not emotionally fulfilled in her marriage and experiences sexual frustration and loneliness, yet she does not take any drastic action, such as leaving her husband, like Joan's friend Jean does in 'Cages II' or like the young girl does in 'Sister II'. Joan suffers from her husband's infidelity and mental abuse. Betsy Hyde continues to believe in the status of marriage and continues to be a wife to Jed until his death, although it almost costs her her sanity and even her life. While Joan does contemplate leaving Hugh, it is only a scenario she plays out in her head. She tries to voice her concerns to Hugh as she feels the emotional distance between them and believes that they are destroying each other. Hugh is unable to meet his wife's emotional needs or to fulfil her sexual desires, because, as the reader learns later, he is having an affair with Joy, for whom he has even provided a flat.

Joan tries to bridge the gap of loneliness by inviting friends to the house to listen to music or to talk about their hobbies, but Hugh ridicules this and deprives her of any companionship and friendship she could have. He makes it difficult for her to have a conversation with him and makes her feel stupid. As Pollard once said about Caribbean men, "He talks down to you, he doesn't realise that you have a mind even half as big as

his, he thinks you can settle for half a relationship - it's part of a whole lot of things."⁹

One evening, after Joan has made Hugh his coffee, she tries to talk to him about "the marriage and everything" and how she believes that they are "not communicating at all." She goes on to explain, "I mean we not feeling comfortable and happy in the relationship with each other and I don't even feel sure you want me around." (9) His response is gruff and impatient.

"What you want me to do now, tell you a love you and things like that?"

'I don't want you to lie to me and tell me things you don't mean.'

'Is what you want then woman? Listen, all I want now is to read this book and to be able to read it by myself. That is why I came out here in the first place. You ever hear about people wanting to be alone? Well that is what I need right now. A person can't even sit down a little by themselves without you coming with you stupid paranoia. You have crazy noh, but you not going to send me off my head too.'

(10)

Hugh makes Joan feel that she is just an over anxious and unreasonable person, who creates her own problems, yet Joan has every right to be concerned about her marriage, because 'Cage III' reveals the enormity of Hugh's infidelity with his colleague Joy.

Meanwhile, in 'Cage II', Jean's parents are portrayed as content in their marriage, unlike Jean, who is married to Jim, "a professional man of some standing." (14) His career takes him away from his family; she has cared for their home and children for the last five years. Consumed by the responsibilities and monotonous routine for the past five years, she goes off by herself to think. Whilst she is away from Jim she meets Charles, who becomes her new companion and who gives her the opportunity to choose her destination. For Jean, marriage was like a cage,¹⁰ she became enclosed in a stale unstimulating and unexciting environment. In leaving her husband, Jean finds her identity again.

⁹ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.180.

¹⁰ However, Pollard has also said that "[w]hen you think about female identification in terms of a man/woman thing you are in a cage." [Ibid., p.175.]

It was difficult, almost impossible for him to imagine Jean with somebody else, smiling at him, dancing with him, making . . . no, she couldn't possibly make love to him. She had said he didn't know him so the obvious questions presented themselves: good-looking? rich? foreign? But how could all this matter. What must he have to offer to let her risk her marriage. He must be very rich. Perhaps that was a little unfair. She never was a great one for money. In any case he had given her everything she ever asked for. Look at their home, so elegant! the children so pretty and well behaved. And of course himself, a professional man of some standing. (13-14)

It would seem that men look primarily at the material things they can provide. In 'Sister II' the young woman's husband also questions why his young wife left him. After all, he too felt he had given her a house, food, music and English lessons, so what more could she possibly want in any case.

Jean feels that in leaving Jim she is not actually depriving her children of a father, because he hardly ever sees them.

When he's at home he's asleep or they are asleep. Sometimes he takes them out of course, but that's so rare. His life is full and complicated. His clients are demanding. He can't find time to share things with the family. Tell me I sound melodramatic but I haven't lived for five years. I had forgotten even how to dream, for every dream was a nightmare. I had to come here, and get the picture from a distance; and now I can't go back. (15)

Jean describes the relief of telling Jim of her decision. "I feel like a great weight has fallen from my shoulders. I feel light A bird, suddenly, without a cage." (16) Jean has found her freedom at long last. Although Charles, her new-found love, would like to marry her, she feels that she can have a better life and a more fulfilling relationship without the binds of marriage. She prefers to have all the trappings and excitement of wooing. She feels that by belonging entirely to herself, Charles will be more attentive to her because he does not own her and therefore will make more of an effort to keep their relationship alive and exciting, to keep her with him by her own choice. Only emotional ties will connect them, the legal ones would put her back in a cage.

Finally 'Cage III' confirms Joan's paranoia, for Hugh's affair with Joy is office knowledge. An older colleague points out how Hugh is already controlling Joy as well.

Because he does not want her to go to a particular bar, she deprives herself of that pleasure. Lucian says to her, "Girl, you don't see this man lock you up in a cage? you in one and his wife in another; two of you can't even be on the street the same night!" (20) Both Joan and Joy are 'caged' by the same man.

It is worth noting that Hugh admires 'her peace', which is also what Altamont Jones admired in 'the red gal'. Perhaps when suspicion and distrust enter the marriage, a wife can become a nagging woman and drive a man into an affair, turning suspicions into reality. Furthermore, it is interesting that Joan, Jean, and the women in 'Sister I' and 'Sister II' were married to educated and professional men, who provided for them materially, but could not fulfil them emotionally.

CONCLUSION

Relationships of love between women and men are a source of a sense of belonging and self-identity. Unfortunately, relationships can also be a cause of grief, especially when they become un-settled, that is, dislocated.

In 'A Night's Tale' and 'Altamont Jones', Pollard writes about the betrayal of marital love, and its consequences, which allows for an examination of her treatment of gender and marriage. Both stories tell of the humiliation wives feel in consequence of their philandering husbands, and why they are often unable to continue in their marriages. Although Mrs Jones, in 'Altamont Jones', may be seen to act impulsively when she packs her husband's personal possessions in a suitcase and leaves it by their gate, she is also a very brave woman to do this. There is no mention of her profession or income in the story, but I conclude she is a housewife who lives alone with her husband. Although her future without any immediate financial support is cause for concern, nevertheless this particular night she decides she has had enough and is no longer prepared to share her husband with the 'red hair' girl.

In 'A Night's Tale', Dorlene also packs Jacob's suitcase and leaves it outside the glass door. The packed suitcases which are placed outside of their homes in their absence, give the men no excuse to enter the house or to enter their wives' lives again. No further conversation takes place between the respective couples once the husbands have seen their packed suitcases. The suitcase seems to signal 'the end' and acts as a silent statement.

Olive Senior reports that some of the women surveyed in her study on women's lives in the Caribbean cited certain negative behavioural traits which they seemed to take for granted in men, such as infidelity. Women of widely varying ages and backgrounds seemed to consider male infidelity as 'natural'.¹¹ Men's double standards in male-female relationships are a particular source of conflict and sexual inequality. Thus men will accept as 'normal', and women will tolerate, a man having an affair outside a steady relationship, accepting it as part of a man's 'nature', no matter how painful and humiliating an affair might be. The stereotype is of the straying male and the faithful female. This does not mean that females are not unfaithful, but where male infidelity is recognised, and seen as natural for men, the same behaviour is condemned in women. "When women are wild you call them rats; when a man is wild you call him a star!"¹² As Christine Barrow found,

Caribbean man perceives women as existing for his sexual pleasure. The tendency to be simultaneously involved with more than one partner is perceived as natural to a man, 'to keep you knowing you is a man', but not to a woman. For their sexual performance men are complimented as 'hard-seeds', while women become 'whores' and are 'dragged in the gutter'.¹³

Pollard is emphasising that there are exceptions to the norm and that not all women, such as the two central female characters in 'A Night's Tale' and 'Altamont Jones', put up with their husbands' infidelities, and that even in small island societies some women are beginning to assert their equality. But this is not so at first, as shown in 'A Night's Tale' by way of Dorlene's description of her feelings when she discovers her husband's infidelity.

Don't ask me where a get the control not to lick her down or lick him down. For I didn't need to hear anything else. And suddenly I wanted to know how I never notice the shady look the two of them eyes before. And I just stand up there

¹¹ Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, p.166-184.

¹² Hyman Rodman (1971) *Lower-Class Families: The Culture of Poverty in Negro Trinidad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.71.

¹³ Christine Barrow quoted in Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, p.172.

looking from one to the other and feeling stupid how this woman come in here with such a simple lie and come and live with me and wait for my husband and play with him right there in my own house. [...] I decide that I wouldn't give a soul the chance to laugh at me or feel sorry for me. This island very small. And the down-island people mostly know one another and everybody would soon hear. I decide that they wouldn't hear that I get bad or even know how I feel. (85)

The reality is that many women do have to put up with infidelity. Economic security may have the biggest hold over them, but in many cases they still love their husbands. The need for warmth, love and tenderness cannot be ignored as significant elements influencing their behaviour. Hermione McKenzie observes that

the need for warmth and satisfying emotional and sexual relationships exists on both sides. In a social structure which so often defeats fidelity and tenderness, the shift from partner to partner by both men and women may still be seen as a persistent quest for exactly these qualities in a relationship.¹⁴

A slightly harsher interpretation of this would be to see men's infidelities as stemming from uncontrolled 'lust', rather than from a need for 'affection'.

In the Caribbean, male-female behaviour has been the subject of commentary mainly in the idiom of popular folk culture, including folk-songs and sayings and calypsos. In 'Miss Chandra', where the death and burial of Miss Chandra's two handicapped children are revealed, the narrator explains that "Where I come from, there weren't too many calypsonians, and maybe this was too serious a matter for a mento song to come out." (105) Early writings on male-female behaviour had primarily been expressing a male view point. It is only in recent decades that Caribbean women have begun to voice their experiences in public.

The question one asks oneself is why someone like Jacob is unfaithful to his wife, Dorlene, when he seems to have 'everything'. He has a loving and caring wife, who has a sense of humour. They both thoroughly enjoy the physical side of their relationship.

¹⁴ Hermione McKenzie quoted in Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey, p.179.

They are self-employed and Dorlene owns the house they live in.¹⁵ Eventually they have a child of their own. Either Jacob is the typical Caribbean male who has to show that he could still 'pull women', or it happens because he is insecure on account of his feeling of economic powerlessness, for Dorlene is an equal business partner. The interesting thing is that in some respect he is still shown to be loyal and respectful to both, Dorlene his wife and Jane his lover. He continues on the outside to be the attentive and hard working husband, yet Dorlene notices the physical side of their relationship has dwindled upon his return from 'state-side'.

In an interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Pollard was once questioned why "that triangle, the Black male, the white woman and the black woman," although treated frequently by male Caribbean writers, was not so important amongst Caribbean women writers. Pollard replied that "I think the 'other' woman is a theme, but not the woman as white, necessarily."¹⁶ She believes that

we had a lot more of that in the 50s when the men were going abroad to study. To a man they were coming back ... I think you got your degree, you came back, you got your big job, and you had your wife. You have a house on the hill; a big car, a big job, a white wife. I think they went together. And you will see a lot in the literature too - it's not about white, certainly about brown, and about the whole business of milking your coffee, and marrying up and the lot, you know [...].¹⁷

On the one hand the stories reinforce notions of male sexual prowess and power, while also showing men as incapable of sexual morality and as unable to control their lust. Both men in these stories are unfaithful to their wives. The discovery of their infidelity makes them seem neither powerful nor in control. The delight of illicit sex is short-lived when the betrayed wives pack their husband's personal possessions and leave them outside the house. Pollard takes the opportunity to subvert the image of the black woman as a sexual object, and to assert their sexual equality, and empower women to

¹⁵ My reading of the interviews and detailed life-histories in Olive Senior's *Working Miracles* suggests that despite being seen as a mere object of desire, Caribbean women are also perceived as being self-reliant matriarchs, strong, assertive and independent individuals. [Olive Senior (1991) *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean*. London: James Currey.]

¹⁶ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.180.

decide the course of their marriages.¹⁸ The stories celebrate black women's power. It takes strong decisive women to do what these two women did.

Pollard's stories demonstrate that women like Mrs Jones and Dorlene no longer allow themselves be exploited. They acknowledge their true worth and refuse to ignore their husbands' infidelity when it becomes apparent. Their husbands do not admit to being unfaithful, but neither do they deny being so. Their silence confirms the suspicion, while the suitcases placed outside their houses give voice to their betrayed wives, for when the men return to the house, no conversation takes place with their wives. They might have come back to say they were sorry, possibly to resume their marriage, but it was too late. The decision had been made for them, their marriages are at an end.

The relationships of men and women as they appear in Pollard's stories augur ill. In many cases, the man regards the woman as an object, neglects her, ill-treats and diminishes her. Nevertheless, Pollard's writings provide a glimpse of a change in attitudes. Whilst exploring the consequences of the unsatisfactory relationships between the men and women in her stories, Pollard points to the possibility of more fulfilling male-female relationships and the positive social effects which can result. What these two stories demonstrate quite well is that the attitudes of Caribbean women are changing, and that they are beginning to assert their sense of self-worth and self-respect. Pollard presents positive images of Caribbean women, of women who have feelings of self-worth and self-respect, thus providing positive female role models for emulation and ratification. The stories celebrate Caribbean women's strengths and their power.



¹⁷ Ibid., p.180-1.

¹⁸ See Anneka Marshall (1996), 'From Sexual Denigration to Self-respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality', in Delia Jarrett-Macauley ed. *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism*. London: Routledge.

CONCLUSION

In her story 'Gran', Pollard writes that when she heard of her grandmother's death, "I was doing my penance out in the land of whiteness and success where they were asking me for the black opinion."¹ Having done her 'penance', what makes Velma Pollard's writings special is that she is *not*, or no longer is, a West Indian writer in exile, 'in the land of whiteness', producing a literature disconnected from its sources. Instead, Jamaica has been her home since birth, despite the years she spent abroad as a student and teacher.

But it is not just writers who should not be disconnected from their sources. In a paper on teaching Caribbean literature, Pollard draws a distinction

between literature whose content is culturally remote from the reader and is therefore less meaningful and literature which is culturally accessible and therefore more meaningful. [...] The challenge of the Caribbean classroom today is to lead students to relate the writing to the culture which engendered it. It would be ironic if the alienation which prevailed when the literature was foreign, continues to prevail when the literature is local.²

V.S. Naipaul has insinuated that the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands.³ This is what Pollard has done. Writing provides people with a history of a different quality to oral history, but writing can also record a history and give it a permanence less open to revision than oral history. Velma Pollard herself asserts:

¹ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, p.67.

² Velma Pollard (1997) 'From Periphery to Centre - Teaching Caribbean Literature Within a Post-colonial/Commonwealth Context', in Anne Collett, Lars Jensen and Anna Rutherford eds. *Teaching Post-Colonialism and Post-Colonial Literatures*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, p.166, 168.

³ V.S. Naipaul (1994) *A Way in the World*. London: William Heinemann, p.77. Also see V.S. Naipaul (1962) *The Middle Passage*. London: André Deutsch.

Perhaps the most important reason that I write is that I have a great desire to record aspects of life, events and experiences which I think are worth keeping. I grew up in rural Jamaica in the forties. In the fifties I went to school in the capital city, Kingston, but continued to spend all my holidays at home in the country. I write from a memory of those times and those places. It is very easy to lose a sense of the past and have each generation evolve a notion of what existed at a time before the present. I consider that a tragedy.⁴

In writing, according to George Lamming, "the West Indian peasant becomes other than a cheap source of labour." He becomes through the novelist's eye a living existence.⁵

West Indian novelists apply themselves to an analysis and interpretation of their society, including the social and economic deprivation of the majority, the pervasive consciousness of race and colour. As Kenneth Ramchand says in his preface to *The West Indian Novel and its Background*,

The pleasure of recognising the familiar is a legitimate pleasure for readers of literature, but it will only serve conservatism and self-indulgence if there is not a readiness for literature's exciting other side – the process by which it deconstructs and de-familiarises, and so promotes transformation both in the lives of individuals and in the structures of societies.⁶

Literature here is a vital tool and activity in deepening people's understanding of each other, and of social and political issues throughout history; of combating ignorance and the injustices and injuries that spring from ignorance. Through her insight into the growth of a Caribbean consciousness, Pollard's *Homestretch* offers an interpretation of Caribbean history and the development of Jamaican society.

Identity, not least, according to Eduardo Archetti, is reshaped by the impact of literary products.⁷ After all, as Thomas Hylland Erikson maintains,

⁴ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.17.

⁵ George Lamming (1960) *The Pleasures of Exile*. London: Michael Joseph. p.38-9.

⁶ Kenneth Ramchand (1983) *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. London: Heinemann, p.iii.

⁷ Eduardo P. Archetti (1994) 'Introduction.', in Eduardo P. Archetti ed. *Exploring the Written: Anthropology and the Multiplicity of Writing*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Novels also form part of reflexive socio-cultural reality and to this effect are part and parcel of that society within which they were written. [...] In considering this aspect of fiction, we enter the sociology of literature, where texts are seen as the products of society and where the relevant readings of these texts will be those of the members of that society, not our own.⁸

The social appropriation of fictional texts by Caribbean women, in particular, shows how all members of society, not only writers, reflect critically about their own identity, and have their own models of and ideals for their society. As Stewart Brown states in his introduction to *Caribbean New Wave: Contemporary Short Stories*

all these authors are writing to be read in the Caribbean, where they were born, where all these stories are set; they assume an audience and a cultural domain that permits them to intervene - in all the subtle and complex ways that only literature can - in the ongoing process of shaping the mores and values of Caribbean societies. That earlier generation of writers, all the quality of their writing and the depth of their commitment to the Caribbean, were never really able to achieve that status within the West Indies.⁹

A widespread presence of reflection on the values and make-up of Caribbean society and identity is what distinguishes Caribbean women's writing from even the well-respected novels by male Caribbean writers such as Lamming, Phillips, and Selvon. A further distinguishing feature in the literature of black women is that their literature takes the trouble to record the thoughts, words, feelings, and actions of black women; experiences that make the realities of black women look very different from what black and white men have written. Testimonies contained in a collection of essays by black women, *The Heart of the Race*, substantiate this perception.¹⁰

⁸ Thomas Hylland Erikson (1994) 'The Author as Anthropologist: Some West Indian Lessons about the Relevance of Fiction for Anthropology', in Eduardo P. Archetti ed. *Exploring the Written: Anthropology and the Multiplicity of Writing*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, p.191.

⁹ Stewart Brown (1990) 'Introduction', in Stewart Brown ed. *Caribbean New Wave: Contemporary Short Stories*. Oxford: Heinemann, p.viii.

¹⁰ Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe (1985) *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Virago Press.

The tone of Pollard's short stories, of her novella *Karl*, and of *Homestretch* is sharp, its observations and recollections seem personal, employing what appear to be autobiographical incidents which are illuminated by her analysis and commentary. That is, Pollard's stories are quasi auto-biographical, drawing on her own, contemporary and past experiences of the Caribbean and elsewhere. Indeed, a very high proportion of creative writing on migration and return migration is strongly autobiographical. As Paul White argues, behind writings on migration there are often "strongly personal motivations drawn from a possible need for catharsis, or to allow the act of writing to contribute to the re-definitions of identity [...]"¹¹ In black writing in particular, according to Pam Morris, "autobiographical form has been important [...] because it unites individual and group identity."¹²

This is not to say that artistic motivations do not also play a part in Pollard's work. Indeed, my discussion of the treatment of identity and dislocation in her writings should not obscure the fact that her reflections on these issues are coupled not only with a comic sense, but also with a vibrancy inspired by Pollard's insight into human nature.

But there is more to the auto-biographical dimension of Pollard's work. As Samuel Selvon has said, "Writers are products of what they come out of."¹³ To speak of Velma Pollard's fiction without reference to the context in which it is produced would be unthinkable, for the specificity of the Caribbean context of her writings is ever-present. Indeed, Pollard herself provides the reader with the details of the context her writings 'come out of', by means of the wealth of factual information and analysis embedded in her work, such as her detailed descriptions of the social, political and psychological circumstances of place (countries, institutions) and time (dates, public events).

Throughout her work Pollard demonstrates her art as a local colourist. Her sharp eye gives her observations the exactness and comprehensiveness of a photograph, while her fine ear records the speech of her 'country folk' with the accuracy of a linguist, which

¹¹ Paul White (1995) 'Geography, Literature and Migration', in Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White, eds. *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*. London: Routledge, p.9.

¹² Pam Morris (1993) *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, p.177. For an introduction to autobiography, James Olney ed. (1980) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Also see, Liz Stanley (1992) *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹³ Frank Birbalsingh (1988) *Passion and Exile: Essays in Caribbean Literature*. London Hanslib, p.159

she is also. Indeed, throughout her work, she illustrates commonplace West Indian social features and captures West Indian manners, customs, beliefs in an almost ethnographic style. The dialogue is natural and the characters and the activity reveal vitality and vivid energy. By examining the blend of local customs, family reunions and voluntary educational and community support, Pollard is able to elaborate on West Indian foods, music, dance and song, the influence of church life in a small community. In *Homestretch*, this detail helps to accentuate the unique West Indian culture which David and Edith were deprived of during their thirty-year working life period in England.

However, such detail serves multiple purposes, for Pollard writes not merely for a Caribbean readership. In *Homestretch*, for example, Pollard painstakingly describes commonplace aspects of life in Jamaica, for example children carrying water during school hours in the blazing hot sun in order to help out in the home. Food is discussed in great detail at David and Edith's family get-together on the Sunday of Heritage Week. As Jamaicans themselves would know the names of the dishes and the ingredients used, the explanations must be for non-Jamaicans. Likewise, local fruits or the illegally distilled 'bushroom' need not be described for a Jamaican audience.

Yet, a non-Jamaican readership need not necessarily be one without any connection with the Caribbean. Instead, Pollard's work addresses above all a readership which by way of migration has become dislocated from its West Indian roots. Such detail, to once again use *Homestretch* as an example, is not supplied for readers akin to her characters Anthony and Laura, but for someone like Brenda, who is almost a stranger to her own culture and cuisine. In contrast, characters like David and Edith have always been steeped in their West Indian-ness.

But there is another reason for including detail familiar to a West Indian readership. In *Homestretch*, when Charley and Myrtle take David and Edith to the 'Milk River Bath' and Myrtle serves a 'Jamaican breakfast', Pollard states that this breakfast consists of: "chocolate tea in a flask, bammie, ackee and saltfish."¹⁴ In all instances, such detail serves to convince a Jamaican and West Indian readership who may be questioning her portrayal and interpretation of Jamaican experiences, that the author knows what she is writing about, that her settings are seen as authentic. Hence, such detail facilitates recognition on the part of that very West Indian community which her writings (especially

¹⁴ Velma Pollard (1994) *Homestretch*. Harlow: Longman, p.15.

her prose) attempts to inscribe. The ethnographic dimension of Pollard's writings are perhaps most evident where her creative writing and her academic specialism, linguistics, come together. Pollard's work is remarkable not least for the extensive use, especially in her short stories, of Creole, which is spoken by the bulk of people in Jamaica, where most of her stories are set. As Pollard herself explains in her 'Afterword' to *Considering Woman*, the "popular language in Jamaica is Jamaican Creole (JC), and English related Creole, the result of the interaction of English and several West African languages in a plantation situation."¹⁵ As a linguist, Pollard exploits fully the Jamaican speech community, making use of the flexibility which different codes allow.

Joan Anim-Addo has argued that Creole, despite being

held in 'utter contempt' by many of its Caribbean speakers is nonetheless a significant medium of literary writing for African Caribbean women. [...] African Caribbean women writers, beneficiaries of wider access to formal education which by and large continues to discredit Creole, turn to familiar oral sources - Creole - in order to develop as writers. [...] The encoding of oral culture within literature serves to alter, albeit slowly, the continuing low status of Creole into literary language or, perhaps more accurately, the language of literature.¹⁶

Pollard herself expresses this concern in an interview with Daryl Cumber Dance and Pamela Mordecai, acknowledging that the "poetry that we have had in dialect so far has tended to be laughter-raising; the plays that we have had that use dialect are mostly Bim and Bam stuff, so that the business of treating dialect seriously is going to be very new."¹⁷

Pollard has indeed succeeded in treating dialect seriously, for reasons she herself makes clear. As Pollard explains in *Considering Woman*, "as writers of fiction sought greater accuracy in their representation of character, the need to use Jamaican Creole

¹⁵ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, p.73.

¹⁶ Joan Anim-Addo (1996) 'Audacity and Outcome: Writing African-Caribbean Womanhood', in Joan Anim-Addo ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writings*. London: Whiting and Birch, p.219-20. Also see Douglas Midgett (1977) 'West Indian Version: Literature, History, and Identity', in Ann M. Pescatello ed. *Old Roots in New Lands: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on Black Experiences in the Americas*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, p.219-20.

¹⁷ Daryl Cumber Dance (1992) 'Pam Mordecai and Velma Pollard', in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, p.177.

became clear [...]."¹⁸ It is this concern with accuracy, linguistic and otherwise, with the accurate representation of Jamaican society, which gives her work its remarkable ethnographic quality and value.

Indeed, Pollard's basic writing technique could well be called ethnographic (rather than journalistic), with only a fine line separating fact from fiction. The fact that her writings are rooted in a recognisable, historical reality, certainly confirms Merle Collins' claim that "Caribbean women writers will approach the themes that concern their everyday existence."¹⁹

Much can be gained from reading Caribbean women's literature in terms of recent debates on ethnographic writing, including auto-ethnography, that is, the "anthropological study of a sociocultural system by a member of the society concerned."²⁰ Ideally, auto-ethnography should lead to a more subjective ethnography which overcomes the opposition between anthropologist and informant, subject and object. With reference to auto-ethnography in developing countries, however, it has been pointed out that the "scholar is likely to be a middle class intellectual who in order to study rural or urban popular sectors of his own society must overcome his own class (and/or racial) prejudice."²¹ Arguably, this is an issue which any analysis of Pollard, the intellectual middle class Jamaican, has to take into account.

The debate on ethnographic writing, which received additional impetus through the work of James Clifford and George E. Marcus, questions the role of the writer in and the status of an authoritative voice in ethnographic writing, emphasising instead the subjective nature of narratives.²² As James Clifford now famously remarked,

No longer a marginal, or occulted, dimension, writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter. [...] The focus on text making and rhetoric serves to highlight the constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts. It undermines overly transparent modes of authority, and it draws

¹⁸ Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, p.74.

¹⁹ Merle Collins (1996) 'Framing the Word: Caribbean Women's Writings', in Joan Anim-Addo ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writings*. London: Whiting and Birch, p.9.

²⁰ Charlotte Seymour-Smith (1986) *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*. London: Macmillan, p.19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.20.

²² James Clifford and George E. Marcus eds. (1986) *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*. London: University of California Press.

attention to the historical predicament of ethnography, the fact that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures.²³

Consequently, as Clifford suggests controversially, “[e]thnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of ‘something made or fashioned’ [...]”.²⁴ Within this postmodern climate, different ways of writing ethnography became central to debates on anthropological methodology, rather than being on its margins. The expansion of the genre of autobiography into anthropology is just one of these.²⁵

In the wake of these developments, Kamala Visweswaran has suggested possibilities for ‘feminist ethnography’, which involves a questioning of the ‘accepted canon of ethnographic writing and a shift to experimental writing, as exemplified what she calls “recent autobiographical and novelistic attempts” at ethnography.²⁶

I argue that feminist ethnography can benefit from a experimental ethnography's concern for the constitution of subjectivities, but perhaps more importantly, that experimental ethnography can benefit from a feminist evaluation of some of its assumptions. For a movement which claims interest in experimenting with how selves are constituted or represented, experimental ethnography has been strangely reluctant to embrace other forms of writing, like the novel, short story, diary or autobiography. At a time when literary critics read such texts as expressive culture, why can't anthropologists? Novels by Zora Neale Hurston or Paula Gunn Allen, or short stories by Cherrie Moraga would never be considered anthropology in the old canon. But perhaps they can in the next one.²⁷

Zora Neale Hurston, notably, was trained as an anthropologist by none other than Franz Boas.

It is this which makes possible a reading of Caribbean literature as auto-ethnographic. Erikson, for one, suggests that

²³ James Clifford (1986) 'Introduction: Partial Truths', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus eds. *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*. London: University of California Press, p.2.

²⁴ Ibid., p.6.

²⁵ Judith Okely and Helena Callaway eds. (1992) *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London: Routledge.

²⁶ Kamala Visweswaran (1988) 'Defining Feminist Ethnography', *Inscriptions*, Vol.3, No.4, p.27.

²⁷ Ibid.

First, novels may serve as ethnographic *sources* and may to this effect rank with informants's statements. At this level, the author [...] more or less unwittingly reveals aspects of his society. [...] The author, known through the novel, is here seen as the production of a society. Second, novels may be read as ethnographic *descriptions*; that is, the information conveyed may be taken more or less at its face value, as a kind of ethnographic documentation. Third, some novels may profitably be read as *theoretical anthropology*. These books embody a cultural analysis and reflexive critique of the author's society.²⁸

The implications of this is that, according to Thomas Hylland Erikson, "[n]ovels, which are simultaneously the production of a society and contributions to the self-definition and reification of that society, have the additional virtue of presenting some kind of ethnographic evidence [...]."²⁹ Indeed, fictional models of culture entail general assumptions about aspects of life, just as ethnographic models do. After all, the novel as a literary form emerged against a specific historical and social background. As Pollard herself states,

There is a great deal that no longer exists in Jamaica today that was important to life in Jamaica yesterday. In my fiction I make these things affect imaginary people. There is an interrelation between history and literature which when exploited gives a clearer picture of any given time than either discipline would have been able to offer independently. A picture or a description of any phenomenon of people in a story give life to the picture.³⁰

In some sense, I see Pollard as an indigenous anthropologist, as an authoritative interpreter producing a very fruitful dialogue between literature and ethnography. As Erikson has argued, anthropology and fiction "represent different, although sometimes overlapping and frequently complementary reductions of social reality." The practitioners of both, the novelist and the anthropologist share an "ambition to

²⁸ Thomas Hylland Erikson (1994) 'The Author as Anthropologist: Some West Indian Lessons about the Relevance of Fiction for Anthropology', in Eduardo P. Archetti ed. *Exploring the Written: Anthropology and the Multiplicity of Writing*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, p.191.

²⁹ Ibid., p.171-72.

³⁰ Velma Pollard (1999) 'The Most Important Reason I Write', in Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale eds. *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. London: Macmillan, p.17.

transform the world of sensations and thoughts into one of words."³¹ In the preface to their seminal collection of papers on literature and migration, *Writing Across Worlds* (published in 1995), Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White advance the premise

that 'non-academic' literature, written often (but by no means exclusively) by migrants, can offer powerful insights into the nature of the migration process and the experience of being a migrant. [...] Such insights are often infinitely more subtle and meaningful than studies of migrants which base themselves on cold statistics or on the depersonalised, aggregate responses to questionnaire surveys.³²

In Erikson's well chosen words, "fictional texts may help build a bridge between the richness of experience and the sterility of the academic anthropological text."³³ After all, as Mary Chamberlain explains, "on the ground, migrant lives are also quite prosaic, concerned with the daily round of work, home and family, as well as developing and adapting older cultural patterns and social formations [...]."³⁴ Hence, the 'indigenization' of diasporic Caribbean communities can be observed in the mundane, in the world normally subject to ethnographic enquiry. As Chamberlain argues, "it is within the family, and the workplace, that the points of similarity and difference, conformity and conflict are negotiated and resolved, where family values and cultural practices are transmitted, contested and transformed, and where identities evolve."³⁵

Paul White points out that the role of the individual in migration has been inadequately addressed in most of the social scientific literature, except in social

³¹ Thomas Hylland Erikson (1994) 'The Author as Anthropologist: Some West Indian Lessons about the Relevance of Fiction for Anthropology', in Eduardo P. Archetti ed. *Exploring the Written: Anthropology and the Multiplicity of Writing*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, p.192-93.

³² Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White (1995) 'Preface', in Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White, eds. *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*. London: Routledge, p.x.

³³ Thomas Hylland Erikson (1994) 'The Author as Anthropologist: Some West Indian Lessons about the Relevance of Fiction for Anthropology', in Eduardo P. Archetti ed. *Exploring the Written: Anthropology and the Multiplicity of Writing*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, p.194. For a similar statement, see Edward M. Bruner (1993) 'Introduction: The Ethnographic Self and the Personal Self', in Paul Benson ed. *Anthropology and Literature*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, p.9.

³⁴ Mary Chamberlain (1998) 'Introduction'. In Mary Chamberlain ed. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, p.9.

³⁵ Ibid.

anthropology and social history. Even more so, it is creative writing which has a "power to reflect complex and ambiguous realities that make it far more plausible representation of human feelings [...]"³⁶ As White explains at length, and with great relevance to Pollard's work, especially her novel *Homestretch*,

In migration, above all topics, the level of ambivalence, of plurality, of shifting identities and interpretations are perhaps greater than many other aspects of life. The relationships between people and their contextual societies are intimate ones which are transformed by movement. [...] Creative writing on migration often illuminates the processes of socialisation that occur to awaken an acceptance that migration is a viable, even sometimes the expected, means to achieve a goal (poorly articulated though it may often be.) Migration also produces its own outcomes, for those directly and indirectly involved. Fictional and autobiographical writing illuminates many of these outcomes in terms of both superficial happenings and deeper-seated attitudinal and behavioural changes.³⁷

In consequence of the strength of creative writing on migration, White appeals for collaboration between social scientists and literary scholars in the field of migration studies.

All in all, this thesis has sought to provide a detailed and contextualised introduction to the writings of Jamaican-born Velma Pollard. Despite the ever-growing critical literature on Caribbean women's writing, Pollard's extensive body of work, including poems, short stories, a novel, literary criticism and linguistic studies, has so far failed to attract the critical attention which the work of other Caribbean women writers has received. One possible reason may be that that her writings are aimed primarily at a Caribbean readership, both in the Caribbean and abroad. Moreover, as Pollard's prose is concerned primarily with substance rather than form (that is, with the experiences of the characters she portrays rather than with the ways they are portrayed), her writings may be deemed to be insufficiently complex to merit academic criticism.

³⁶ Paul White (1995) 'Geography, Literature and Migration', in Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White, eds. *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*. London: Routledge, p.15.

³⁷ Ibid.

None of these considerations, however, should detract from the considerable quality of Pollard's work, which is recognised by at least one of her fellow writers. As none other than Joan Riley has commented with respect to Pollard's *Considering Woman*,

We are reminded of J. California Cooper and Zora Hurston ... yet these voices are pure Pollard. Pollard takes us on a journey through her world of women, Black women whose warmth and humanity enfolds us through her pen.³⁸

As discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, Pollard's writings are situated firmly within mainstream Caribbean women's literature, with which her own work engages critically (as exemplified by her poems on women writers and her work on Olive Senior). I have likewise argued that Pollard's principal contribution to Caribbean literature is found in her engagement with two principal subjects, return migration and relationships (male-female and female-female), which are addressed within a wider context of literary and sociological debates on identity, dislocations and (Caribbean) migration. This is not to say that Pollard's writings merely go over established ground in a predictable fashion. This is evident from her novella *Karl*, which addresses the key issues found in Caribbean women's writing, but does so, unusually, by means of a male-centred narrative (or, rather, an interior monologue). In addressing the problems of identity and dislocation which Karl experiences, Pollard gives analytical expression to the conflicts that arise for anyone who tries to be at ease with themselves in a Creole and colonial or postcolonial culture. The novella illustrates the opportunities and achievements of Karl's generation, but also the limitations to which that generation was subject.

These issues are taken up in Pollard's only novel to date, *Homestretch*, which focuses on the experiences of 'return migrants' and 'repeat migrants' and their comparison of life in England, the United States and Jamaica. The novel chronicles how these migrants come to reconnect with and accept their cultural heritage. Pollard uses the genre of the novel to good effect, employing a wide range of characters to explore and contrast the multiple dimensions of migration and return migration, and illustrating the complexity of Caribbean social history. It is for this reason that stereotyping and over-generalisation are avoided, nor is Pollard's novel a purely women-centred text. Apart from providing both a historical and sociological treatment of return migration, *Homestretch* allow Pollard to advocate what she considers to be the idealistic potential of return migration.

Although she offers no simplified solutions to the cultural rootlessness occasioned by migration, Pollard shows that solutions can be found, hence offering positive prospects.

This is not always the case for Pollard's short stories, which provide an examination of the frustrations and conflicting desires of women in the Caribbean, as well as of their quest for wholeness and belonging. Here, her portrayal of Caribbean life stories are considerably bleaker. Men are shown as regarding women as objects, neglect them and ill-treat them. Although exploring these consequences of unsatisfactory relationships between the men and women, Pollard's stories give voice to changes in attitudes which may make possible more fulfilling relationships.

Finally, in my conclusion to this thesis, I note that in addition to the fact that Pollard's stories display not only considerable understanding and insight into relationships, human nature and the human condition, but also into the historical and sociocultural dimension of Caribbean society. It is this ethnographic quality of her work which makes a major contribution to discussions of the historical, social and cultural experiences of people in the Caribbean. Rather than focusing on the strictly literary merits of Pollard's work, an area in which her work does not differ significantly from other Caribbean women writers, a critical appreciation of Pollard's writing must be based not least on an assessment of her 'ethnographic' contribution to Caribbean literature. I, for one, have gained a deeper understanding of the Caribbean and of Caribbean life experiences through Pollard's writings.



³⁸ Quoted in Velma Pollard (1989) *Considering Woman*. London: The Women's Press, backcover.

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¹ Despite my best endeavours, and the assistance of Velma Pollard, I cannot claim, let alone guarantee, that this bibliography is complete. In any case, bibliographical details of poems and stories republished in Pollard's monographs have not been provided, but these are usually given in the works in which they were eventually included. An exception has been made for works where the later version is known to differ from an earlier version.

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