Beyond Postmodernism: London Fiction at the Millennium

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with an analysis of London fiction at the millennium (leading up to and beyond the year 2000). This study involves an exploration of texts that can in some way be regarded as occupying a space beyond postmodernism. It explores how a selection of contemporary London novels can be considered as "second-wave" or "post-postmodern" in light of their borrowing more from mainstream and classical genres as opposed to formally experimental avant-garde techniques. This investigation is conducted with a specific focus on the London author in order to investigate how novelists utilizes the cultural capital of London as a consistent metaphor in their texts as part of what can be read as an attempt to relocate the marginalized, subjugated or underrepresented character within the culturally dominant. The texts considered here are read in terms of post-postmodern discourse, critically evaluating how this selection of London writers at the millennium are appropriating and adapting mainstream writing styles and genres such as realism, the historical novel and the bildungsroman, as well as characterizations such as that of the heroic.

Key novels by Bernardine Evaristo, Mark Haddon, Nick Hornby, Hanif Kureishi, Andrea Levy, Gautam Malkani, Rupert Thomson, and Sarah Waters are considered in the thesis. The millennium provides an apt symbolic opportunity to reflect on British fiction and to consider the direction in which these contemporary authors are moving. As postmodernism has been such a dominant critical perspective throughout much of the twentieth century, it is in light of postmodernist challenges, disruptions and innovations to form that I analyses how texts can be read beyond a postmodern focus on form to instead consider how the writers engage with attempts to "open up" literature but do so with the use of mainstream styles.
Chapter One focuses on a discussion of millennial London fiction reimagining key moments from British history. In particular Evaristo *Soul Tourists* (2005), Levy’s *Small Island* (2004) and Waters’s *The Night Watch* (2006) are examined; novels which in different ways embark upon a reengagement with history to offer a process of re-writing and readdressing absences within dominant accounts of the city’s past. Michel Foucault’s work on power and its relationships to knowledge, and discourse has a particular relevance to this discussion of the repositioning of the marginal.

Chapters Two and Three concentrate on millennial London writers’ characterization in terms of the heroic monomyth as described by Joseph Campbell. In Chapter Two this takes the form of an analysis of the work of male writers writing male protagonists. By comparing the earlier novels of Kureishi and Thomson to their later work, along with an analysis of texts by Hornby and Haddon, it is suggested that texts can be read in light of a move towards a reengagement with the heroic characterization. In Chapter Three the depictions of the heroine in contemporary London texts by Evaristo and Waters are addressed, demonstrating how the journey of the protagonists of *Lara* (1997) and *Tipping the Velvet* (2002) may be read in line with that of the heroic monomyth. This shift towards archetypal characterisation forms part of the positioning of these texts in light of a discussion of moving beyond postmodern perspectives.

Chapter Four provides a consideration of masculinity in Malkani’s *Londonstani* (2006) and Kureishi’s *Intimacy* (1998). The focus of this chapter is a consideration of how these writers move away from decentred notions of self, and a discussion of this in relation to a post-postmodern reading. Such an approach provides an alternative to the much discussed postcolonial debate. The chapter charts how both postmodern and postcolonial perspectives inform readings of these texts, but notes how it is also possible to begin to approach them in a manner that moves beyond these entrenched fields of critical investigation.
This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of Dennis Henry Allen.
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Introduction

"Mapping" Millennial London Fiction

The rise of the city, in Britain, coincides with the rise of the novel itself, and the two have been inextricably linked ever since. As cities develop and mutate in the late twentieth century, subject to national and international population movements and political fissures, multiplying varieties of religion, race, history and politics increasingly contest each other for space and public visibility and legitimacy. New individual and collective identities struggle to emerge; new voices seek to find a hearing above the noisy crowd. (Ken Worpole. 'Mother to Legend (or going underground): The London Novel' 1995 181)

This study is concerned with an analysis of London fiction at the millennium (leading up to and beyond the year 2000). As the title suggests, this thesis involves an exploration of texts that can in some way be regarded as occupying a space beyond postmodernism. I explore millennial London texts and will argue that they should be considered as "second-wave" or "post-postmodern" in relation to their style of storytelling and characterization which borrows more from mainstream and classical genres than it does from formally experimental avant-garde techniques.1 The texts considered in this thesis are read as challenging the "centre" in terms of repopulating it with new or previously underrepresented voices via the adaptation and appropriation of mainstream forms. By using popular styles such as heroic characterization and historic narratives, "marginalized" writers refrain from wholly subverting the form, but instead revise the novel in the light of previous subjugations. The

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1 I use the terms "second wave" and post-postmodernism" in relation to Raoul Eshelman's, Gavin Keulks's, José López's and Garry Potter's use of the terms as defined and discussed below.
reasons that writers from politically marginalised backgrounds might choose to employ traditional and conventional, rather than avant-garde or innovative forms are complex, and any investigation into this aspect of contemporary London writing must acknowledge a need to understand the text as a cultural and social artefact, not purely a literary one. As this thesis will make explicit, it is evidently still desirable for writers from the periphery to gain a foothold on traditional forms, rather than simply to reject them, and this may be due to the relative cultural capital that is still afforded conventional styles and forms in popular discourse, which has implications for the legacy of the postmodern endeavour. This is not to suggest that the writers in this thesis reject postmodernism entirely, rather that they are selective in their appropriation of some of the formal innovations that postmodernism ushered in, and instead of wholly embracing the postmodern, attempt to produce texts which form a synergy between a postmodern opening out of the form and a conventional, accessible style. I discuss and define the terms “second wave” and “post-postmodern” at length below, but initially I will address the specific temporal and spatial subject matter of the thesis, that of London fiction at the millennium.

To an extent, millennial London fiction acts as a useful representative sample of wider trends within British fiction. In some texts the capital city acts as a highly charged symbol of the state of Britain at the dawn of an era in which the United Kingdom emerged a changed nation, having lost most of its empire, and still owing a debt to the USA from the Second World War. However, textual representations of London are often more complex than this model suggests, and in many texts the city functions as more than simply a metonym for the whole of Britain. Writers are often drawn to the uniqueness of the capital and in particular its ability to mutate: “It has rarely been just one thing at a time. Despite everyone from Inigo Jones to the GLC, it has never remained what its planners desired” (Roy Porter London: A
As Porter suggests London developed through the amalgamation of many different cultures without much reverence for the art of urban planning. The nature of the mélange of London also derived from the city’s complex history of governance: “not since the Romans has London possessed a unified government, a government relevant to all its needs” (Porter 3). These factors have combined to make London unique, and from the nineteenth century (and continuing in millennial fiction) authors have consistently been drawn to the resulting mélée of peoples, cultures and ideas. From Dickens’s portrayal of the many versions of Covent Garden that one may experience (Little Dorrit, 1855-7), through Peter Ackroyd’s layering of historical periods in a single space within London in Hawksmoor (1985) to Zadie Smith’s depiction of the multicultural, hegemonic playground in Willesden in White Teeth (2000) and Sarah Waters’s recreation of the “Blitz spirit” in The Night Watch (2006), writers have responded to and represented London’s unique and complex character.

Ken Worpole, during his discussion of the definition of the “London novel”, as opposed to a novel simply set in London, suggests that we must ask: “Why, of the many dozens of novels published each year set in London, do so very few of them qualify even to be considered as a ‘London novel’?” (183) He answers this question by suggesting that: “The main qualification, surely, is that the city is not simply a backdrop of the action, but an essential feature and dominating metaphor throughout” (183). In the novels considered in this thesis London is an “essential feature and dominating metaphor”. Even though it does not always feature as “part of the very texture of the lives and thoughts of the characters, and constitutes the very air in which they live and breathe” (Worpole 184) in the same manner as it does in Graham Greene’s The End of the Affair, Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, Iain Sinclair’s Downriver or Michael Moorcock’s Mother London; London is a significant metaphor in key novels by Bernardine Evaristo, Mark Haddon, Nick Hornby, Hanif Kureishi,
Andrea Levy, Gautam Malkani, Rupert Thomson, and Sarah Waters. For these authors a London setting provides a symbolic representation of the relationship between the centre (in the form of the capital city) and the marginalized characters that the texts portray. As such, for many authors in this study London forms an opportunity for a striking metaphorical repositioning of once marginalized voices within the centre.

The category of "London literature" is both long established and highly contested. For Lawrence Phillips in The Swarming Streets the category "literary London" has a particular relevance to the nineteenth-century: "Nineteenth-century ‘literary London’ was an imaginative, physical and psychological space in which there was much to surprise, horrify, titillate and appal the polite reader, but it could be eminently known" (3). Bradbury makes a similar point, that it is during an earlier period that London literature has a distinct aesthetic identity, describing London at the beginning of the twentieth century as "a fruitful symbiosis of the cosmopolitan and the nativist [that became] a profoundly important aspect of the aesthetics of the entire period from the 1880s through to the First World War" (Modernism 175).

However representations of urban life and the city also hold a prominent position within contemporary British fiction. Philip Tew argues that the changing relationship between the novel and the city has been a significant feature of the current era of literature: "If the contemporary novel has done anything consistently since the mid-1970s it has been to

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2 A. Laurence notes some provincial writers and critics identify a ‘London literature’ against which they define themselves. When discussing Scottish literature with author Duncan McLean, McLean and Laurence argue that London literature has a recognisable ‘voice’ to which some Scottish authors provide an alternative: “Neither Kelman, Alasdair Gray, nor Janice Galloway leaves an imposing authorial voice from outside, from Oxford, Cambridge, or the London literary establishment” (‘Duncan McLean: Scottish Writer’ NPg), thus the suggestion being that there is a literary London establishment, a notional ‘literary London’ identity, or as McLean defines it, a distinct literary London style of writing that these Scottish authors wish to define themselves in opposition to. This is often achieved, it is suggested by Laurence and McLean, by using ‘their own voice, or the voice they grew up with’ in terms of speech patterns and styles, in their writing. This categorization of what, in part these writers are marking themselves as distinct from, the ‘literary London establishment’ furthers the suggestion that London literature functions as a distinct group/section of literature in the minds of some critics and writers.
radicalize traditional understandings of the late capitalist cityscape and urban environment. … [N]ew voices have emerged and cartographized the complexity and heterogeneity of urban existence” (The Contemporary British Novel xi). The urban and the city therefore continue to be prominent areas for consideration and discussion within the contemporary novel. With such a focus on “the city” within contemporary British fiction, London, as the British capital, and as a city with a long history as a publishing centre (a place historically where writers both come to write, and to have their works published) is an obvious point for discussion and must take its place within the debate about contemporary British fiction.

London had a renewed energy at the beginning of the new millennium as its status as a place of cultural significance was reasserted in the decision to focus much of England’s millennial celebrations in the capital. London had recently enjoyed a revival, being at the forefront of popular culture through the success of “Brit Pop” of the 1990s, and was also the stage chosen for New Labour’s election campaign, which simultaneously evoked images of “New Labour” and a “newly” rejuvenated English Capital. At this time for many there was a cultural investment in the idea, by writers and critics, that there was something noteworthy occurring at this specific time and place.

Nick Bentley (British Fiction of the 1990s) suggests that, “trying to identify the defining characteristics of any period of literary history is a difficult task” (1), a task which is further complicated, as Fredric Jameson comments, when that fiction is so contemporary: “[T]he grasping of the present from within is the most problematical task the mind can face” (‘Afterword – Marxism and Postmodernism’ 383-4). Though problematic, I consider that it is possible to begin to map some significant trends within millennial fiction. The

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3 During the 1997 election campaign Tony Blair evoked “the millennium” as a chance for change, a symbol of new beginnings. Within the first few sentences of New Labour’s manifesto he states: “I want a Britain that does not shuffle into the new millennium afraid of the future, but strides into it with confidence” (quoted in Andrew Marr A History of Modern Britain (513).
contemporary should not be ignored or reserved for analysis in a future period, but instead forms an integral part of a vibrant, contemporary literary criticism as a topic which is currently occupying the minds of an array of established critics. Dominic Head, Tew, Bentley and Jago Morrison all draw attention to the contemporary novel as a ripe area for literary analysis, Tew asserts: “One important historical fact (set of observable and arguable circumstances) about contemporary British fiction is that it is being increasingly studied very widely in a range of institutions” (180). The field of contemporary fiction studies is expansive and within the scope of the term there can be found more discrete areas of study that are worthy of critical attention. Millennial London fiction is one such area; it represents an opportunity to analyse the myriad ways in which writers have interacted with the shifting narrative strategies that have come to the fore as the capital city is defined and redefined.

There has not as yet been an in-depth study of British fiction at the millennium; an absence which this thesis addresses. The years leading up to the millennium were a significant period for British fiction; “the last decade of the old millennium was seeing some striking changes” (Bradbury The Modern British Novel 1878-2001 515). As Bradbury goes on to note, in some ways this involved a natural ending of an era as a “significant number of the leading writers who had shaped the course of post-war British fiction died in the decade” (515). Although, as Bradbury also comments, “[a] ‘Millennium’ is an artificial invention ... millennial sentiments are, and always have been real enough” (502). The inevitable feelings of change associated with fin de siècle reflection, and the careers of many of the key figures of post-war British literature coming to an end in the final two decades of the twentieth

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4 The recent publication of a second edition of Philip Tew’s The Contemporary British Novel (2007, first published in 2004) with the additional section which purely addresses fiction since the millennium, focusing on a “post 9/11 aesthetic”, or Nick Bentley’s British Fiction of the 1990s (2005) published just a few years after the decade which forms the subject matter of his analysis, demonstrates a growing trend for analysis of the very contemporary by contemporary critics.

5 Bradbury’s list includes Graham Greene (d.1991), Angus Wilson and Angela Carter (d.1992), William Golding and Anthony Burgess (d.1993), Kingsley Amis (d.1995), V.S. Pritchett (d.1997), Iris Murdoch (d.1999), Anthony Powell and Penelope Fitzgerald (d.2000).
century combined to contribute towards a sense of an end of a literary era. As such, the beginning of a new century, and a new millennium, seems an appropriate time to pause and reflect on the current trends and characteristics of British fiction. Garry Potter and José López (After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism 2001) concur, highlighting the opportunity the new millennium provided for reflection: “It is a year similar to many, but yet unlike any that has come before. It is the year two thousand, the gateway to a new millennium and as such an opportune time to pause and attempt to reassess” (3). Similarly John Brannigan in Orwell to the Present, whilst acknowledging the artificial nature of the construct, states the turn of the millennium “afforded some opportunities” for “reflection” (65).

Through my specific focus on London literature I engage with a body of critical work by Phillips, John McLeod and Alex Murray. Phillips has written extensively on the topic of London fiction and I extend his trajectory to a consideration of the post 1990 novel. Murray’s approach in Recalling London (2007) is to examine the specific developments of London fiction through the authors Sinclair and Ackroyd, this thesis seeks to build upon Murray’s work to consider a range of contemporary authors. Similarly I extend some of the work of McLeod’s Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis (2004) which focuses on post 1950s immigrant writing, to consider the wider contexts of style, structure and characterization of a range of authors in the millennial period. If there is one aspect within the critical literature that constantly recurs, it is the idea that the city is a continuously changing entity—what Phillips calls “the city in performance” (London Narratives 159). Through a focus on a selection of key millennial texts, this thesis extends a critical focus on

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the literary re-imagining of the capital, one that is forever “in process” (London Narratives 159).

Context: The Postmodern Debate

This thesis approaches millennial London texts through a theoretical positioning of the post-postmodern. It is necessary for any discussion and definition of post-postmodernism to first engage with postmodernism. Postmodernism has dominated much critical thinking since the middle of the last century and is a term which by its very nature defies easy definition. Fredric Jameson makes such a point about the elusive nature of a single definition of postmodernism in Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991): “The problem of postmodernism – how its fundamental characteristics are to be described, whether it even exists in the first place, whether the very concept is of any use, or is, on the contrary a mystification – this problem is at one and the same time an aesthetic and a political one” (55). Postmodernism is such an extensive category that I focus only on those aspects which are most relevant to London millennial fiction. These include many of the aspects of postmodernism discussed by both Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard, for example, the distrust and questioning of narrative as a viable form through varying techniques of linguistic play or narrative self-reflexivity; the celebration of the fragmented and multiple, specifically in relation to the notion of the “loss of the self” in terms of a single identity; a fascination with artifice, schlock and kitsch; and the subversion of “high culture”. I investigate contemporary texts which share a desire to express the subjugated voice, but that significantly stop short of the destruction of the principle of narrative as a viable and valuable cultural discourse and thence take us beyond the assumptions of postmodernism.

Lyotard, in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984), lays out the difference as he sees it between modernism and postmodernism in terms of aesthetics:
modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure" (81). In contrast:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forwards the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (81)

Therefore it is within the mode of presentation and an essential attitude that Lyotard locates the difference. Edward Soja in the opening 'Preface and Postscript' to his collection of essays Postmodern Geographies (1989), is clearly influenced by Jameson's work and points to how specific aspects of postmodernist theory manifest themselves within literature, and more specifically within a disruption of form observing that one aspect of postmodern fiction is a narrative which "signals right from the start an intention to tamper with the familiar modalities of time, to shake up the normal flow of the linear text" (1). Hans Peter-Wagner also associates postmodernism with a challenge to modes of representation which: "undermin[es] the ideas of logical coherence in narration, formal plot, regular time sequence, and psychologically explained characters" (94). Though the notion of "missing contexts" remains a relevant force within the post-postmodern, the boundaries of a postmodern project which seeks to evoke such notions of the ultimately "unpresentable", or to disrupt any "logical coherence" or "psychologically explained character" are transcended by the authors
who are the focus of this study. Evaristo, Waters, Levy, et al.7 offer an alternate approach to the postmodern, eschewing challenges to form and the notion of the unreliability of narrative or the unobtainable nature of representation, to reinstate the more straightforward temporal flow of storytelling (as opposed to chronological juxtapositions) and archetypal characterization. The writing of the hero or the heroine archetype, whose quests for knowledge and understanding can be fulfilled, demonstrates this point (as discussed in Chapters Two and Three) as the texts considered here repopulate popular style with previously missing or subjugated voices. Yet a nod to postmodern perspective within these texts means that they are not offering a simple return, but are rather revisiting, adapting and appropriating certain aspects of postmodernism alongside selected elements of classical styles for their own means in order to express voices which have previously been occluded.

Postmodernism in part represents a democratisation of culture because the centre is challenged along with the idea of "absolute truths."8 Ihab Hassan in The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature (1971) and The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture (1987) refers to postmodernism as an impulse to decentre, to unmask that which has always been present, but previously repressed. Chris Snipp-Walmsley ('Postmodernism', 2006) succinctly summarises Hassan's proposal that postmodernism is "a celebration of silence and otherness that was always present" (407). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak ('Can the Subaltern Speak?' 1988) also links the postmodern with an expression of the "unheard" as she engages with deconstructionist aspects of postmodern thought in order to suggest an aesthetics which "opens up" Western scholarship to "subaltern" voices, concerning herself with the tendency of institutional and culturally dominant discourses and

7 The following writers come within the scope of this study: Andrea Levy, Bernardine Evaristo, Hanif Kureishi, Mark Haddon, Nick Hornby, Gautam Malkani, Rupert Thomson, and Sarah Waters.

8 As Homi K Bhabha in The Location of Culture suggests, such "grand narratives" of "truth" have been vigorously contested by contemporary writing, which has lead to the processes which create such accepted ideas of knowledge being revealed, along with and the narratives of those, who were previously subjugated.
practices to exclude marginalized voices, particularly those of subaltern woman. Critics such as Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) argue that a process of reassessment and the "laying bare" of the practices which leads to the subjugation of narratives can allow such voices to form a counter to the dominant discourse (1) and, as theorists such as Alison Lee in *Realism and Power*⁹ (1990) and Patricia Waugh in *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (1989), amongst many others propose, postmodernism provides an interpretive framework for some of these voices to be heard.

However, Bentley notes a growing scepticism about postmodernism towards the end of the twentieth century among literary and cultural theorists such as Fredric Jameson, bell hooks, Seyla Benhabib, John O'Neil, and Terry Eagleton. bell hooks notes in 'Postmodern Blackness' (1994) how a complete rejection of dominant forms in the new celebration of "difference" (that postmodernism in part embarks on) can have complicated consequences for those previously marginalized. hooks suggests that one needs to make a careful consideration of the implications for the marginalized of any critique or destabilising of the notion of identity. She considers how within the critical arena some African-Americans welcome a disruption of essentialist notions, that much postmodern theory brought to the fore through a focus on the expression of "difference": "Abandoning essentialist notions would be a serious challenge to racism" (NPg). But yet she is also keen to note that a debunking of the notion of "identity" may in fact have contradictory effects from the supposed liberatory potential: "Any critic exploring the radical potential of postmodernism as it relates to racial difference and racial domination would need to consider the implications of a critique of identity for oppressed groups" (NPg). Though hooks is here writing in direct relation to those

⁹ Alison Lee aligns postmodernism with representations of the marginal in *Realism and Power* by stating that postmodernism is involved "in questioning" "cultural authority", suggesting that, postmodernism is concerned with those who, "because of class, race, gender, or sexual preference, are 'othered' than, and have been marginalized by, the dominant tradition" (xi). Lee further refers to postmodernism as "a fiction which concerns itself with questioning margins and boundaries valorized by the dominant cultural authority" (xi).
marginalized in terms of race, she later states, that the theories are capable of: “cutting across boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice” (NPg). hooks elucidates her argument that the rejection of the concept of “identity” may have different consequences for different peoples using Lawrence Grossberg’s discussion of rap music in his essay ‘Putting the Pop Back into Postmodernism’:

Considering that it is as a subject that one comes to voice, then the postmodernist focus on the critique of identity appears, at first glance, to threaten and close down the possibility that this discourse and practice will allow those who have suffered the crippling effects of colonization and domination to gain or regain a hearing (NPg).

As hooks notes, even though this is to an extent a “misunderstanding of the postmodernist political project”, these very worrying consequences need to be considered since such misunderstandings “nevertheless shape responses”. hooks further argues: “It never surprises me when black folk respond to the critique of essentialism, especially when it denies the validity of identity politics, by saying ‘yeah, it’s easy to give up identity, when you got one’” (NPg). hooks, while accepting that such a response may in part be a misappropriation of postmodern theories, further warns: “We should indeed [be] suspicious of postmodern critiques of the “subject” when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time” (NPg).

Bentley is alert to this sort of issue when he charts postmodernism’s development from “the first phase [which] corresponds roughly to the 1960s and 1970s” to a second phase in the 1980s (4). In particular Bentley’s suggestion that the later phase questions “the liberatory potential of postmodernism’s scepticism towards ‘grand narratives’” (4) describes the textual responses to the situation hooks outlines above. These particular concerns raised about postmodernism are especially illuminating when considering the London millennial
writers Levy, Evaristo, Kureishi, Haddon, Hornby, Malkani, Thomson, and Waters who all engage with the process of expressing the marginal voice, but they do not seek such "liberation" through a postmodern "scepticism towards grand narratives" (Bentley 4).

Post-Postmodernism

"Post-postmodernism" and "second wave" postmodernism are terms which have only recently come into usage within literary criticism and are still very much in the process of being developed and argued over. Building upon the work of critics such as Gavin Keulks, López and Potter I will engage with notions of the post-postmodern and apply them to my reading of London millennial fiction. I argue that there is a discernible trend among the group of authors identified for this study in their use of narrative, storytelling techniques and characterization that can be interpreted as a significant move away from narrative and stylistic experimentalism. Therefore, just as the distinction described above between modernism and postmodernism may be understood in terms of attitudes towards form and presentation, so too can the difference between postmodernism and post-postmodernism be interpreted in relation to form and the tone of the use of formal innovation and experimentation. Potter and López suggest that the current aspiration to move beyond postmodernism and define what will "come next" can in part be explained by a process of the natural progression due to the longevity of postmodernism:

[W]hy is it necessary for something to 'come after' postmodernism? The answer is double-sided. First, it simply seems to be a sociological fact that intellectual and academic life has its fashions and enthusiasms. One can cynically observe that the demise of one 'exciting new' trend or school of thought generally means that another will soon be born. (4)
However the other "side" to their argument offers a much more definite commentary on postmodernism itself: "a new and different intellectual direction must come after postmodernism, simply because postmodernism is inadequate as an intellectual response to the times we live in" (original emphasis 4). What Potter and López articulate above may read like a debunking of the postmodern, yet to some extent their words simply acknowledge the inherent limitations in any theoretical endeavour. Once the limitations of any theory are exposed, the creative response to this "gap" often ushers in a new wave of artistic and critical responses. In this manner, though Potter and López may seem harsh, they actually articulate an inevitable part of every intellectual response to cultural and social events. Their critique of the limitations of postmodern theory has been accompanied by an artistic and creative departure from first wave postmodernism, in response to a lack of faith in postmodernism, writers are attempting to move beyond a disruption of narrative form. These writers are notably borrowing from more "classic" or at least more formally conventional (perhaps even aesthetically conservative) narrative styles in order to situate marginalized voices within such traditions, rather than laying down a challenge at the level of form, and thus can be understood in part to be offering a "return" at the level of style. However this change is complex and attempts to provide a definition in terms of a simple return are not entirely adequate, as these texts do not engage with a compliant return to traditional forms, but rather they are appropriated and adapted (but not rejected or debunked, a subtle, yet significant difference) enabling the previously underrepresented voice a purchase upon the centre.

Postmodern perspectives often involve a discernible consideration of the processes of narrative and a discussion of form within the creative work itself. However, as Rachel Falconer comments in The Crossover Novel (2009), this is not always regarded as having a positive effect on the storytelling process: "postmodern writers become trapped in the self-
absorbed art of demonstrating their artistry” (5). Martin Amis comments on how such a focus on form resulted in what he perceived to be the “huge boredom” of narrative tricks and the “self-reflection” of the postmodern text (as quoted in Keulks “W(h)ither Postmodernism” 159). Amis asks: “Why did writers stop telling stories and start going on about how they were telling them?” (159). Though Amis’s Money: A Suicide Note (1984) and London Fields (1989) were very successful, “two of the decade’s most incisive portraits of apocalyptic anxieties, nuclear fear, and bristling individualism” (Keulks, ‘Introduction’ 2), texts which demonstrate overt interrogation of the processes of narrative, and contain such “trickiness” as an unreliable narrator and metafictional devices such as the author appearing within the novel, these techniques have now, to some extent, “gone out of fashion” (López and Potter 4). Keulks remarks that Time’s Arrow, or, The Nature of the Offence (1991) was met with scepticism because “some readers objected to Amis’s subjugation of history to style, labelling his efforts artistically callous or indulgent” (2). Whether as a response to such accusations and changing attitudes, or as an inevitable literary development, writers have begun a process of return to more “classic” storytelling models. Falconer comments specifically on the work of Philip Pullman, and describes his move towards “put[ting] the interests of his readers first” (5). In 1996 Pullman himself commented that in contemporary fiction: “stories are there on sufferance... Other things are felt to be more important; technique, style, literary knowingness... The present day George Eliots take up their stories as if with a pair of tongs. They are embarrassed by them” (in Nigel Reynolds, ‘Writers are losing the plot’ 1996 NPg). However, in London millennium fiction writers engage with, rather than seemingly being “embarrassed” by, traditional styles. A return to more classical

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10 Whilst reviewing Don DeLillo in 1991.
11 As discussed and quoted in Falconer (5-6).
reading and writing models allow readers to participate in familiar storytelling modes, as opposed to being an observer of an author's critique on form.

Although attempts at defining the post-postmodern are as equally contentious and difficult as attempts to define its predecessor, it is possible to note that since the early 2000s, within theoretical arenas, there have been a few moves towards an articulation of a successor term. One meaningful theme recurrent within these attempts is the notion that trust, dialogue, performance or sincerity can work to transcend postmodern irony. Raoul Eshelman offers such a definition in *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism* (2008). Eshelman coined the term "performatism" in 2000, as a means of describing the more unified, aesthetically mediated experience of transcendence that he feels can be found in millennial works. It is such a desire to move beyond postmodern irony and reengage with more "classical" processes of storytelling, yet maintaining the desire to express the marginal or previously subjugated, which is a common theme throughout the texts considered in this thesis. Though a turning towards mainstream styles and the use of conventional forms may seem to be at the expense of formal innovation, and thus, for some, such texts may compromise the aesthetic credibility and credentials of the resulting art, I suggest that it is possible to read this shift in more positive terms. The use of popular forms by marginalized writers still constitutes a subversion of the centre ground, as writers from the periphery attempt to fill the dominant centre with previously underrepresented or absent voices. This is not to deny that the margins have long been a locale for fiction, Peter Childs in *Contemporary Novelists* (2005) remarks: "The novel has perhaps always flourished most at the margin" (274); but the texts considered in this thesis constitute an attempt to resituate the outsider figure within the culturally dominant centre through an appropriation of dominant styles, rather than (as has been previously attempted) through a radicalization of form.
It is possible to read a move towards mainstream styles and a lack of formal innovation as a betrayal of an artist’s responsibility to challenge and innovate at the level of form, and as a bowing to market forces, as by using more recognisable styles these writers are also producing more marketable and commercially attractive texts in an increasingly competitive publishing arena. Though this is a valid interpretation of the use of mainstream styles such as the hero archetype and the historic narrative, I read this trend in a more positive manner. A consequence of the margins appropriating such styles necessarily represents a challenge to the demographic of the centre ground; and thus the process of revising the culturally dominant from the perspective of the periphery (that was begun by postmodernism) exists in a mutated, less aesthetically radical form in many contemporary texts, yet the challenge to open out the form to previously marginalised voices is still consolidated in the millennial era. In the millennial novels of Kureishi and Haddon for example there is a certain reengagement with the “grand narrative” of moral absolutism, following a period of discussion and often rejection of universalising metanarratives, such as morality, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. This move towards classical styles reflects a shift towards something which is more aesthetically or culturally conservative, but it retains a desire to “open up” classical forms and the centre ground to underrepresented voices after a period of intense interrogation of, and often movement away from, the use of such styles.

The key difference between postmodernism and post-postmodernism can therefore be understood in terms of a reassertion of an older, perhaps even neo-humanist thematic. Keulks discusses this process in relation to the work of Martin Amis and suggests that Night Train (1997) and Yellow Dog (2003) can be viewed as Amis’s “tentative forays toward constructing a post-ironic, ‘post-postmodern’ voice...such a voice rejects the extremist claims

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12 As there has been an entire volume of critical essays dedicated to the discussion of the work of Martin Amis beyond a postmodern consideration (Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond 2006) I do not directly engage with any of the fiction of Amis in this context, but instead consider alternative texts in light of such a reading.
of radical (or vulgar) postmodernism and strives to recuperate select humanist themes" (158).

Keulks further defines post-postmodernism as “striving to sanitize postmodernism of its nihilist excess while restoring a degree of sanity, of emotional value and sincerity, to its fictional worlds” (original italics 161). Keulks’ use of the term “sanitize” is worthy of interrogation since the term will have negative connotations for many readers and may even seem reminiscent of fascistic ideologies of cultural “cleanliness”, yet Keulks is describing something more subtle and less absolutist. Keulks goes on to explain that:

My suggestion of second, or late-phase postmodernism seeks to mollify the extremism of its radical “first-phase” configuration – especially the “end of history” theories of Jean Baudrillard and Francis Fukuyama – as well as to recuperate, however problematically, essentialist concepts of agency, subjectivity and authenticity. (161).

The phrase “however problematically” stands out in Keulks’ statement above; he acknowledges that any exercise that involves the recuperation of “essentialist concepts of agency, subjectivity and authenticity” is necessarily fraught with difficulties, and yet it is one with which many millennial authors are engaged. What Keulks articulates here is an attempt to “reshape postmodernism...to revive and rehumanize...the dehumanized subject” (161). In terms of form writers who fit into this category can be considered to be more conservative than their predecessors as they attempt to reengage with classical linear narratives which on the surface are not very distinct from nineteenth century realism, or the familiar bildungsroman. In their search to move away from the experimental and the concentration on self-awareness of style, authors revisit narrative traditions, just as Porter suggests is a key characteristic of the city, that: “Everywhere continuity and change coalesce; forms and functions mutate; past buildings and townscapes enhance but inhibit the present; the future refashions the debris of the past” (9). Reengaging with more conservative forms can in part
therefore be read as analogous to, and thus a fictional representation of, that which Porter suggests is a key aspect of London’s character. Evaristo, Hornby, Kureishi, Levy, and Waters “refashion” fictional styles but do not perform an extreme disruption of narrative. Instead they use familiar styles to resituate the marginal and in so doing move away from the decentred subject prevalent within much postmodern focus on form. Therefore, these London writers can be seen to be engaged with a process which, as Porter suggests, is a characteristic of the city as past styles influence the present. Postmodernism often informs these writers’ works even though they may be read as also moving beyond the formal experimentation so often associated with it, and thus furthers an understanding of them in light of the post-postmodern as opposed to a simple rejection of postmodernism or a return to modernist perspectives.

It should be noted that this stance is only possible because postmodernism helped to debunk some of the restrictive aspects of traditional forms. This has enabled authors to return to utilising more “classical” techniques of storytelling but to do so with fresh eyes and to reconsider and reconfigure the political and aesthetic implications of their use. They reposition the “outsider” within and alongside traditional forms, thereby allowing the subjugated access to, even ownership of, those “economies of discourse”\(^{13}\) which had previously marginalized them. In terms of form Evaristo, Haddon, Hornby, Kureishi, Levy, Malkani, Thomson and Waters are more closely aligned to the nineteenth-century works of George Eliot or Elizabeth Gaskell, than their more experimental counterparts such as Michael Moorcock, Iain Sinclair or B.S. Johnson. Sinclair’s style for example is almost instantly recognisable yet equally as confusing, as Peter Barry admits in his article “‘You Can’t Get It from the Street’” (2007): “The content and ambience of his works is compulsively fascinating

\(^{13}\) I use this term in relation to Michel Foucault’s work, which is defined and discussed at length in the next chapter.
to many, though it is possible (for me, usual[sic]) to read his novels with little idea of what is going on" (44-5). As Barry comments during his analysis of Sinclair’s style, the form of his sentence structures and syntactic techniques creates confusion for the reader: “Syntactically, his prose is *disjunctive* and *pronominalized*: lexically it is what I’ll call “*kennistic*” and “*registerially fluid*”...the prose often seems to consist of brief, sawn-off sentences which are placed end-to-end without connectives” (original emphasis 45). Barry likens Sinclair’s style to what Marorie Perloff and Peter Quartermain describe as “disjunctive poetics” which is phrasal and “*post-linear*”.14 Traditional narrative structure is either disrupted or annulled by these experimental writers. There is no predefined narration in *The Unfortunates* (1969) by B.S. Johnson which attacks the random nature of narration, allowing his reader to read the unbound fragments of his text – famously released in a box without binding – in whatever way they choose; consequently one of the roles of the author is questioned. This style is far removed from that of authors considered in this thesis who re-instate concepts of authorial authority as they reengage with a style more familiar to literary realism.

**Motifs and Themes**

In Chapter One I discuss millennial London fiction which engages with the process of writing history. In particular I consider a group of female writers Evaristo, Levy and Waters, who in their different ways embark upon a reengagement with history to offer a process of re-writing and readdressing absences within dominant accounts of the city’s past. Ackroyd, Moorcock, and Sinclair have led the London literary scene for almost thirty years and still enjoy much popular and critical success. In novels such as *The Night Watch* and *Soul Tourist* akin to Ackroyd’s endeavour, Waters and Evaristo engage with alternative histories. The manner in which these female authors approach this task however can be read in line with the post-

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postmodern. They do not as Moorcock and Sinclair often do attempt to disrupt narrative itself, instead they use linear narrative forms, and engage with the process of traditional storytelling modes and the rediscovery of underrepresented voices. They do not challenge the very concept of historical fiction through a disruption of temporal modes or the rupturing of principal discourse methods. Instead they engage with the “dominant” and the “centre” in terms of stylistic conventions in order to reposition the “outsider” within the centre in a neo-humanist endeavour to strive for universal equality.

Michel Foucault’s work on power and its relationships to knowledge, and discourse has a particular relevance to my discussion of the repositioning of the marginal through a reimagining of history in fiction. What allows these texts to be read as post-postmodern is that they move beyond the narrative techniques of their postmodern predecessors, though they continue to strive for some similar political ends. Murray notes: “Sinclair’s texts are, on a political level, concerned with challenging both the manipulation of history in contemporary Britain, and the restrictive and inequitable nature of British society” (City Visions 3). The “manipulation of history” is a key concern for Waters, Levy and Evaristo, but they do not respond to this concern with experimental narrative. Sinclair’s readers must navigate their way through incomplete sentences and vast amounts of “implicitness”, which, at least according to Barry (as discussed above), can be confusing. Sinclair himself suggests that you can gain an understanding, a relationship with his words, by experiencing a “romp” around London: “You can get it from the streets” (‘If I Turn and Run’ 17), to which Barry remarks: “if you have to ask what “it” is exactly, then obviously you don’t get it” (original emphasis 46). Waters, Levy and Evaristo use styles more akin to classical realism thereby, in terms of narrative form and structure, make their texts seem more familiar to many readers. Their concern is the manipulation of history and so focus on a repositioning of those voices
which were previously excluded as opposed to a direct challenge to the narrative form itself. This stance may be problematic and is inevitably in danger of substituting one partial reading for another. To some extent, therefore, these texts depend upon the legacy of first-wave postmodernism, and rely on the hope that it has sufficiently shifted readers’ understanding of the authority of historical narrative in order to avoid the traps identified above, thereby complicating the texts’ relationship to both the traditional and the postmodern forms that they follow.

Novels such as Divided Kingdom (2005) by Thomson, Tipping the Velvet (1998) by Waters, or Evaristo’s Lara (1997), reinstate heroes and heroines, character types which can also be read in the light of a neo-humanist thinking, as the function of the hero can be understood in relation to principles of searching for universal (or at least societal) good as opposed to singular self-interest. I investigate this trend in Chapters Two and Three in which I draw on Joseph Campbell’s description of the archetypal heroic character to demonstrate how millennial London authors return to a more classical composition of the hero (Chapter Two) and the heroine (Chapter Three) after a popular movement away from the depiction of the hero/heroine figure in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Writers like Kureishi, Thomson, Evaristo and Waters provide alternative characterizations of millennial youth which are situated away from an engagement with multiple and fragmented identities. Gabriel for instance in Kureishi’s Gabriel’s Gift can be read as a heroic character (according to Campbell’s theories); he faces many obstacles he has to overcome, but because he works hard and helps others he is rewarded by being given a valuable piece of art, and then by the prospect of a successful career as a film director in his adult life (see Chapter Two). This process of mythologizing contemporary discourses on youth through the application of the heroic figure and the quest narrative allows authors to move beyond the multitude of micro-
narratives that postmodernist discourse proposes, and instead allows them to offer an alternative to postmodern narratives which tend towards a decentring of essentialist concepts of agency and a decentred subject rather than a requisition of agency such as can be found within the heroic characterisation.

The appropriation of the mythic – in terms of the heroic monomyth – offers an alternative framework for interacting with representations of young characters, as opposed to hedonistic, drug fuelled schemas which previously dominated much of 1980s and 1990s British fiction and criticism. As Tew, argues of the post-war novel, one of the main "visions" of the city was "as a site for the ebullience or the threatening disruptions of youth and hedonism" (The Contemporary British Novel, 2004, 93). Joseph Henderson suggests that the use of the hero acts as a universally recognisable subject: "The myth of the hero figure is the most common and the best known myth in the world" ('Ancient Myths and Modern Man' 101). Henderson's argument reflects Keulks' comments that the post-postmodern represents a kind of humanism that has to an extent been liberated from its "postmodern excess" and nihilism. By using the heroic monomyth Kureishi demonstrates a clearer sense that his characters constitute a unified "self" and, because of the very nature of the monomyth, the text is able to provide its reader with a happy ending. As such Kureishi engages with a more positive storytelling process which reaches towards the notion of a universal set of values that can be collectively understood and accepted.

In the third chapter I continue to discuss millennial London authors' engagement with heroic characterization in relation to Campbell's theories through a consideration of the depiction of the heroine figure in Lara and Tipping the Velvet. Evaristo and Waters utilise an archetypal characterization in their readdressing of subjugated voices, in terms of gender, sexuality and race. Both Evaristo and Waters (in these novels) highlight a gender-specific
experience of London. For Evaristo this comes in the form of the protagonist Lara struggling to find out about her family history as a consequence of the difficulties in tracing a female family line, as well as the difficulties of tracing a family’s history which is located within the slave trade. Waters’s heroine Nancy, by dressing both as a male and a female, experiences gender-specific aspects to London life, the text suggests that a young female travelling alone in the city cannot enjoy the same freedoms as a man, or even a heterosexual couple. Both Waters and Evaristo turn to archetypal characterization to reinforce this point, making the text feel recognisable to the reader, but with an under-represented aspect.  

In the final chapter I consider “new identities” for London’s men in contemporary fiction by contemplating a movement beyond the postmodern in relation to constructions of identity. In this chapter I consider how Hanif Kureishi’s novella Intimacy (1998) and Gautam Malkani’s novel Londonstani (2006) can be read in light of a perceived “crisis of masculinity” and apply a post-postmodern reading to the texts. Implicit within my approach is a consideration of London literature’s relationship to postcolonial perspectives, as I seek to move beyond a focus on the already extensively discussed area of postcolonialism to instead investigate a contemporary trend for the depiction of alternative identities for the postcolonial subject (or a subject with an ancestral purchase upon such a past). Instead the

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15 As discussed in more detail in Chapter Two Evaristo engages with the subjugated voice of Lara who feels that she and her family’s history has been excluded. Waters attempts to reposition female homosexuality with a neo-Victorian text. Female homosexuality is addressed implicitly in some Victorian and early twentieth-century fiction. The poetry of Charlotte Mew provides one example, though Mew did not write poetry with overt lesbian themes, keeping her speaker ambiguous or male, her writing is widely considered to be an expression of her homosexual love. Waters explicitly engages with homosexual relationships in her fiction. Famously Radclyffe Hall’s novel The Well of Loneliness (1928) was banned immediately after its publication, accused of obscenity despite it not being sexually explicit. A notable difference between Mew’s writing and Waters’ is that Mew’s love poetry often closes in a bleak, sorrowful manner, love is unrequited, whereas at the close of Tipping the Velvet Nancy does find love in an intimate relationship with Florence as well as an acceptance of her homosexuality (which she so desperately seeks throughout the novel) by the community. This ending on a note of personal and relationship fulfilment is in stark contrast to Mew’s treatment and expression of homosexual relations.

16 A concept being discussed across many various fields of enquiry including by R.W Connell as discussed in subsequent chapters.
primary focus for this chapter is the text’s engagement with the performance of and changing nature of masculinities.

Therefore, through each of the chapters described above I hope to demonstrate how this selection of London texts written at the millennium can be read beyond postmodern perspectives. Though this is a very limited selection it functions as a useful sample with which to consider the potential directions that some key London writers are moving in the contemporary era. By reconsidering historical narratives, London’s youth, and constructions of masculinity the texts analysed here demonstrate how marginalized writers may appropriate and adapt dominant styles of storytelling in order to revise the centre and position new and previously underrepresented voices within it. Symbolically it is within the London novel that these authors all chose to locate this revision, allowing them purchase on the centre, not only in terms of dominant forms and styles, but also in terms of a capital city and the cultural capital associated with an occupation of such an important locale for British fiction. Therefore I suggest that millennial London fiction offers an important avenue for analysis, one which can be rewarding in terms of the possibility of identifying themes which may be applicable to British fiction in a wider context, but also importantly, as a fruitful topic worthy of attention in its own right.
Chapter One: Restabilising Storytelling in the Female Historical London Novel at the Millennium

The historical novel, a subgenre of the English novel with a continuous presence since the eighteenth century, has in the past two decades flourished, enjoying popular success with a devoted readership, undergoing energetic feminist and postcolonial revisions, garnering significant prizes, inspiring film and television adaptations, and commanding significant critical attention. (Suzanne Keen, ‘The Historical Turn in British Fiction’ 2006 167)

This chapter examines London writers at the millennium whose work engages with “alternative histories”; Bernardine Evaristo in Soul Tourists (2005), Andrea Levy in Small Island (2004) and Sarah Waters in The Night Watch (2006) provide representations of the minority, marginal or the “outsider” figure within their fiction as they offer a reimagining (and thus a fictional return) to either a specific historical period or a reconsideration of well known moments or motifs from the past. For example, Waters addresses a lack in mainstream romantic fiction of the lesbian experience during the Second World War; Evaristo writes about the processes of exclusion that black history has undergone in the British education system; and Levy gives voice to the subjugated narratives of those who immigrated to London in the Windrush years. I will consider these writers in light of a post-postmodern theoretical stance and suggest that they offer the perspective of the marginalized but without necessarily “rupturing” traditional storytelling practices.

A reengagement with more traditional narrative modes can be read as a move beyond postmodern experimental disruptions of narrative. By combining some postmodern perspectives, such as the aim to give voice to the marginalized, but by using more traditional storytelling methods, these authors may be read in line with later, second phase, or post-
postmodernism (as defined in the Introduction). This allows writers access to more "traditional" narrative modes, such as realism and the bildungsroman, whilst still upholding some of the aims of postmodernism. As such once marginalized voices can be repositioned within the centre (as also discussed in the Introduction). The process of taking ownership of the space of the traditional narrative form has been facilitated, to some extent, by postmodernism's exposing and subsequent destabilising of the narrative processes by which certain experiences (and in fact peoples) became marginalized (and others normalised) in the first instance. Following postmodernism's engagement with the experimental and the disruption of form it is possible to read authors writing once marginalized voices in more traditional styles as a moving away from overt experimentalism of postmodernism's first phases to instead engage with more popular styles, or more "classically" dominant storytelling techniques. This can have the effect of those previously on the periphery being able to access and inhabit a place within established narrative forms. By using less radical styles of storytelling these writers use a form which is familiar to many readers, this arguably assists in these authors reaching a wider readership than their more formally challenging postmodern predecessors. Consequently the use of traditional storytelling forms and styles assists in the positioning of the previously marginalized perspectives (that these texts contain) within the centre, as because they are written using a less radical style these works can more easily become part of the mainstream.

As stated in the Introduction bell hooks reminds us that the terms of a rejection, or "giving up", of something in fact depends very much on the possession of that "thing" in the first instance. Therefore a postmodern rejection of formal conventions is not the only possible viable position from which to lay a challenge to the subjugation of certain voices. As she suggests, and as is discussed in the Introduction, for some a postmodern challenge
came at the wrong time in that just as the marginalized felt they were gaining access to dominant forms (hooks discusses this in terms of notions of identity), a challenge to the ideologies behind the dominant forms were made, which lead to (for some) a rejection of those ideologies and the forms associated with them. hooks suggests that just as Afro-Caribbean people were being allowed access to the mechanism to express an identity, the very concepts of identity were challenged or rejected by some postmodern perspectives. This in turn effected a continued denial of access for the marginalized to dominant forms. I extend hooks' analysis to that of the classical forms of the novel, suggesting that there has been a period of intensification of the marginalized perspective engaging with such style, as not all marginalized writers choose to reject the formal conventions of storytelling, even though they may acknowledge that at various times voices have been excluded, occluded or absent from classical, and canonical fiction. The attempt of an ownership of "classical" storytelling modes for the previously marginalized authors considered in this chapter demonstrates a desire to adapt rather than debunk traditional modes of storytelling. Rather than an overt concentration on the ultimate disparity between the form's ability to represent, as perhaps demonstrated in a text such as B.S. Johnsons The Unfortunates, there is a return to the stylistic formal conventions of aspects of traditional storytelling. Waters's romance narrative, Evaristo's use of the bildungsroman, and Levy's use of conventions such as a prologue, demonstrate these authors' use of more traditional style, styles which have always attracted a wide readership, and thus furthers a pursuit of situating marginalized voices in the centre, turning to styles of writing which are perhaps perceived as offering them the widest exposure.

My analysis focuses specifically on a selection of female writers. As highlighted in the Introduction this selection is significant since in recent years the sub-genre of historical
writing, particularly in terms of the London novel, has largely been the preserve of men with authors such as Michael Moorcock, Iain Sinclair, and Peter Ackroyd dominating the scene; these writers have almost become synonymous with the process of writing the historical London novel. As discussed in the previous chapter, the work of these male writers has received much critical attention. However towards the end of the twentieth century there is a departure from this male focused perspective. Both Keen and Lindsay Duguid note a particular female presence in the writing of the “historical novel” subgenre during the 1980s. Duguid speculates that a turn to the “historical novel” has particular resonance for the female writer, describing how Beryl Bainbridge, Penelope Fitzgerald, Pat Barker, Hilary Mantel, Rose Tremain, and Jeanette Winterson write within this subgenre “as a way of escaping the feminist straightjacket, or just getting out of the kitchen” (‘Before it Becomes Literature’ 296). In addition an increase in writers engaging with the historical novel has been noted in relation to a postmodern ideology: “changes that appear to be related to a parallel narrative turn in historical writing and to the impact of poststructuralism and postmodernism” (Keen 171). Angela Carter and Winterson (particularly in Winterson’s Sexing the Cherry) for example engage with experimental aesthetics such as magic-realism, narrative disjuncture and play, and fantastical and/or grotesque characterization, whereas the novels considered in this chapter move away from such overt experimental and fantastical devices.

Gavin Keulks, in his analysis of the work of Martin Amis and Winterson, as discussed in the Introduction, moves the discussion of British contemporary fiction away from what he terms “vulgar” postmodernism towards a more “sanitized” post-postmodernism (Martin Amis original emphasis 161). It is possible to apply Keulks’s theories to an analysis of Evaristo’s, Levy’s and Waters’s texts. In ‘Winterson’s Recent Work: Navigating Realism and

1 See the Introduction for a full discussion of Keulks’ use of the word “sanitized".
Postmodernism' Keulks argues that Winterson's more contemporary novels "broker an accord with select aspects of realism, especially historicism, linearity and motivation" (148). Evaristo, Waters and Levy demonstrate in their texts an attempt to reengage with such select aspects of realism, historicism and linearity (and character motivation as is discussed in detail in the following two chapters). Keulks is keen to note in the authors he discusses that this is a "second-phase", or "post-postmodernism", not a return. Keulks suggests Powerbook is "[Winterson's] last full-fledged, first-phase postmodern novel" (148), reading Winterson as doing something different in her later phase: "Lighthousekeeping and Weight try to refigure postmodernism for the inescapably historical, serious and decidedly un-ironic twenty-first century" (original emphasis 148). The "shifting" relationship Winterson has with realism and postmodernism is, Keulks himself suggests, by no means exclusive to her work: "[Winterson's later] works position their author at a representational crossroads that has become predictably common in the twenty-first century" (147). Keulks asserts that this condition is particularly relevant to texts of recent times, categorising the current era as: "a transitional period that labours, for some, under the burdensome label the 'post-postmodern' age" (147). Therefore, I consider Keulks' analysis and engagement with post-postmodernism in relation to Soul Tourists, Small Island and The Night Watch.

The "return" to more conservative styles may be read in part as a reaction to what Keulks has identified as an "un-ironic" "post-postmodern age". The final decade of the previous century had ended, for some, on a relatively optimistic note in terms of the possibility of the dawning of a new era that many hoped "New Labour" would bring.2

2 Writing in 1997 Will Hutton historicises the politics of the Thatcher era (perhaps somewhat optimistically) implying that there will be a departure from such policies after the election of New Labour. Hutton notes in The State to Come (1997) that during the Thatcher era inequality was "perhaps the single most salient fact in contemporary British society" (6), as he describes "the gains of the twentieth century – from the forty-hour week to a public library service – are all under threat" (54-5). Philip Tew (in The Contemporary British Novel, 2004) also comments that: "Hutton's litany of excesses of Thatcherism make sober reading, and confirm the
However as the millennium dawned, fear replaced optimism in part as a consequence of the 2001 9/11 attacks. As Nick Bentley notes: “The symbolic power of the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre reverberated around the world, and has had a particularly profound impact on British culture” (British Fiction of the 1990s 3). Philip Tew in his revised edition of The Contemporary British Novel considers “the perspectival transformation in much new fiction” (xvii). He goes on to explain how in order to investigate this era, he “adopt[s] the term ‘traumatological’ to describe an emerging aesthetic of cultural threat and upheaval, a collective economy of repetition and symbolic return” (xvii-xviii). Though I do not directly undertake a “traumatological” reading, the texts considered in this chapter do engage with an “economy of repetition and symbolic return” in that they offer a reimagining (and thus a fictional return) to either a specific historical period or a reconsideration of well known moments or motifs from the past. Tew argues “post-9/11 events have confirmed a new range of uncertainties, somewhat akin to the always underlying consciousness at the height of the Cold War when fear of nuclear extinction shaped our very dreams” (xviii). Ana Douglass’s and Thomas A. Volger’s comments in their introduction to the collection Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma support Tew’s point of a correlation between post-war, cold-war fears and the post 9/11 climate: “It would seem that in our post 9/11 state, we are being conditioned by threats of terror and a pseudo ‘war’ to exist in a similar state of perpetual fear” (84). Therefore the suggestion of such a traumatological era seems to provide further support for Keulks’ observation that we are

dramatic nature of life for a whole range of British people, mostly outside of the middle classes it may be noted. This includes long periods of mass unemployment, the destruction of much of the trade union system and of workers’ rights, mass economic migration and intermittent ethnic strife, an ongoing and endemic drug culture and its associated ‘black economy’, intermittent wars and terrorist campaigns, and rising poverty and startling inequalities” (57).

3 And the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ and then 7/7 attacks. The fear prevalent within this era of London’s history is explored in Ian McEwan’s novel Saturday (2005).
currently living in an "un-ironic" state, a state which in part can be understood as a consequence of such persistent and constant fear.

A Theoretical Perspective of a Textual Repositioning of the Marginal

Before I begin my consideration of the texts it is important to establish the theoretical perspective through which I approach my analysis. Michel Foucault’s work on power and its relationships to knowledge, and discourse has a particular relevance to my discussion of the repositioning of the marginal through a reimagining of history in fiction. In the essays which make up the collection Power/Knowledge, Foucault demonstrates how power is created and transferred through discourse. Foucault argues that power is situated among a variety of social practices, and becomes part of an "economy of discourse". Foucault’s work suggests that power is directly related to discourse, which can be used to construct knowledge, and that power is not tangible, but rather related to the "economy of discourse". Discourse can therefore be utilised to define anything as "truth". As such, knowledge is manufactured within these discourses. Such a theory can be applied to our knowledge of history. Foucault suggests that certain social conventions and formations create and affect our knowledge, that we receive the socially dominant discourse as the "truth". Foucault therefore argues that what we think of as our knowledge of history is in fact merely one version, that of the dominant discourse. He suggests that there may be different versions to that which we believe to be "true". He defines these alternative versions as subjugated knowledge: "I am referring to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systematisation ... Subjugated knowledges are thus those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised" (‘Two Lectures’ 81-2).

Foucault considers all knowledge to be arbitrary, including notions of "truth"; such notions are used to keep power structures relevant and functioning. Foucault suggests that
there is "official knowledge", particularly within the social sciences, which works to normalise certain knowledge, and discourses, and therefore, other knowledge can become marginalized or are even unknown, he further delineates:

When I say 'subjugated knowledges' I mean two things. On the one hand, I am referring to historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systemizations. ... [In other words, I am referring to] blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and systematic ensembles, but which were masked, and the critique was able to reveal their existence by using, obviously enough, the tools of scholarship. Second, when I say 'subjugated knowledges' I am also referring to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as...insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity. (Society Must Be Defended 7)

This chapter focuses particularly on those subjugated knowledges which Foucault defines as "disqualified" or suggests are considered "inferior"; however, the process of the subjugation of knowledge that are present but "masked" is also highly relevant to this investigation. Foucault suggests that concepts of "truth" must be investigated in order to reveal the power relations behind them, and thus the processes behind the subjugation of certain knowledges:

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousness - or what's in their heads - but the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth. ('Truth and Power' 133)
Foucault identifies a need to acknowledge that the “régime of the production of truth”, is just that, a “regime”, and as such is available to be utilised by institutions for their own means, and to position certain things as “truths” as opposed to others in line with their particular ideology. Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace argue:

[Foucault’s] way of working (repeating or revealing) also shows how official knowledges...work as instruments of ‘normalisation’, continually attempting to manoeuvre populations into ‘correct’ and ‘functional’ forms of thinking and acting. Therefore Foucault also has an interest in examining methods, practices and techniques by which official discourses go about this process of normalisation and, in the process, occlude forms of knowledge which are different from them. (Original emphasis 17)

The texts in this chapter all offer, in various ways, a historical novel of the subjugated, those who have been excluded from mainstream discourses in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Just as Foucault also suggests is needed, these texts can be read along the lines of an attempt to reveal an alternative, “a new politics of truth”. Though Foucault makes the point that the “processes of normalisation”, and therefore the infrastructures which work to subjugate voices, need to be exposed; he also suggests that this leads to a need for “a new politics of truth”, and thus therefore not just a deconstruction of the notion that such a metanarrative as a “truth” can exist. The marginalized writers in this study attempt to occupy and utilise the “economies of discourse” which were previously part of a process of occluding subjugated voices and histories as these authors, within their texts, engage in a process of demonstrating that a “new politics of truth” can exist in which marginalized voices are no longer occluded. Thus rather than an approach which identifies a need for each individual to search for their own history (suggesting that the very notion of an “overarching” history is impossible) these texts instead demonstrate an approach which maintains a search for the
positioning of the marginal within an "official history", such is akin to the "sanitized" postmodernism which Keulks describes as the "second-phase".

The account of history described above, and perhaps in turn, post-postmodernism, may therefore be a more "acceptable" version, or more easily translated into the mainstream. The texts considered here represent an adaptation of popular forms of the novel; yet, I suggest, with a polemical edge in that they are engaging with aspects of the postmodern endeavour, aimed as they are at exposing "instruments of normalisation". If texts can reach a wider audience (for instance Small Island has been defined as an "airport novel" by some critics) and thus challenge perceptions of key moments of British history, the marginalized figure can take a more dominant position within popular conceptions of that historical moment, and also become part of the ownership of narrative form (as opposed to being excluded or denied access to it). Therefore a resituating of the marginal can be read as not only happening in more formally experimental, avant-garde, or highbrow styles, but within texts which use more mainstream genres of writing.

Evaristo's and Levy's Reimagining of Key Moments in British History

Evaristo's novel Soul Tourists tells the story of Stanley who embarks upon an Odysseian journey, during the course of which he meets figures from the past including Alexander Pushkin and Mary Seacole. The journey proves to be a process of re-education for Stanley as he encounters (for the first time in his life) positive stories of black people in history. The figures that "visit" Stanley play an important part in making him aware of the way in which we think about (and more importantly, pass on our understanding of) history, how it is recorded, and how, in Stanley's experience, it has often excluded black people. Stanley is unaware of whole communities, as is revealed when he meets Pushkin: "I never knew there were black people in Russia. This journey has been a series of awakenings" (243). Stanley's
ignorance demonstrates how both key figures and black communities are absent, “occluded” or under-represented in the “official knowledges”, in the history books and teachings of history to children in schools.

As a result of his travels (and in line with postmodern theory) Stanley learns that history is not a singular unchallenged narrative, and that his identity (as he understands it) is related to the particular version of history he has been told. He becomes aware that the history he knows is just a story, a version of how things happened, and as such history is something available to be created and re-created. Stanley begins to understand history in terms of a discourse and rejects the stories about the past that he learnt at school. Instead Stanley learns about history through conversations with figures from the past who visit him in the form of “ghost” like imaginings. In investigating recorded versions of history in this way Evaristo might appear to be partaking in a postmodern endeavour to challenge metanarratives. However, her critique does not stop at the deconstruction of the concept of “history” and simply imply that there can only be many individualised versions of the historical record. Rather, Evaristo’s text hints at a universalising principle behind the narrative when she begins a process of reconstructing a more “satisfying” version of history (for Stanley) and then offers this to the reader as a possible model; thus moving beyond the solipsism of postmodern approaches. Rather than representations of history Stanley feels that he goes to the “body of history, turning its skin inside out and writing a new history upon it with a bone shaved down to a quill dipped in the ink of blood. Europe was not as it seemed, Stanley decided, and for him, at least, Europe would never be the same again” (189). Stanley’s approach is to revisit and rewrite history, “writing a new history” in which the stories of the people he has encountered during his travels are not occluded. That he will use

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4 I use the terms “occluded” histories and “official knowledges” in relation to Michel Foucault’s use, as defined and discussed above.
“a quill dipped in the ink of blood” suggests a permanency to the history he is attempting, which involves a correction of previous versions through the same techniques of writing history that he perceives were originally used.

The suggestion implicit in Evaristo’s novel is that Stanley will write an official history, that one version of history which contains an account which equally addresses the histories of all peoples can be recorded. Such a belief that he can begin a process of rewriting an official history therefore demonstrates a move away from a more postmodern suggestion that such an overarching narrative is impossible. Stanley’s approach is clearly problematic and certainly less radical in that the form in which he chooses to write remains unchallenged, it is a conventional understanding of how in the past history has been written, as evident through the image of a handwritten script using a quill. That he is attempting to provide a story of those who have been excluded rather than overtly denying that such a process is possible, suggest that for Stanley, a rejection of history would not address the exclusion or occlusion from history of groups of people that he has identified on his travels, but rather continue their absence. As such he attempts to write the missing people he comes across into history.

Stanley has learnt during his travels for the first time about a history of black people before that of the SS Windrush generation. He shares his findings with his travelling companion Jessie as he has learnt not only about history that he had no previous knowledge of, but also the mechanisms behind the creation and dissemination of certain aspects of history over others. He informs Jessie:

‘You mustn’t generalize’, he said, adopting his banker-speak. ‘No one nation is homogenous, no matter what its PR machine says. Did you know there were black
people in sixteenth century England and eighteenth-century France \textit{par exemple}? Who knows what’s in the genes of your average Frenchman or Briton today?’(132)

Stanley’s use of the idea of a “PR machine” forming ideas of the past has relevance to Foucault’s ideas of “economies of discourse”. The ways in which “loaded” versions of history can be created, and then become the accepted idea of how things are, especially in contemporary culture, is further delineated through Stanley’s expectations of a harem: “‘I expected them to be naked,’ Stanley whispered to Pushkin, unable to hide his disappointment” (241). His views have obviously been inspired, as Pushkin comments, by the film industry: “‘Hey brother, you’ve been watching too many Hollywood films’” (241). John McLeod suggests that it is exactly such a process of reassessment of our perceived notions of Britain’s past which is needed:

> The social and political future of the British Isles rests upon the ability of its conflicted populations to reconceive of Britain’s past and present in transcultural terms, recognising and prizing the unruly rhythms of arrival, settlement and departure which London particularly, but not exclusively, exemplifies. (Postcolonial London 178)\(^5\)

Thereby through the character of Stanley, \textit{Soul Tourists} embarks on such a process of revisiting and reconceiving of British history which McLeod calls for, as he learns about a history other than the one he received from his formal education. Like Evaristo, Levy’s \textit{Small Island} also embarks upon a process of reconsidering British history.

\(^5\) Sonya Andermahr also discusses such a process in relation to a feminist re-visioning, noting how specifically towards the end of the twentieth-century many feminist writers shifted their focus away from futuristic science fiction to a consideration of the past. “It seemed to me that in contrast to the futurist or present-day settings of many of the classic texts of feminist fiction of the 1970s, especially of feminist science fiction, a genre which predominated in that period, many of the more recent novels by feminist writers I was reading looked back into history for their inspiration, their settings, and their subject matter. Think, for example, of Angela Carter’s \textit{Wise Children} (1991), Jeanette Winterson’s \textit{The Passion} (1987) and Michèle Roberts’ \textit{In the Red Kitchen} (1990)” (‘Utopian Dreaming’ 161).
Levy’s novel set during, and immediately, after the Second World War (a similar time period to *The Night Watch*) demonstrates how many people from many places across the world played their part in the Second World War, fighting for and living in Britain. Levy’s use of a prologue engages with conventional storytelling techniques and narrative structure; as does the use of a quote from Winston Churchill to end her novel, functioning as a coda for the text and could be read as an epigraph for the novel as a whole, thereby Levy engages with very recognisable storytelling devices as opposed to more experimental ones, and as such makes her story feel familiar to the reader.6 By positioning Churchill’s famous words from his speech after the Battle of Britain: “Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few”, words synonymous with Britain’s eventual overall victory, Levy reminds the reader of the many soldiers fighting for Britain from the colonies. This reminder is especially poignant considering the account within her novel of the difficulty soldiers returning to England from the colonies experienced. Levy’s character Gilbert for instance, was rejected by many within the local community when after the war he sought residence in England; he was treated as an outsider (only being allowed to carry out menial work). Maria Helena Lima comments regarding Levy’s quoting of these famous words in this context that they: “illuminate the whole world Levy so powerfully creates” (Lima 79) as Levy poignantly locates her novel, which addresses issues of prejudice, at a time when the terrible consequences of race hatred are prominent.

To some extent Levy indulges the common misconception and oversimplified belief that the Second World War was fought on the grounds of a world uniting to fight against the fascism of the Nazi Party. This allows her to utilise the liberal momentum that this idea provides, in order to challenge both modern racism and the view that British history should

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6 For further discussion on the nature of reading the end quote of *Small Island* as an epigraph to the novel see Maria Helena Lima, ‘‘Pivoting the Centre’: The Fiction of Andrea Levy’ 56-85.
be predominantly white history. Gilbert's encounter with segregated black soldiers in the US Army makes this point. Gilbert is intrigued by the term Anthropoid: "Anthropoid - I looked to the dictionary to find the meaning of this word used by Hitler and his friends to describe Jews and Coloured men ... resembling a human but primitive, like an ape" (129). The fact that this realisation that he is thought of as "primitive" happens when Gilbert believes that he is engaged in a war against segregation and race hatred adds poignancy to the moment. Gilbert is still discriminated against because of the colour of his skin: "We fighting the persecution of the Jew, yet even in my RAF blue my coloured skin can permit anyone to treat me as less than a man" (186). Here Levy suggests that Gilbert is aware of the persecution of Jewish communities in Nazi Germany when, in reality, it is unlikely that soldiers on the ground would have this knowledge at this point in the war. Levy provides a post-war re-reading of the motivations for the war in order to imply a mismatch between the way that Britain might present itself - as a liberal society that fought against fascism - and lived experiences of the Windrush immigrants.

The need for a reconsideration of the history of wartime Britain is further poignantly emphasised by the attitude of Levy's character Bernard. Bernard believes that having fought in the war, he has the right to return to England and only live with white people:

The recipe for a quiet life is each to their own. The war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind. Quite simple. Everyone had a place. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people... Everyone was trying to get home after the war to be with kith and kin. Except these blasted coloured colonials. I've nothing against them in their place. But their place isn't here. Mr Todd thought they would only survive one British winter. I hoped he was right. (469)
Bernard’s misappropriation of the nature and consequence of the war is ironic. He wishes for England to exist as a homogenous, segregated society, perhaps somewhat ironically echoing some of the rhetoric of the Nazi regime he has helped to bring an end to. Bernard considers Gilbert and Hortense to be “invaders”: “But I fought a war to protect home and hearth. Not about to be invaded by stealth” (470). Bernard believes it is his right to evict Gilbert and Hortense: “‘now I’m back we intend to live respectably again. It’s what I fought a war for’” (471). Though Gilbert here reminds Bernard that he too fought in the war, the manner in which he does this is far from overt: “He took a deep breath. Looked to his feet. Bit his ample lip. Mentioned, almost quietly, that he, too, had fought in the war” (471) a comment which seemingly goes unnoticed. The distinction between the speech styles of the two characters here is significant, in that Bernard is almost aggressive whilst Gilbert is very submissive. By Levy giving a voice to characters such as Hortense and Gilbert, and placing their narratives alongside the many war stories which already exist in British fiction, she demonstrates both that voices can become marginalized, and foregrounds misconceptions of the war and who fought in it and why. But the novel is not entirely pessimistic in that Small Island also shows that such narratives can be repositioned, as Levy writes a text about wartime Britain which gives equal space to voices from four different perspectives, and thus positions marginalized accounts alongside those the reader may be more familiar with.

By writing about people from the colonies travelling to London in the belief that they are returning to the mother country because “their country needs them”, and having come to the aid of Britain during the war, Levy undermines Bernard’s notions of an immigrant “invasion”. Gilbert likens the attraction of the mother country to that of a relative: “Let me ask you to imagine this. Living far from you is a beloved relation whom you have never met. Yet this relation is so dear a kin she is known as Mother. Your own mother talks of Mother
all the time" (139). Gilbert develops his analogy of the cherished, beautiful distant relative that the Mother country represents to describe the harsh treatment and disappointment of arrival in England:

The filthy tramp that eventually greets you is she. Ragged, old and dusty as the long dead. Mother has a blackened eye, bad breath and one lone tooth that waves in her head when she speaks. Can this be that fabled relation you heard so much of? This twisted-crooked weary woman. This stinking cantankerous hag. She offers you no comfort after the journey. No smile. No welcome. Yet she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, ‘Who the bloody hell are you?’” (139)

Here Gilbert recounts not only the literal dilapidation of the capital which is a result of the Second World War, but also the disparity between the perceptions of “home” from those who travel from the colonies, such as Gilbert and Hortense, and London’s inhabitants’ understanding of belonging and “kin”, such as that held by Bernard and Mr Todd. Neither Gilbert nor Hortense receive the welcome they are expecting; as though they believe it to be part of their duty to travel to London to protect the Mother country, Bernard and his friend perceive that Britain is being “invaded”. Here therefore is evidence of how stories have been constructed by empire both about the colonies and the centre, as both parties when they meet each other do not encounter what they expected. Gilbert is disappointed by the discrepancy between what his colonial education has taught him of the Mother country and reality of his lived experience. He may know everything about London and feel an affinity with the Mother country, but is shocked to discover that the Mother country knows nothing of him or, worse, has taught its citizens mistruths, as Gilbert’s comments about an English woman demonstrate:
Ask her to tell you about the people of Jamaica. Does she see that small boy standing tall in a classroom where sunlight draws lines across the room, speaking of England – of canals, of Parliament and the greatest laws ever passed? Or might she, with some authority, from a friend she knew or a book she’d read, tell you of savages, jungles and swinging through trees? ...Give me a map, let me see if Tommy Atkins or Lady Havealot can point to Jamaica. ... But give me that map, blindfold me, spin me round three times and I, dizzy and dazed, would still place my figure squarely on the Mother Country. (142)

Here we can read Foucault’s theories of the creation of power through discourse in light of colonialism, as narrative has been used to construct the “other”. A “truth” of Jamaican boys “swinging through trees” has been constructed as part of an “economy of discourse” in order to keep power relations functioning and thus offer a justification of colonial exploits. The construction of a grand Mother Country obviously benefitted London in terms of Gilbert and others like him being willing to fight and defend this distant land. Levy’s novel therefore suggests that even during the 1940s popular misconceptions of the colonies, or ex-colonies continued.

Through characters such as Hortense and Gilbert Levy’s novel obviously attempts to dismiss such notions of an “immigrant invasion”. However the character of Queenie also plays a significant part in the process of challenging racist preconceptions. Forced to take in lodgers to assist in the household finances during the war as her husband is away, Queenie accepts both Gilbert and Michael into her home when many around her won’t. Though it is somewhat ambiguous as to whether this is motivated by a more liberal attitude, or simply financial necessity, the result is that Queenie’s relationship with these characters means the

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7 Edward Said’s theories of Orientalism are of course highly relevant to this discussion.
reader can see a certain universal humanism across the characters, and Queenie begins to understand that the racism of those such as Bernard and Mr Todd is a discourse as opposed to a "truth". Therefore, Levy challenges any ideology which seeks to naturalise racist points of view or position such within an historical context as an accepted part of a British identity at this time. Levy hints at the power relations which function behind discourse, but rather than reject narrative she works to construct alternative stories to challenge them. Therefore Levy positions an alternative wartime story alongside the many others by using a genre similar to those that already exist. This allows for an easy comparison, but also the possibility of a more likely crossover into a more mainstream readership than a text which rejects such recognisable forms.

Bernard's misinformed perspectives are further challenged as at the end of the story he must, because of his personal situation, rethink his ideas on ethnic purity and segregation as he wishes to bring up Queenie's baby who is fathered by the Jamaican soldier Michael. The obvious question asked by \textit{Small Island} is therefore, where would baby Michael's place be if Bernard's segregated system was operational? The symbol of baby Michael at the end of the novel, separated from his biological mother and father, to be brought up by supposedly more "appropriate" parents based on skin colour, is effective. These from a country with a colonial past are responsible for bringing up the (symbolic) nation's future. Queenie believes that Gilbert and Hortense can give her baby a home and a community, something she can't because of the backward thinking attitudes of those around her such as Bernard and Mr Todd. This clearly complicates the oversimplified misconceptions of a homogenous notion of "home", belonging and kin which Bernard describes above, as two characters who each have

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8 Queenie asks Hortense and Gilbert to bring up her baby because of the racism she fears he will encounter as a mixed heritage child in a predominately white area of London.
a dual heritage and a heritage in a country which has a history of being a British colony are charged with the care of London's next generation.

Gilbert feels a duty towards baby Michael, foreseeing terrible treatment and the difficult upbringing he would have with a white family: "I can't just walk away. Leave that little coloured baby alone in this country, full of people like Mr Bligh. Him and all his kind. What sort of a life would that little man have? Damn them" (527).9 Thereby Levy effects a reconsideration of familiar wartime narratives and undertakes a process akin to that which McLeod suggests is required, that of a "reconceiv[ing] of Britain's past and present in transcultural terms", as both London's history; in terms of who was involved in fighting for the country in the Second World War, and its future, in relation to the parenting of Queenie's baby, are considered in relation to Hortense's and Gilbert's participation and are here written as playing significant parts in both.

Reimagining the Past: Returning to Recognisable Forms

The Night Watch contains characters marginalized in various ways, due to gender; sexuality (particularly female homosexuality, cross-dressing, and trans-sexuality); illicit love affairs; and moral stance (conscientious objectors to war). These voices are generally absent from popular fiction of the 1940s.10 Significantly Waters chooses to represent these voices using what in essence amounts to straightforward literary realism. Waters uses a writing style which is reminiscent of 1940s writers, one such example being the comparison between Water's text and Elizabeth Bowen's 1944 short story 'Mysterious Kor'. Bowen dedicates

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9 Bernard (and therefore Queenie once they are married) shares a surname with the famous Captain William Bligh (1754-1817), an officer of the British Royal Navy who accompanied Captain Cook in 1776 and was also a colonial administrator. He famously suffered a mutiny during the voyage of the Bounty – a clearly significant name choice on Levy's behalf.

10 Although there was a large 'pulp' fiction industry publishing works about marginal subjects, such as the thriving Lesbian 'pulp' fiction in the U.S. in the 1950's as discussed by Carol Ann Uszkurat in 'Mid Twentieth Century Lesbian Romance: Reception and Redress' there was little representation of female homosexuality (especially in an overt manner) within mainstream fiction.
several paragraphs within the story to a description of the naïve and prudish Callie preparing for the return of her friend Pepita with her would be lover Arthur:

Hours ago she had set out the three cups and saucers, the tins of cocoa and household milk and, on the gas-ring, brought the kettle to just short of the boil. She had turned open Arthur’s bed, the living-room divan, in the neat inviting way she had learnt at home - then, with a modest impulse, replaced the cover. She had, as Pepita foresaw, been wearing her cretonne house-coat, the nearest thing to a hostess gown that she had; she had already brushed her hair for the night, rebraided it, bound the braids in a coronet round her head. Both lights and the wireless had been on, to make the room both look and sound gay. (36)

Waters uses a similar style in terms of the exacting detail she uses to recount one of her characters making a cup of tea: “Helen took the kettle down to the lavatory on the landing and filled it at the sink. She set it on the floor, plugged it into a socket in the skirting-board, then stood waiting. It took about three minutes to boil...” (13-14). Thereby Waters’s text feels familiar in terms of a nineteen-forties text and aids the reader further in perceiving of the novel as an example from this time period, and thus enhances a reading of The Night Watch offering the reader a rewriting of this style of fiction with the inclusion of female homosexual perspectives. The character Duncan who is obsessed with details and the desire to understand the history behind objects allegorises the process the novel in part undertakes, that of seeking to look again, to consider carefully the detail and the “back stories”, as Waters through the writing of a wartime tale with a female homosexual perspective encourages the reader to think again about popular misconceptions of London’s history of this time, and to perhaps think about those people who are often absent from popular re-imaginings of it.

Duncan notes how the history of the pipe he finds on the bank of the Thames will never be
known: "Duncan held the pipe up and studied it. 'I wonder what that man's name was. Doesn't it torment you, that we'll never know" (87). Duncan's obsession therefore foregrounds that there are absences, gaps within history.

Waters uses a linear, but backwards chronology, starting in 1947 and ending in 1941. The character Kay provides an interesting comment regarding this narrative technique, stating that she prefers backwards chronology in her cinematic viewing, going in halfway through, or watching the end of the film first. This approach to cinema is essentially what the author is forcing the reader to do in her text, to see the end first. Kay comments: "I almost prefer them that way" (99). Kay extends this philosophy beyond the cinematic world, commenting: "people's pasts, you know, [are] so much more interesting than their futures" (99). Significantly this is what Waters's narrative device achieves for the novel. From the very beginning, the reader will learn no more about the characters' futures, they can only develop their knowledge of the characters in relation to their past. Laura Doan and Waters in their essay 'Making up Lost Time' argue that "retrospection is a condition of homosexual agency" (12).11 Emily Jeremiah also associates Waters's alternative narrative devices with a homosexual perspective, stating of The Night Watch that it is "significant" that "the narrative moves backwards in time, in what could ... be read as a queer gesture" (original italics 133). The backwards narrative is being utilised to insert marginalized perspectives into historical discourse, or as Doan, Waters and Jeremiah discuss, it can be read as a "queer gesture", in part because it relates to the process of looking back into history and inserting previously absent narratives. Jeremiah defines the "queer" associations of the historical novel as such:

'Theory' is contingent and its recognitions are sometimes belated: 'Gender trouble is not new', Butler remarks, 'the hybridity of dissonance ...is already here, already

11 Cited in "'The 'I' inside "her": Queer Narration in Sarah Waters's Tipping the Velvet and Wesley Stace's Misfortune" (133).
structuring the gendered lives of many people' ... Historical fiction is one site at which this recognition can be developed. By positing a queer past, one performs a 're-vision' of traditional accounts ... uncovering lives most often ‘hidden from history’” (132).

The backwards narrative technique used by Waters symbolically reinforces this idea as the reader is forced to partake in a revision and reassessment of initial responses and ideas in relation to the characters and perceptions of wartime London, as we as the reader also undergo a process of learning more about the past rather than the future of the characters as we progress through the novel. This is a process akin to that which Evaristo takes her readers on and McLeod asserts needs to be undertaken in relation to a reassessment of postcolonial British history (as discussed above).

Both Evaristo and Levy also use very familiar storytelling techniques in their novels. Akin to Levy's use of prologues and "epigraphs", Evaristo's text also reminds the reader of familiar storytelling devices. Evaristo signals the beginning of the novel with the use of a classic opening title page, and thus aligns her story with traditional storytelling techniques. However, as her endeavour is, as stated above, to adapt such classic forms, she replaces a more traditional opening such as "The Beginning" with a symbol common in the contemporary era in which she is writing, one associated with travel and tourism, the internationally recognisable "i" symbol for tourist information. Demarking the novel's opening (and thus the storytelling space) with a title page foregrounds recognisable, traditional, storytelling devices as opposed to utilising experimental forms which disrupt such traditions. However, Evaristo has tailored the tradition for her own needs as the second function of the use of this specific symbol is the suggestion that there is a need for the reader to gain information, the implication being that there is a lot to learn that hasn't been taught. Therefore through reading the novel we are beginning a journey of discovery of subjugated
histories, and as we are at the beginning of a journey we first need tourist information. Through this act Evaristo denies the reader the complacency that there is such a thing as any definitive prior knowledge. This signals that the reader must undertake a process of relearning from the beginning, and thus that "new histories" can be learnt, and that they can utilise traditional storytelling devices, rather than rejecting them.

The method Evaristo uses to introduce the reader to one of the characters, Pearline allegorizes the process of subjugation of some peoples, and thus is suggestive of a need for a reassessment and repositioning of previously marginalized histories. Pearline's presence in the house is a metaphorical representation of the current position that versions of black history occupy in British history, being one of simultaneous presence and absence. It is described in the novel how after Pearline's death her presence is still felt in Clasford's (Stanley's father) house:

Pearline

whose antique cook's knife, with its smooth ivory handle, gathered dust in a drawer because when he used it he could feel her strong hands sawing deep into hundreds of succulent hams, the Sunday roast gammon. (4)

This device establishes the theme of dead people's continued presence (as Stanley learns about the past through the visitations he receives from ghosts), as well as asserting the notion of missing people. Stanley also describes his father's isolation and withdrawal from London life: "'Stop rushin' me,' he'll say, because in the silent-movie space of this room, the energy of someone from the outside world of technicolour is overwhelming" (8), a metaphor which

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12 Evaristo also describes Pearline's character in a list-like manner, as the page layout changes for her introduction. The text is divided into small sections a few lines long each describing one aspect of her character, each separately headed with her name. This technique further demonstrates Evaristo's 'nod' to a postmodern play with typographical layout. Though this device may appear to have postmodern characteristics, the tone of its use disassociates it from any postmodern desire to disrupt or fragment narrative as a form.
imparts a strong image of Clasford's simultaneous presence and absence within London. He is literally without a voice in the "silent-movie space of his room" whilst the outside world is functioning in full "technicolour". Evaristo's text here attempts to give a voice to Clasford and the history of the previously subjugated by bringing characters from the past into the metaphorical "technicolour" of the centre that is London. In part, through a return to 'traditional' narrative techniques associated with nineteenth-century realism, Evaristo engages with less formally experimental techniques in a search for the beyond of postmodernism. The history of black people that was not given to Stanley or his classmates during their education at school is foregrounded as the process of relearning that Stanley undertakes during his travels reveals the absences in his education which "made him want to storm up to his history teacher, grab him by the lapels and demand, 'Why didn't you tell me about the Moors Mr Cartwright? Why not, eh, why not?'"(155).

The simultaneous presence and absence of Pearline and Clasford is perhaps analogous to an aspect of black British history, as positioning these characters in this manner acts as an example of the lack of black figures within popular perceptions of both London and British history; for example Stanley is aware of the work of Florence Nightingale but not Mary Seacole. Pearline's favourite Calypso, which is about London, reinforces how the two cultures are inextricably linked:

"Zombie jamboree, dat took place in a London cem-e-tery,

Dey were singing 'Back to back, belly to belly,

Ah don't care a damn, ah done dead already." (original italics 5)

Despite London's long history as a multicultural and polycultural city, Evaristo feels the need to reinstate London's inherently multiracial character and culture. Evaristo's novel implies
that this point will need to be reiterated unless or until black history is more generally perceived as being part of British history. Evaristo's reiterating of this seemingly well rehearsed fictional depiction of London as a place of arrival and departure for immigrants, and the symbol of Pearline's and Clasford's simultaneous presence and absence, is perhaps indicative of a fear that London's "welcoming" multicultural status is/was in some respects questionable and under threat. One example of the complicated nature of the "melting-pot" notion of London is provided by anthropologist Sheila Patterson who in 1955 described her "shock" and feelings of "strangeness" at the sight of "coloured men and women wherever I looked" (Dark Strangers 13) during her travels in and around Brixton. As McLeod notes, immigrants, (especially those in the mid-twentieth century) often faced barriers and exclusions from housing, economic and social infrastructures: "Brixton's diasporic peoples, like many other new Londoners from countries with a history of colonialism, would be subjected to a series of attitudes which frequently objectified and demonized them, often in terms of race, whilst questioning their rights of citizenship and tenure in one of the world's most historically cosmopolitan cities" (2). The lived experience of London, McLeod suggests, often failed to live up to the expectations created by a colonial education system which depicted London as a great capital city within the grand Mother country (as is evident from Gilbert and Hortense's experiences), and as such suggested that it would be a city which would welcome its colonial subjects:

The perpetual identification of these people and their families as 'strangers' in, rather than citizens of, London bears witness to the profoundly polycultural character of the city in the postwar years and to a number of reactionary responses at the levels of state and street which refused to accept newcomers' legitimacy and rights of tenure. (2)
In *Transmission* (1992) by Atima Srivastava, the young “twenty-something” protagonist, Angie, is described by John Clement Ball as simultaneously being an inhabitant of, but also outsider to, London. This is due to her parents’ Indian heritage: “she moves about London with the confident ease of the native she almost is” (222). Angie remains an outsider even though she migrated as a small child, her acceptance as a resident in Britain is superseded by her parents country of origin, who, as Clement Ball comments “keep the heat turned up ‘full blast’ in the Finchley house they never seem to leave” (222), and who Angie describes as conducting their lives “as if we were not living in a different country” (19). Therefore, just as Evaristo’s character Pearline is simultaneously present in London, so too are Srivastava’s characters in that they occupy a house within London’s streets, but they are also simultaneously absented from the social milieu and even from the climate of the city. Clement Ball suggests that the acceptance and functionality of London as a multicultural space (an issue raised in the fiction of Evaristo, Levy and Srivastava) is in some respects questionable:

Srivastava deftly crystallizes the precarious history of postwar ‘black British’ settlement – the mass migration of West Indians, South Asians, and (to a lesser extent) Africans inaugurated by the *SS Windrush* and the 1948 Nationality Bill. In policies and its social discourse, Britain has responded to ‘New Commonwealth’ arrivals with a confusing mix of open-armed welcome and racist marginalization, leading many black Britons to feel that they were invited to inhabit the seat of power only to be left hanging, outside the door as it were, by an exclusionary national ethos that no one will bother (or knows how) to fix” (223)

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13 Clement Ball’s description of this character acts as a reiteration of Kureishi’s famous opening to *The Buddha of Suburbia*: “My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost” (3); in particular the significant “almost” of his nationality, hinting at his simultaneous existence within, but also outsider status.
As McLeod notes, the theme of and the need to re-imagine and reconsider stories, voices and history has a particular relevance for London due to the city’s identification as a place of transient inhabitants, a city which is known for its “prizing [of] the unruly rhythms of arrival, settlement and departure” (178). Therefore the literature of London is key to any exploration of the subjugated narratives of its immigrant, diasporic and subsequent generations of populations. Though the process of immigration may be an important aspect of London’s character, and therefore the immigrant or diasporic novel (and that of subsequent generations of writers born within the city from such a heritage) may be a frequent theme within its literature, as McLeod notes, there is a need to reassess and reposition in the light of the contentions over the “rights of tenure”. The acceptance of these writers and their works whole-heartedly into the canon of British fiction, as opposed to the segregation of the texts to a subsection of immigrant or diasporic narratives, is seemingly questionable. Therefore, just as McLeod suggests the inhabitants’ tenure is questioned, Evaristo and Levy utilise classical storytelling methods to dismiss any questioning of the “rights of tenure” of their fictional works, to occupy the form, and to position their diasporic or postcolonial heritage firmly within the narratives of London’s history. The choice of linear narrative techniques for their reengagement with key moments of the city’s past is a significant part of this process of both challenging “regime[s] of the production of truth” and demonstrating that there is “the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth”.

Levy achieves her critique of absences within dominant wartime narratives by focusing on character in a direct, classically realist way, writing from the perspective of characters from the colonies. In an unpublished interview with Lima, Levy asserts how an engagement with the process of storytelling is a priority to her: “You have to understand the craft of story”, stating further: “I want it to be a story” (quoted in ‘Pivoting the Centre’ 80).
Levy argues that there is a social function to the things that she writes, and that the narrative form is vital in this process, as Lima comments: “[Levy] chooses realist conventions because of her faith in the power of representation” (80). Levy asserts her own belief in the power of storytelling, and suggests that there is something particularly unique and successful about this process for a dissemination of ideas: “Certainly the literature I like to read, by the end I like to understand something better…there is no essay that could have been as powerful” (quoted in ‘Pivoting the Centre’ 80). As such Levy’s use of narrative and storytelling styles akin to realism, those which are perhaps the most easily accessible for the widest audience, clearly aid her endeavour to “make her point” as she stresses the need for it to be a “story” which brings “understanding”. Therefore she seems to be suggesting that a story can indeed bring “understanding”, rather than interrogating the notion that narrative can be an apt “representative” or form of expression. Small Island along with Evaristo’s text through the story of Stanley’s quest, demonstrates that it is possible to represent a variety of people within history, that history can be adapted to do this, as opposed to a rejection of the essential notion of history. The Second World War, and how people survived, and reacted to the challenges of it, is such an integral part for many in terms of the construction of a British identity, and also a London identity (in part due to the terrible period of the blitz that London suffered) Levy’s placement of black history within this period is therefore a crucial part of positioning marginalized voices within the centre.

The manner in which Levy structures her text, dividing it equally between the characters means that the reader comes to realise the similarities (and differences) between each of the characters. This narrative structure allows Levy an “even-handed” approach. For example, when Queenie meets Hortense for the first time, the encounter is as equally unfamiliar for both parties:
“What did you say her name was?”

‘Hortense.’

‘Funny name.’

‘What funnier than Queenie?’

She gave a little laugh although I had not made a joke.” (23)

Through this narrative technique Levy (in part) reverses the colonial gaze, during Hortense’s narrative she describes her shock at the discovery that English people use only one washing-up bowl, which Hortense thinks is unhygienic. Queenie assumes people coming from Jamaica will have “smelly things” in their luggage. Just as Queenie is fascinated by the skin colour of the African family she sees at the Empire Exhibition: “a woman with skin as black as the ink that filled the inkwell in my school desk” (5), Hortense is likewise intrigued by skin colour: “Mrs Ryder was without any doubt the whitest woman I had ever seen. Her short blonde hair sat stiff as a halo around her head. Her delicate skin was so thin that in places it revealed a fine blue tracery of veins” (45). Levy seeks, therefore a certain sense of a shared humanity, as she provides a balanced perspective from varying points of view in a neo-humanist approach.

The reader equally likes, dislikes, agrees and disagrees on varying occasions across race, gender and age boundaries with each of the four characters, as each receives equal space in the novel. This structure provides the reader with different perspectives of the same event, such as Bernard’s assumption that black people didn’t fight in the war: “I’d seen colony troops up in Blackpool. Brought over for clerical duties and suchlike. Useful, of course, but hardly fighting men” (471). Whereas the reader is aware of Michael’s and Gilbert’s active fighting from Gilbert’s and Hortense’s sections of the narrative. Individual character voice
and style are important devices within *Small Island*. Though each chapter of the novel is headed with the character’s name, it would be obvious due to the very distinct narrative styles of each of the characters which chapter is from the perspective of which character without the name, akin to narrative styles and character voice in much classic realism. Gilbert’s narrative contains non-standard English, particularly in relation to grammar. Hortense however, is the opposite. Throughout most of the novel, especially when talking of England or to English people she is very careful to use the formal grammar and lexicon she has been taught at school and college. It is only later on in the novel, most often when she talks to Gilbert that she slips into non-standard forms and is more colloquial in her style, reflecting her increasing disillusionment and realisation that the image of England and the English she received from her colonial education is a fabrication. It is not the polite, civilised, place that she was expecting; aspirations demonstrated by her presumptions about what she will experience from a visit to the shops in England: “Where I am greeted with manners, ‘Good day’, politeness” (101). Queenie sounds like a working class Londoner, even though her family obviously had higher expectations for her, and Bernard sounds like the middle-class banker that he is. A lot of Bernard’s narration contains parenthesis offering further clarification – his narrative style therefore hints at his character, reflecting how he is narrow minded, and ill-informed. He, like his words often need explanation, as there needs to be clarification and expansion of much of his misguided thinking.

Arthur doesn’t speak at all. He has been silenced by what he has seen and is suffering from trauma; there are literally no words he can use to narrate his story, as Levy through this character engages with a common theme in terms of an attempt to depict the lived first-hand experiences of horrific wartime events, as many of the formally accepted methods of communication or representation are simply insufficient for the task. Arthur’s silence
however also makes another point. It symbolically reinforces the marginalisation of certain perspectives as for once, his, a perhaps more usual perspective in terms of his gender, class, race and sexuality is left out as Arthur is part of a gender/class/race that is so prevalently represented within British fiction. Many of the authors contemporary to the character of Arthur are from a similar background to him, including Kingsley Amis, Anthony Burgess, Ian Fleming, Robert Graves, Graham Greene, William Golding, Philip Larkin, C.S. Lewis, Somerset Maugham, George Orwell, Anthony Powell, J.R. Tolkien, Evelyn Waugh and P.G. Woodhouse. There are also a number of the successful writers contemporary to Levy who also fit into this social class/gender/race, such as Martin Amis, John Fowles, Nick Hornby, David Lodge, Ian McEwan, Graham Swift, Will Self and A. N. Wilson. Levy can be read, through her exclusion of this character’s voice to be partaking in a process similar to that discussed by Alan Sinfield. Though I do not read *Small Island* to be part of a subculture, Sinfield’s analysis is in part relevant as he suggests that subcultures “form points from which its repression becomes apparent, its silence audible” (303). Levy’s novel, I suggest, reverses this position, through making Arthur silent she demonstrates how previously the other main character’s voices have been missing, or at least under-represented. Absences and silences (a theme discussed further in Chapter Three) are in this situation, conversely very telling, as those previously muted (such as Gilbert’s tentative proclamation that he fought in the war) are made more symbolically audible through the juxtaposition of Arthur’s lacking. Therefore, *Small Island* demonstrates Foucault’s observation of how “politics of truth” can be constructed, and that therefore certain voices can become marginalized, but also that this can be readdressed and alternatives given.

The novel ends on a tragic-comic note as Gilbert makes an emphatic speech directed at Bernard calling for peace and unity:
'You know what your trouble is man?' He said. 'Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. But you know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That all man. White. No better than me ... Am I to be the servant and you are the master for all time? No. Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr. Bligh. You no see? We must. Or else you just gonna fight me till the end?' (525)

Bernard's reply to this considered, heart warming speech -- "'I'm sorry...but I can't understand a single word that you're saying'" (526) -- demonstrates the difficulty faced by any attempts for change. The reader, having read almost a quarter of Levy's novel narrated through Gilbert's perspective and voice is fully aware of Gilbert's style of speech, one which is far from difficult to understand. Bernard's denial of Gilbert a voice conveys his desire of colonial ownership and occupation of London and his wishes to position Hortense and Gilbert as outsiders; he literally and metaphorically attempts to deny them a place, a voice and a home. Therefore, Levy's text can be read in terms of the paradigm of the post-postmodern, in that her technique moves beyond the narrative nihilism of postmodernism's first-wave, but yet also maintains an investigation of the processes of subjugation, and attempts to bring the marginalized to the fore.

**Postmodernism and Beyond**

As the above example demonstrate, Evaristo, Levy and Waters utilise more "classical" techniques of storytelling after a postmodern interrogation of the narrative form. The repositioning of the "outsider" within and alongside traditional forms allows the subjugated access to those "economies of discourse" which previously marginalized them, and the ability to show that alternative histories can be created using, rather than rejecting, narrative
conventions, and indeed that culture is open to such attempts to challenge the very concepts of margin and the centre. The teaching of these texts within universities, and their positive critical reception (in terms of the winning of awards) and promising sales figures would suggest that their attempts are in part successful.\(^{14}\) Stylistically this shift may be understood as a return, yet the huge influence that postmodernism has had on contemporary British literature cannot be ignored, and the texts discussed here often occupy a more complex position than a simple move backwards or away from postmodern trends. Indeed many of the novels include a knowing "nod" to the form. The unconventional nature of Evaristo’s use of the "road-signs" as chapter headings within her novel means that her text is interspersed with symbols. This constitutes a "nod" to a postmodern style of innovative typographical presentation within the text; although this is often not fully exploited as a means of deconstructing traditional narrative and instead constitutes a more subtle, less complete engagement with a decentring of narrative. Therefore it can be understood as a seeking to move beyond postmodernism, or perhaps offering a new phase and understandings of it, as opposed to a complete rejection of postmodern perspectives. Keulks notes that postmodernism is "[o]ne of the most assimilative, polymorphic movements – which is its source of both weakness and strength – postmodernism seems supremely suited to immanent critique, revision from within" (‘W(h)ither Postmodernism’ 160) and as such with the use of less formally experimental modes and adaptation of postmodern ideologies into more

\(^{14}\) Bernadine Evaristo received an MBE from the Queen in June 2009 for her services to literature. Evaristo’s most recent novel Blonde Roots was nominated for an ‘Alternative Orange Prize’ for fiction by a group of teenage judges after missing out on being shortlisted for the main prize. All three authors are also increasingly taught in British universities. For example, Levy’s and Waters’s novels variously form part of the reading list at Aberystwyth University; Birkbeck University of London; Oxford University (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology); The University of Hull; Manchester University; The University of Northampton; The University of Strathclyde; Warwick University; and The University of Winchester, to name but a few. These writers are also taught at some sixth-form colleges as well as being part of many more diverse reading groups’ lists, demonstrating how these authors are key in contemporary British fiction. Also both Levy’s and Waters’s novels made The Guardian’s ‘Books of the Decade List’ by The Review Team in their article ‘What We Were Reading’ (The Guardian.co.uk).
mainstream forms, it may be read that such a reassessment "from within" is taking place, or as Keulks defines it, postmodernism is entering a later stage, the post-postmodern.

Magdalena Mączyńska in 'The Aesthetics of Realism in Contemporary Black London Fiction' associates challenges to narrative form within the postmodern during the latter part of the twentieth century: "The late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s ... marked a gradual movement away from classical realist representation, under the influences of international postmodernism, magic realism, metafiction, and a renewed interest in the traditions of fantasy and pre-nineteenth-century novelistic discourse" (137). Mączyńska goes further in associating a specific postmodern trend with the London novel. She argues that there is a clear link between the London writer since the 1970s (who wished to discuss and raise concerns over the nature of representation) and a postmodern aesthetic, suggesting that in fiction: "London's turn away from the mimetic has been seen by many as subversive in nature, aimed at questioning the official representation of the city and its dominant political, social and symbolic orders" (137). Steven Connor notes that in literature a revisionist process entails a focus on narrative: "it is plain that, in contemporary fiction, telling has become compulsorily belated, inextricably bound up with retelling, in all its idioms: reworking, translation, adaptation, displacement, imitation, forgery, plagiarism, parody, pastiche" ('Rewriting Wrong' 123).

Though Evaristo, Levy and Waters may engage with the literary devices mentioned above; such as imitation, parody and pastiche, there is a distinct difference in these writers' approach. They demonstrate a movement beyond a focus on the ultimate viability of the narrative form as they situate themselves within the centre and occupy the form, in an attempt to move beyond a preoccupation with it. Evaristo may question the representation of, and transmission of history, but she does so without a desire to disrupt the formal stylistics of
narrative. Stanley’s anger aimed at his school teacher reflects a lack in the British education system rather than a rejection of historical narrative entirely. This is in opposition to John Fowles’ *The Magus* (1965). Implicit in this novel’s form and content is the notion that narrative is untrustworthy as Fowles interrogates the relationship between narrative and truth. Fowles’ character Conchis (a suspected Nazi collaborator and the protagonist Nicholas’ mentor) expresses a certain anger towards written “mistruths”; however, unlike Stanley who aims his anger at a specific aspect of the teaching of British history, Conchis expresses anger and distrust towards the written form in fiction in general. He informs Nicholas that he has burnt all of the novels he owned: “why should I struggle through hundreds of pages of fabrication to reach half a dozen very little truths?” (Revised edition 96) Conchis’ suggestion therefore is that fictional narrative has nothing to offer, as he literally destroys it. Though Stanley may be annoyed he does not wish to destroy the essential form. He chooses to explore European history, seeking out other “souls” to talk to and learn from. His anger and disappointment ultimately is not as nihilistic as Conchis, and thus, as Keulks suggests, in a different context, perhaps demonstrates a shift away from such postmodern scepticism. For Keulks “late” or “second-phase” postmodernism “forswears the nihilism, ahistoricism and relativism of its earlier incarnations” (148). The distinction between postmodernism and post-postmodernism is, as previously mentioned, therefore, in terms of tone. These texts demonstrate a movement beyond postmodernism, in that there is still a consideration of the need to adapt form and representation in order to reveal and address the subjugation of voices, however, it is far less nihilistic, in that the classical storytelling modes are adapted rather than rejected, as the essential form remains. It is through the adaptation of more dominant styles that these texts can perhaps more easily address popular

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15 Fowles’ revision and republication (1977), as Nicola Allen comments, demonstrates the author’s dubious acceptance of the narrative form: “the revisions seem to hint at a more general concept that revision and counter-narrative can and should be ongoing processes of fiction and history” (97).
misconceptions as by masquerading as something that has been encountered before the marginalized voice can appear within the history, when it was previously absent or underrepresented; therefore it is adaption, rather than a rejection.

Evaristo’s novel, in terms of the formal structure of her narrative borrows heavily from verse, especially in terms of page layout, as the above quote of the description of the character Pearline reflects. Evaristo’s previous novels Lara and The Emperor’s Babe are entirely written as novels in verse, whereas Soul Tourists is in part written in this form. The hybridity of her narrative style further emphasises the author’s challenge to homogenous perspectives as she demonstrates that there are multiple versions of history to be told, and as such adds a further “nod” to the postmodern perspectives which have provided a challenge to form, and also contribute to a consideration of an aesthetic return, as her style is akin to much earlier written conventions. But that her character does not reject form himself, as well as the novel demonstrating an awareness of postmodern experimentation and challenges to form, perhaps suggests a seeking to investigate possible alternatives to postmodernism, and rather is engaged with demonstrating a need to reengage and reimagine aspects of history. The “visitations” of the ghosts from the past do not disrupt the temporal flow or linearity of the novel as they would in a more formally experimental narrative, rather the text follows the structure of a traditional bildungsroman.¹⁶

Evaristo utilises the frequent association of London literature with the bildungsroman (a relationship discussed in more detail in the following two chapters). The bildungsroman has been used in much literature, including by Henry Fielding, Voltaire, Dickens, E.M. Forster, Robert Louis Stevenson, D.H Lawrence, J.R.R. Tolkien, Doris Lessing, Jeanette Winterson

¹⁶ The bildungsroman is a narrative form which has links to classical realist structures: “One of the classical realist novel’s most important sub-genres is the bildungsroman: a narrative form focused on a young protagonist’s search for identity” (Maćzyńska 138). An engagement with such realist writing perhaps further demarks a shift away from an earlier incarnation of a postmodern disruption of this form.
and many more. Evaristo specifically describes a London location for the beginning of her novel and Stanley’s journey: “The Blackwall Tunnel is the birth canal forcing me underneath the pressurized gallons of the river” (3), thereby firmly locating Stanley as a product and a native of London, it is metaphorically London (or at least the city’s infrastructure) that has given him life. Stanley is therefore depicted by Evaristo as occupying the centre in terms of his physical inhabitation and metaphorical parentage (as Evaristo takes the time to mark Stanley’s “rights of tenure”), he is firmly within the centre, more so than those associated with the bildungsroman journey to London, as they have to travel to the city for their story. Evaristo therefore reverses the tradition as it is during Stanley’s journey away from London and around the world that he falls in, and then out of love, and finally reaches an epiphany, and is reborn, Stanley has “eyes screwed up and gummy” (263) as he experiences a re-birth at the culmination of his journey and his learning. Significantly then it is only when Stanley is away from London, that he can fulfil the process of coming to an understanding of who he is and his own maturity as well as greater understanding of the city’s history. He has to move away from the history of London which excluded black people that he learnt at school, as Evaristo’s text emphatically points out that Stanley is not an immigrant to London, he is part of the city as the tunnel (metaphorically) gave him life; but a history of black people is not prevalent within the London discourse Stanley has so far experienced. It is therefore through the use of techniques which feel very familiar, such as the bildungsroman, that Evaristo can make this point, as by using this technique her novel becomes part of a genre, and thus can be compared to other texts within it, therefore history is reformed in line with Stanley’s discoveries as opposed to rejected.

The reengagement with traditional narrative modes comes after a period of challenges to conventional forms of narrative, challenges that in part relate to postmodern discourses, as
previously discussed. However, an impetus towards the postmodern is not the only motive for a move away from traditional narrative modes. Despite its backwards chronology Waters's narrative conforms to a very conventional realist structure. This is unlike some of her predecessors such as Graham Swift or Ackroyd in *Hawksmoor* (1985) (significantly in his more recent works, Ackroyd has moved towards more traditionally realist narrative styles, further emphasising my suggestion that there is a certain movement beyond such postmodern experimentation). Swift's narrators do not tell their stories chronologically. In *The Sweet-Shop Owner* (1980) and *Last Orders* (1996) there is persistent movement backwards and forwards between the narrators' past and present. I would argue, as David Malcolm does, that Swift's style of narration and narrative organisation is of great significance to Swift's works in terms of an embodiment of a "particular vision of the world" (Understanding Graham Swift 16), in which the past "weighs heavily on the present" (16). In part traditional narratives forms are questioned for their ability, even appropriateness to narrate in a post-war world, which has witnessed such horrific events. Many critics have commented on how some fiction of this era, especially that which attempted to describe the horrors of war moved away from more traditional linear modes of storytelling. Jago Morrison offers one such example of a critic who considers the "death of the novel" and narrative form in this era. In an attempt to counter such concerns for fiction some authors challenged, or turned away from, conventional realistic narrative form, a form which seemed too naïve compared to the "weight" of such terrible events as Nazi genocide and violence:

In the wake of the Holocaust...it is difficult to imagine what kind of literary text could, any more, provide the kind of orderly overview and representative historical vision...

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17 Swift's *Last Orders* provides an apt example of temporal dislocation as four travellers make their way from South London to Margate over the course of a few hours. During their journey they recount events from the 1930s to 1990 in a manner which bears little relation to the traditional sequential progression of time.

18 Morrison in *Contemporary Fiction* (3-8).
In the wake of such events – and under the shadow too of the always imminent, nuclear holocaust that hung over the heads of everyone for the majority of the post-war period – it seemed to many writers that a new set of aesthetics was required, whether based on disjunction, allusion, dis-memory or something else, to deal with subject matter that is essentially overwhelming. (Morrison 12)

D.M Thomas in his novel The White Hotel (1981) represents the Nazi massacre at the Babi Yar gorge in Kiev in “a circling gradual way” (Morrison 9). For Thomas, as with many post-war British authors “direct narration often becomes inadequate or impossible” (Morrison 9). This uncertainty in relation to the processes of narration opens up the genre for revision due to, as Connor notes, a “growing scepticism about the shared myths of public history and their power to govern and organise ordinary life” (The English Novel 134).

However, it was far from just wartime stories which turned away from traditional narrative structures (as evident through the example of Swift’s work above). A linear temporal flow is also not a feature of Hawksmoor (1985). Ackroyd mingles the eighteenth century murders committed by architect Nicholas Dyer with the murders that twentieth century detective Nicholas Hawksmoor is investigating. Ackroyd’s approach to the representation of the past therefore structurally varies greatly from Waters’s. Connor notes that Hawksmoor sees history as “occurring all at once” (The English Novel 144) and that it is “rooted in the visionary tradition as the novel unfolds into a spatial rather than a developmental view of history” (144). Ackroyd’s technique creates the effect of history bleeding into the contemporary. The novel therefore can be read as merging the present “reality” of Nicholas Hawksmoor with the past “reality” of Nicholas Dyer. However the texts considered here all demonstrate an adaption of the more classical forms in order to

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19 The genocide is figured through premonitions of a psychiatric patient twenty years before the war.
situate the marginalized within history. They are reforming from within, working with the conventions of traditional style to readdress an imbalance, and as such to create various “economies of truth” as opposed to rebuffing the dominant forms.

**Retrospection in Twentieth Century British Fiction**

It is important to establish a contextualisation of the historical novel in contemporary British fiction. The longevity of the alliance between history and fiction cannot be ignored as Marguerite Alexander remarks: “[The] use of historical material in imaginative writing is part of the development of literary genres before the novel” *(Flights from Realism* 124). However, in *Nation and Novel* Patrick Parrinder also locates the prevalence of the historical novel within contemporary fiction: “Historical reconstruction has become...a regular feature of late-twentieth century English fiction” (406). Parrinder further notes that during the latter half of the twentieth century, much of the most celebrated English fiction had become “in-ward looking”, concerned not only with earlier traditions of the novel, but also the nation’s past.20 Murray further locates the process of reimagining the past in a London context during the late twentieth century, noting how it was the writing of a particular kind of (predominately) London history that dominated, as he suggests it was “urban history” during the late 1980s which was “the locale for fiction” *(Recalling London* 181). The fashion was for a certain style of “mythic and historiographic” (181) narrative as Murray argues: “The work of Ackroyd and Sinclair...has been considered by academic criticism to be participating in a radical historiographical process, using narrative logic to disrupt the empirical forms of history that dominate most public discourse” (180). However, as Murray notes in the fiction he considers, there is a certain “radicality” to the form; he suggests that Ackroyd, Sinclair, Michael Moorcock and Stewart Home “all used the suburbs of the East End to explore urban

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20 For Parrinder’s discussion of this point see 406-7
history as having the potential to rupture dominant historical discourses” (181). Therefore in the texts which Murray evaluates, predominately those published in the final two decades of the last century, the process of revisiting history does not simply involve a repositioning of marginal voices within historical fiction, but also involves a questioning, even an attempt to “rupture” the dominant form (which reflects one aspect of a postmodern rethinking of such). Hayden White in The Content of Form reflects that the viability of narrative in the late twentieth century became a concern across various fields wider than the literary:

Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts have all begun to re-examine the function of narrative representation in the preliminary description of their objects of study. And cultural critics...have commented on the death of the great “master narratives”... All of this can be taken as evidence of the recognition that narrative, far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different content, real or imaginary as the case may be, already possesses a content prior to any given actualisation of it in speech or writing. (xi)

Here White’s comments can be read as supporting Foucault’s belief that within “formal systemizations” (Society Must Be Defended 7) certain ideologies, histories or narratives can be “buried or masked” (Society Must Be Defended 7), and therefore, narrative is “far from being merely a form of discourse” (White xi). However, as discussed above, Foucault also suggests that “new politics of truth” can be created, and it is this process of locating female homosexual love stories within popular fictional accounts of London during the blitz which I suggest Waters’s The Night Watch can be read in relation to as opposed to a simple rejection or nihilistic pessimism towards a narrative style which has previously subjugated such voices. Levy and Waters can therefore perhaps return to using more conventional forms for their wartime stories, styles which were previously felt to be limiting, as a generation on these
writers are more divorced from the lived experiences of war, and thus for these writers wartime London is part of history as they partake in a process of adaption of dominant forms of the historical novel.

It can be noted that though there is a recurrent theme within the work of many writers at the end of the last century to attempt to re-situate the marginal within a historical discourse, the methods used in terms of expressing this challenge to dominant historical discourses can be various. Richard Lane, Rod Mengham and Tew dedicate a chapter of Contemporary British Fiction to the historical novel, tentatively suggesting that a trend for rewriting history in the contemporary era may be “regarded as a new phase of the historical novel” (11), analysing writers who they consider to be “part of a wider literary commitment to reworking the past as fiction” (11). As Nicola Allen notes during her situating of the process Lane, Mengham and Tew identify, the relocating of the marginal in the historical novel does not always involve a desire to “rupture dominant forms”, but rather for some writers it can be read as an attempt to “update”, address absences, and thereby adapt pre-existing canonical historical fictional forms:

Critical material on the subject of revisionist historical narrative often highlights how the process of rewriting historical narratives to account for the experiences and perspectives of the marginal often entails an ‘updating’ of these histories, in effect imbuing well-documented episodes from history with a more ‘politically correct’ viewpoint. (93)\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21}Emily Jeremiah also suggests that by re-visiting history writers can “uncover” the history of those previously excluded; as she writes in relation to homosexual fiction: “By positing a queer past, one performs a ‘revision’ of traditional accounts uncovering the lives most often ‘hidden from history’” (133) – a pertinent comment in relation to Waters’s Tipping the Velvet. Lucie Armitt and Sarah Gamble develop this discussion of the ‘Neo-Victorian novel to the specifics of Waters’s work, suggesting that such a process of revision is a prominent theme in historical fiction: “Affinity… might be seen as a return to the Victorian grand-narrative, were it not for the fact contemporary reconstructions of the Victorian novel retain the postmodern impulse that characterizes
Therefore, the writers considered in this chapter can be read as moving beyond the more formally radical endeavours that Murray describes as occupying 1980s and 1990s London fiction.

*The Night Watch* engages from the opening scene with a style which feels familiar to many readers. The pain and isolation one of the principle characters is feeling as a result of the breakdown of her relationship is described in a manner which is reminiscent of an image from popular culture. The first lines of Waters’s text: “So this, said Kay to herself, *is the sort of person you’ve become: a person whose clocks and wrist-watches have stopped*” (original italics 3) states Kay’s isolation from the outside world. Waters’s opening commentary on stopped clocks draws heavily on W.H. Auden’s famous poem ‘Funeral Blues’ (1936), as Kay’s first words recreate for the reader an image akin to the first line of Auden’s poem “Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone”. Such an analogy of the heartbreak Kay is experiencing functions to locate Waters’s work alongside a poem which features strongly in the popular imagination. The poem is studied on many school syllabuses in Britain as well as having specific associations with popular culture due to the quoting of this poem during the Mike Newell film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994). For many readers therefore, the text will feel familiar because of Waters drawing on the imagery from such a famous poem, whether the reader knows the lines directly from the poem or as a consequence of the film. An added layer of meaning to this choice of poet is provided by Auden’s own homosexuality, which he does not openly write about during his early poems, but instead encodes homosexuality as heterosexuality through the change of a noun or a pronoun (as Stan Smith discusses 10).

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late twentieth and early twenty-first century fiction, summed up by Malcolm Bradbury as ‘smart, experimental, self-mocking and historically analytical and retrospective all at once’. In texts such as these, history is not just revisited but revised” (141). Armitt and Gamble further associate this process of revision with the postmodern aesthetic, as will be discussed in more detail below.
The characteristics of the building which Kay resides in symbolically echoes her loneliness. Kay lives in an isolated building standing alone on an otherwise bombed out street in London: “it was the last surviving building in what had once, before the war, been a long terrace” (7). Kay, just like the house, has recently become “detached” as the reader later finds out more detail of the painful demise of Kay’s relationship. The lonely figure of Kay that opens the novel was once part of a loving partnership and a happy friendship group. Waters demonstrates that the war had allowed much more freedom for women, perhaps especially those in homosexual relationships. Kay was able to spend her time with women, and occupy a “masculine” role because the war effort deprived the city of men, she could therefore occupy the space that the men had vacated and enjoy some of the adjacent freedoms that this entailed, without having to defend these as lifestyle choices. With the war over, as well as her relationship (Helen falls in love with Julia and leaves Kay), Kay, like the building she lives in, stands alone, isolated in a very different world from the one she was able to occupy a few years ago. The war-damage to the building is symbolic of her own scars from her “broken” heart: “it still had the scars, on either side, where it had been attached to its neighbours, the zig-zag of phantom staircases and the dints of absent hearths” (7). The writing of a female homosexual love story into the bombed out London streets in this way, marking Kay and her isolation from the world because of her lost love provides another perspective to London’s “Blitz fiction”. But the form in which Waters tells this story is very familiar, and the setting she opens her text with, that of a bombed-out street means that marginalized characters such as Kay are positioned within a key moment of London’s history, as London during the Blitz is an image which is consistently evoked in constructions of popular notions of a London identity.
The publishers of Waters's *The Night Watch* were seemingly not unaware of the sense of nostalgia and reflection that the calendar change from the twentieth to the twenty-first brought with it. Therefore not only in terms of narrative style is the book reminiscent of 1940s texts, but also it is deliberately made to look and feel as if it is from popular fiction contemporary to the Second World War. The dust-jacket design encourages the reader to make assumptions about the age of text and locate it within the popular fiction realm. The image of the silhouetted figures by the lamppost, and the flowing, quasi handwritten font all aid in the "fake" positioning of the novel within populist fiction of the 1940s in which it is set. The faded and worn edges also invite the reader to suspend disbelief in order to immerse themselves fully in the reading experience, asking us to perceive that the novel is contemporary with the era in which it is set, not a new novel. Therefore not only does the novel read, in terms of style, like a 1940s novel, but it is also made to look like a survivor of the blitz.

However, it is not just the 1940s novel that the text draws on in terms of recreating images to make the text feel familiar to the reader to impart a greater sense of the reassessment of literature and history to include the voices of those previously marginalized, and to reform these absences from within. Helen describes (at length) her need during wartime to appreciate the simple pleasures in life, and the guilt she feels about doing this:

Helen opened her eyes and gazed into the luminous blue of the sky. Was it crazy, she wondered, to be as grateful as she felt now, for moments like this, in a world that had atomic bombs in it – and concentration camps, and gas chambers? People were still tearing each other into pieces. There was still murder, starvation, unrest, in Poland, Palestine, India – God knew where else, Britain itself was sliding into bankruptcy and decay. Was it a kind of idiocy or selfishness, to want to be able to give yourself over to
the trifles: to the parp of the Regent's Park Band; to the sun on your face, the prickle of grass beneath your heels, the movement of cloudy beer in your veins, the secret closeness of your lover? Or were those trifles all you had? (52)

Helen demonstrates a need to engage with artifice and trifles, to enjoy the small pleasures of life, whilst acknowledging that they are exactly that (trifles and artifice), because of the nature of the horrific events of the war that is happening around her. This episode is reminiscent of comments made by the eponymous character in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849-50), in which during his reminiscing of Dora, his first wife who has died, he comments: "I sit down by the fire, thinking with a blind remorse of all those secret feelings I have nourished since my marriage. I think of every little trifle between me and Dora, and feel the truth, that trifles make the sum of life" (632). A comparison can be read between David's feelings and those that Helen is described as experiencing, as they both only have the "small trifles" in life to cherish. For David this is because his wife died at a young age, and for Helen it is because she is frightened that her relationship with Julia may soon end. Waters's rewriting of this moment of treasuring of trifles from Dickens into her text assists in the process of aligning her fiction with more dominant, familiar fiction. Situating her text in this manner has the effect of making the text feel familiar as stories of lost loves, and the treasuring of small moments of joy are universally experienced across grounds of gender and sexuality. The use of the word "parp", the idea of a happy sound without substance exemplifies how Helen is aware of the artificiality of what she is enjoying, yet still believes that such moments can be of value: "Oughtn't you, precisely, to preserve them? To make little crystal drops of them, that you could keep, like charms on a bracelet, to tell against danger when next it came?" (52), and as such echoes David's suggestion that in fact the mere trifles are "the sum of life".
Conclusion

During their expedition to snatch moments of joy in *The Night Watch* with the backdrop of the fearful times of war, Helen and Julia take china cups to the park to drink their beer from: "The beer foamed madly to the curving porcelain lip" (51). The notion of appropriating the china cup, a symbol of refined English past-time, tea drinking, for beer in the park is highly symbolic. This act of adaptation by the characters is comparable to Waters's literary endeavour, and also of that of Levy and Evaristo in the texts discussed above. Waters too is appropriating an old form, the classic linear novel, for an alternative content, the lesbian, minority and marginal story (akin to that of substituting the function of the cup from tea for beer). Such an action brings to mind Angela Carter's famous comment about her desire for feminist fiction to explode the old forms: "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottle explode" (Wandor 70). However, Waters's putting beer in china tea-cups demonstrates how her endeavour differs from Carter's. Waters does not wish to explode the old forms, but instead reengages with them (narrative and cup) in a different way, as she gives voice to marginalized perspectives through them, as opposed to finding a new vessel. We can also compare Waters's endeavour to Leslie Dick's discussion of postmodernism in 'Feminism, Writing, Postmodernism' (1989), Dick suggests that "postmodernist work uses strategies of plunder and purloinment, plagiarism, replication and simulation, not merely to construct a more complex and enriching art work...but to challenge the category of what an art object is, to call the whole artistic project into question" (206). Waters may "plunder and purloin", in that she uses styles familiar to the reader, such as from the work of Bowen or Dickens as discussed, but her use of traditional narrative styles is not as radical in tone towards artistic endeavour as Dick suggests the postmodern approach to be, nor is it about formal innovation. Waters does not
wish to destroy the novel form or narrative, but rather to situate the minority figure within it, to adapt, reform and reassess from within, as she attempts to relocate the once underrepresented lesbian perspective within mainstream fiction.

The approach towards classic storytelling techniques and styles which these authors engage with, utilising literary realism and the bildungsroman, suggests that these texts can be read as seeking the beyond of postmodernist challenges to narrative and a disruption of form. It is often apparent through their novels that the authors are aware of both a postmodern challenge to narrative, and also the concerns over the viability of traditional styles that the post-war era brought, however, though they nod to these problems and challenges, they then seek to reengage with traditional styles. Therefore these texts can be read as attempting to reform from within as they offer a mainstream reader a recognisable style but with a marginalized perspective. They reveal the "economies of discourse" behind many popular conceptions of London and British history but also construct rewrites with the appropriate adaptations to meet their own means. By being able to occupy and utilise traditional styles in order to situate the occluded or subjugated voice within key moments of history these texts demonstrate that a "new politics of truth" can exist from which marginalized voices are no longer occluded, but also offer a version of a postmodern desire to reveal such mechanism and the process of marginalisation but within a form which is more adaptable and accessible for a more mainstream readership. Therefore female historical stories are restabilized by Evaristo, Levy and Waters in that they use traditional styles to situate the marginal through a strategy which can be read as moving beyond the configuration of postmodernism's more experimental first phase.
Chapter Two: The Hero Returns - The Emphasis on Character Motivation in London

Millennial Fiction

Just as the mixed reception of the eighteenth-century novel reflected anxieties about the emergent literature and affluent middle-class, so the charge of illegitimacy, so often lodge against ‘kidult’ or ‘kiddult’ fiction in the early twenty-first century reveals discomfort over the way child and adult cultures are clashing, intersecting and hybridising in our own time. (Rachel Falconer The Crossover Novel 2009 3)

This chapter investigates a perceived shift in terms of the characterization of young protagonists in millennial London fiction. I consider in detail novels by Hanif Kureishi, Rupert Thomson, Nick Hornby and Mark Haddon. Joseph Campbell’s analysis of the hero figure in The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) is an integral part of my consideration of millennial London authors’ engagement with the archetypal characterization of the hero. Through a comparison of Kureishi’s and Thomson’s pre- and post-millennial novels I suggest that a subtle change can be discerned in the manner in which both authors depict the young male protagonist. I argue that whilst Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) and The Black Album (1995) and Thomson’s Dream’s of Leaving (1987) contain hedonistic characters that might be understood in terms of an anti-heroic model, there is a discernible re-engagement with the heroic archetype in the later novels Gabriel’s Gift (2001) and Divided Kingdom (2005). I also discuss About a Boy (1998) by Hornby and The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2003) by Haddon in relation to an engagement with the heroic
archetype. I then go on to read this shift in terms of the post-postmodern as previously outlined (in the Introduction).

London features as a significant setting in all of these authors’ works. The prominence of youth and youth culture within and for London literature has not escaped key figures within the literary critical establishment. Kureishi himself overtly explains the direct and important relationship the capital has with its younger inhabitants and youth culture at the end of the twentieth century:

> It is well known that at different times, in different cities, certain arts are primary or central, and at this time it was pop, with London being as important as anywhere in the USA. Britain’s cornucopia of music prevented the country from becoming a third-rate cultural outpost, the complete victim of US cultural power. Britain couldn’t be entirely Americanised while it continued to generate its own identity through music, fashion and the political culture and activism of youth. (Outskirts xii)

The capital has long been associated with the journey towards maturity which young protagonists embark on, as Lawrence Phillips succinctly notes: “The draw to central London is familiar enough to be a cliché, being well established as long ago as the picaresque novels of the eighteenth century” (London Narratives 60).

In this chapter I focus on male characters. As discussed in the Introduction there is a particular tradition of stories about a male’s passage towards maturity happening in and on a journey to London; famous examples include Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones (1749) and the story of Pip in Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations (1860-1).\(^1\) Of course London as a

\(^1\) Phillips offers us further examples within more contemporary fiction of such a male protagonist’s journey and the direct association with London: “a character like Mark Underwood [the protagonist in David Lodge’s novel The Picturegoers (1960)] is a modern echo of Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones; the young man from the provinces
location for a journey to maturity is by no means the sole preserve of the male writer or character. Therefore in the next chapter I consider in detail millennial authors' engagement with the heroine, analysing depictions of young females in the city. This separation is firstly due to practical reasons owing to the large number of texts. For purposes of clarity it is befitting to deal with the writing of the hero and heroine in separate chapters. However the gender distinction is to an extent made on grounds of the varying experience of the city based on gender (as discussed at the beginning of the next chapter).

London and Youth

As previously mentioned the themes and symbols of youth and youthfulness are prominent within the genre of London fiction. The end of the twentieth century saw a continuation of the trend towards a particular alliance between young characters and the attraction of the capital city. Ian Jack comments that the 1990s "Cool Britannia" campaign employed by the Labour Party during the 1997 general election utilised youthfulness as a marketing tool\(^2\), implying a positive link between the capital's rejuvenation and the "youthfulness" of Tony Blair. The theorisation of youth by Henri Lefebvre is central to my reading of millennial London literature's focus on the young protagonist, in terms of a general discussion on the theoretical positioning of a philosophical and cultural understanding of the concept of youth. One possible reading of Lefebvre's theorisation of youth is that implicitly the exotic desirability of "youthfulness" forms an integral part of the consciousness of modern humanity. Lefebvre suggests that the abstraction of youth exists "over the polar horizon" as

\(^2\) Rachel Falconer makes a similar point about the allegiance between New Labour's 1997 election campaign and youth culture in relation to her investigation of the growth of the crossover novel, as children's literature at this time became extensively read by adults also: "In Britain, one must also take into account the change of political climate from Thatcherite conservatism to a youth-conscious New Labour. Blair's reign as Prime Minister spanned exactly the same decade as [J.K.] Rowling's, 1997 to 2007. Even if the shared dates are fortuitous, the promotion of youth culture under Blair can have done nothing to damage the popularity of children's authors" (7).
something distinct and preferable to “everyday life”. Lefebvre further argues that “youth”
transgresses the mundane and the everyday:

Everyday life is a crust of earth over the tunnels and caves of the unconscious and
against a skyline of uncertainty and illusion that we call Modernity, while overhead
stretch the Heavens of Permanence; among the greater planets are Scientificness, clear,
cold and somewhat shadowy, and the twin planets Virility and Femininity; there are
stars, constellations and nebulae; high over the polar horizon we have Technology and
elsewhere Youthfulness. (vii)

Youthfulness is seemingly ubiquitously desired, as it is very much distinct from the “crust of
earth” of the everyday, yet it is unobtainable for so many, far removed from everyday life, it
is perpetually “elsewhere”. Youthfulness, and the associated lifestyle, is an aspiration held
by many of the characters in the novels considered in this chapter, yet for many of them it is
also unobtainable, seemingly “elsewhere”. This is either because they are aging beyond the
confines of “youth”, even though they may not want to accept this; or because they have been
denied access to its freedoms and seeming “otherworldliness”, often because of their parents
or other circumstances out of their control (as will become clear in the following discussion
of the texts).

This ephemeral, prized possession and desirable state has been utilised as a publicity
device that intrinsically links and becomes synonymous with rejuvenation and renewal.
Attempts have been made to link the notion of youthfulness with London, to conjure up
notions of change happening within the capital city’s most neglected areas. Jenny Bavidge

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3 “Large stretches of the inner city have been colonized by the young, abandoned warehouses have been
knocked into flats, anything without a job (an old brewery, a disused power station) gets one as an art gallery,
the streets are fuller for longer into the night, there is a lively, enterprising sense about the place (even if people
do seem to drink too much)” (‘London: the Lives of the City’ 6-7).
and Andrew Gibson in their article 'The Metropolitan Playground: London's Children' extend this analysis to suggest that the markers of youth have become an intrinsic part of both London and millennial society; they state: “For some time now, urban fashion has been appropriating toys, games and other accoutrements of the child. We live in a culture of ‘infantile chic’”(45). However, along with Bavidge's and Gibson's observations of a specific London culture of “infantile chic,” are concerns about the extension of childhood into adult years (the young protagonist failing to reach a level of maturity in their actions). Significantly if youthfulness is seemingly removed from the “crust of the earth” to a desirable elsewhere and therefore unobtainable, the domination of youth in terms of culture, as well as London’s regeneration cannot therefore be understood in entirely positive terms. Nick Bentley locates the climax of the concerns about a culture which is infantilized and seeking perpetual youth within the last decade of twentieth century literature:

The 1990s also saw a number of novels that were concerned with youth culture and subcultures, the most visible of which was Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993). Anxieties about the effects of drugs, sexuality and the effects of consumerism on youth have, of course, been around from (at least) the 1950s and the invention of ‘the teenager’, but the 1990s saw particular concerns about the extension of adolescence downwards and upwards. ...[A]dolescence as a lifestyle seemed to expand to include twenty- and even thirty-somethings, as seen in the popularity of the extended Bildungsroman of the type produced by Helen Fielding and Nick Hornby. (11)

The earlier texts under investigation in this chapter, such as Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* and Thomson’s *Dreams of Leaving*, seem to concur with Bentley’s concerns about representations of youth. Karim and Moses enjoy the trappings of a hedonistic lifestyle, liberal attitudes to alcohol, drugs and sex. However what this chapter
seeks to analyze is the relevance of such comments about hedonistic protagonists to the next generation of young male characters; do they subscribe to the same notions of infantilization and perpetual childish irresponsibility; and secondly, can this be read in relation to the post-postmodern discussion as laid out in the Introduction?

Beyond 1990s' Hedonism

In the post-millennial novels of Thomson and Kureishi a change in the depiction of the young characters can be noted, instead of the characterization of hedonistic youth, the young protagonists of Divided Kingdom and Gabriel's Gift are depicted along more heroic lines and inhabit London narratives that include structural principles that are reminiscent of the archetypal heroic quest. Initially I must address an issue of definition; I am using the term archetype in relation to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of “a recurrent motif in literature or art”. However, Carl Jung’s theories of archetypes as discussed in ‘Approaching the Unconscious’ are also of particular relevance to my use of the term, principally his suggestion that the archetype may represent a motif “that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern” (58).

In this chapter I apply Campbell’s formula of the heroic monomyth of “the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return” (original emphasis 30) to my readings of Gabriel’s Gift, Divided Kingdom, About a Boy and The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time. It is the basic unit which Campbell suggests “might be named the nuclear unit of the

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4 Jung suggests that the concept of the hero within stories has been an intrinsic part of many cultures “for time immemorial”, as he argues that the concept of the hero figure in literature can be related to the figure of Christ (or equivalent Christ like figures in other religions):“The general idea of Christ the Redeemer belongs to the world-wide and pre-Christ theme of the hero and rescuer ... When and where such a motif originated nobody knows” (Man and His Symbols 61). Joseph Henderson (one of Jung’s closest followers and a contributor to Jung’s edited collection Man and His Symbols) likewise makes a similar assertion about the longevity, and the recurring motif of the hero: “The myth of the hero figure is the most common and the best known myth in the world. We find it in the classical mythology of Greece and Rome, in the Middle Ages, in the Far East, and among contemporary primitive tribes” (101). Henderson also suggests that although superficially disparate, certain universal structural principles can be discerned: “These hero myths vary enormously in detail, but the more closely one examines them the more one sees that structurally they are very similar” (101).
monomyth” (30). He goes on to further qualify: “A hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (original italics 30). It is this structure which forms the basis of my analysis. I also consider the subsections of this process as described by Campbell, which are experienced by the heroes in the novels, namely: the call to adventure; the refusal of the call; supernatural aid; the crossing of the threshold; the road of trials; atonement with the father; the achieving/finding of the boon; the refusal of return; rescue from without; the crossing of the return threshold; and the freedom to live.

Vladimir Propp, the pioneering Russian analyst of story structures, identifies the hero as one of the seven basic character types (or roles) within the fairy tale. In many respects Propp’s work anticipates the ideas expressed in Campbell’s study, an example of which is Campbell’s suggestion that the hero is “called to adventure”; Propp similarly identifies that the hero must leave home and be tested. Campbell also concurs with Propp in the assertion that though a basic structure may be followed, there are in fact infinite variations of the hero-myth. As the work of Jung, Henderson and Propp suggests the various descriptions and frameworks defining the character of the hero are extremely variable, and are relevant beyond their initial application. Michael Toolan comments: “[T]he striking thing is that certain fictions rather remote from the Russian fairytale do seem to lend themselves to Proppian analysis without too much strain” (19). This chapter seeks to build upon Toolan’s extension of Proppian analysis but with particular focus on the hero figure in London fiction at the millennium.

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5 Propp identifies 31 basic “functions” or fundamental elements within the Russian fairytale, but his work could be extended to incorporate the fairy tale in general.

6 Toolan goes on to prove this point with an in-depth application of Propp’s “grammar” of the fairytale to character roles and functions in the Star Wars film trilogy and ‘Eveline’ from James Joyce’s Dubliners collection.
Pre-millennial Young London Protagonists

In order to chart the development of Thomson’s and Kureishi’s engagement with the young central character it is necessary to begin with an exposition of young protagonists in Kureishi’s and Thomson’s earlier work. The work of both writers published in the last two decades of the twentieth century, depicts, and to some extent embodies, a youth culture that fits the model that Bentley (above) identifies. Although the authors attempt to avoid giving a purely positive reading of self-indulgent lifestyles, both depict protagonists who engage with a youth culture that is dominated by hedonism and liberal values.

Thomson’s Dreams of Leaving finds its protagonist, Moses, touring London’s underworld living a life that fulfils the hedonist’s dream. Moses is almost always occupied with sex, alcohol, drugs, popular music, and socializing with friends. One such friend, Eddie, is a womaniser. Moses estimates that Eddie has slept with in excess of 1000 women. Vince, another of his friends, is always high on a potent cocktail of powerful drugs, and alcohol, getting into a variety of nasty, violent scrapes. Moses has to: “scrape the remains of Vince off the floor after a fight or stop him jumping out of a tower-block window. Driving Vince to St Stephen’s at four in the morning with a six-inch gash in the back of his head and his blood pumped full of drugs” (60). This becomes an almost normalised event for this group of friends, a consequence of their lifestyle.

Moses finances his drug habit with his unemployment benefit. “The state” acts as a virtual, absent parent who provides financial assistance but little spiritual or emotional sustenance. “The state” takes responsibility for providing Moses with household essentials, such as money for bed sheets (129). These young characters ostensibly need parenting, a duty that falls not only to “the state”, but also by logical extension to the local community. After a drunken night out, and being abandoned by his friends, Moses, found “in a skip on the
main road” (39), with only one shoe on, becomes the responsibility of a taxi driver as he is so inebriated he is unable to care for himself.

The infantile status of Thomson’s character is further enhanced through the seemingly contradictory combination of an “adult” underworld of sex, drugs and alcohol, with a childlike obsession with confectionary. An inventory of what Moses spends his unemployment benefit on includes: “5 packets of Increda Bubble – the popping bubble-gum”(64). Such infantile behaviour reflects a more general mode within Dreams of Leaving which depicts grown-up characters continuing their youthful tastes and adjacent immaturity into adulthood. Falconer, in her study of the crossover novel discusses current critical attitudes to such a process, commenting that: “David Rudd describes children’s culture as ‘an intertextual refashioning of the adult world’, and now adults may be engaged in the same process in reverse” (3). Bavidge and Gibson (‘The Metropolitan Playground’) suggest that such childishness represents contemporary culture in the capital, as they describe how “London is increasingly taking on the appearance of a vast, twenty-first century playground” (141), a playground in which adults have taken on, and engage with, the paraphernalia of childhood:

The ‘sound and vision’ department on the fourth floor of Harvey Nichols has started to call itself ‘The Playground’. Besuited businessmen pedal silver scooters to work. Outsized boys and girls career through the city on rollerblades, wearing Shaun-the-Sheep backpacks and Winnie-the-Pooh pouches. … Mobile phones are the walkie-talkies that children always wanted. (45)

However, as Bavidge and Gibson describe, such a cultural shift is not in fact child-friendly, it is instead specifically aimed at an adult audience: “life in the city seems at present to be subject to a progressive infantilization. Yet, on the other hand, the metropolitan play zone is
perceived as ever more dangerous and threatening to children themselves" (41). London therefore is increasingly looking like a playground, but it is not with the actual children of the city in mind, but rather their “adult” counterparts. 7

For Moses and his friends London resembles a playground, in which they have childlike obsessions, and where they can act and create identities for themselves. Moses and his friends don’t seem to be living in the “real” adult world, but one of simulacrum, an almost fake, pretend adulthood, as they haven’t left their childhoods behind: “[Moses] watched a supersized poster glide past. It was a picture of a man sitting in a desert. The man had clean-cut features, neat black hair and a firm jaw. He was wearing a dinner jacket. He was smiling. It was nice in the advert. Moses smiled back. He knew how the man felt. He was in an advert too” (216). Moses is obviously aware that his life in the city is a performance as he recognises his own life within the advert, perhaps reflecting a postmodern playfulness with identity. For Moses life in London has become a parody, a pastiche of a pastiche, in that it starts, even for him, to look like an advert, which is selling a product through a lifestyle, the symbol has become entwined with the reality of his life, to the extent that he is unable to distinguish between the two.

The depthless identity, the valuing of a symbol of a lifestyle (as presented in the advert) can be understood in relation to postmodern perspectives. Jean Baudrillard’s theories of “loss of the real” and simulacra and simulacrum are brought to mind (these theories are considered and explored in more detail in Chapter Four). However, in relation to a specific discussion of the hero, Roland Carter and John McRae explore in relation to characterization

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7 The London Eye (constructed to be a feature of the cityscape as part of London’s yearlong celebration of the millennium) is an appropriate example. The attraction physically resembles (and in essence is) a giant fairground ride. However antithetically the London Eye is (and perhaps even London itself is increasingly becoming) hostile to the child. Bavidge and Gibson highlight that children under the age of sixteen are not permitted to ride the London Eye unaccompanied (43), thus it clearly has not been designed for the actual children of London, but is aimed at the older “children” of the city.
the consequences of a domination of a postmodern aesthetic within British literature, and offer a significant point for consideration. They suggest that "there are no heroes" (449); they go on to qualify this statement: "There is the individual; solitary, responsible for his or her own destiny" (449-50). Such a description of an individual is far removed from the characteristics of a hero as laid out by Campbell, as in the monomyth the hero is often reliant on his surrounding environment and community to aid him on his quest, and in return, the "boon" (as discussed and defined below) he returns with is beneficial to the community around him. Other critics also discuss the movement away from heroic characterization in the late twentieth century in relation to circumstances other than a focus on postmodern perspectives. Within both British and American fiction it is recognised that in the post-war period the representation of the hero figure declined, in part due to the atrocities of the Second World War, as David Simmons suggests:

Within the confines of the twentieth century it was the chaotic events of the Second World War, and its far reaching reverberations, that most challenged people to revaluate their support for the value systems of the culture in which they lived. This reassessment of hegemony involved a critique of heroic figures thought to embody the values of the state. (11)

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. similarly aligns this re-assessment of the hero figure with the effects of the Second World War in his essay 'The Decline of Heroes', noting: "The Second World War was the climax of an epoch of living dangerously... it is no surprise that it precipitated a universal revulsion against greatness" (342). Critics Lilian R. Furst and James

8 Simmons goes on to convincingly elucidate this point suggesting that: "The attempt to propagate hero worship that had arisen around figures such as Hitler and Stalin (figures who with hindsight embodied qualities that were contrary to all previously held notions of the hero) inevitably led to vehement moral questioning of the notion of the heroic ideal. The idea that one man could, or should ever achieve the level of hero worship previously encouraged by the individualism of capitalism began to arouse suspicion and dissent in those who had witnessed the extreme manifestations of such an ideology brought to life" (11).
D. Wilson in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* similarly stress that a consequence of the era is its inability to produce heroes in literature: "tragedy has ... become an inappropriate genre [in the post-war era] what we have instead is 'metaphysical farce', a modern hybrid of Classical tragedy and comedy that finds itself 'unable to use heroes'"(7). Ihab Hassan in his essay 'The Anti-Hero in British and American Fiction' notes the particular association of the loss of the hero, and its replacement with an anti-hero (a character type I suggest can be associated with Thomson's Moses, and Kureishi's Shahid and Karim) with the twentieth century: "[The anti-hero] has remained at the centre of our twentieth-century consciousness, and it has impelled the radical vision, the irony, order and extremity of despair that have come to be associated with that century" (55). Therefore in the latter half of the twentieth century it would appear the result is the dominance of the anti-hero, which can be aligned in certain ways with postmodern thinking (such as multiple and fragmented understandings of self and a focus on individualism). This characterization manifests itself within the early novels of Kureishi.

Karim, the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, engages in a culture dominated by youth and hedonism. Sukhdev Sandhu comments in 'Pop goes the Centre' on the importance of London as a place in which youth in Kureishi's novels can break the rules and live the hedonistic life which they desire: "The city became in their collective imagination, the only place where they could, as Karim says, 'live always this intensely: [with] mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs'" (147). London is constructed in the characters' imaginations as from the suburbs Karim is excited to travel to the city to experience the freedom he perceives the city will allow him. Such a mythology of London is akin to Phillips' description (quoted above) of the long-standing tradition within literature, as Karim

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9 A narrative device Semma Jena also associates with Kureishi (4).
also treads the well-worn path to the capital within a bildungsroman, yet without ever reaching the destination of maturity and adulthood; instead in London he lives a perpetual adolescence.

London in The Buddha of Suburbia is full of young people descending onto the streets, rejecting the confines of their bedrooms and absorbing the capital's consumer based cultures. They attempt to challenge the boundaries laid down by their families, and (by extension) society, as they inhabit the fringes of the respectable, wishing to experience the perceived freedom the capital holds. The protagonists of these novels (perhaps following negative stereotypes of young people) become embroiled in pop culture, marijuana, clubs, parties, and participate in casual sex, creating generational conflict. The protagonists in The Buddha of Suburbia and The Black Album seek not to be defined by their parents, and their beliefs and values; instead London entices them due to the possibilities of creating their own and multiple identities:

Kureishi sees the capital as being about aggregation, a happy realm where he can wear as many masks, create as many personae, explore as many new avenues as he wishes ...The freedom from homes, from families, from 'bourgeois' constraints allows Omar, Shahid and Karim a limitless palette of intellectual, social and sexual possibilities. (original emphasis Sandhu London Calling 250-1)

The "aggregation" of Kureishi's London demonstrates a postmodern characteristic, that of collage, as it is clearly a place made out of the sum of its many diverse and multiple parts, as opposed to a clear and defined fixed identity as offered by, for instance, Karim's mother, from the suburbs.

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10 For further discussion see Sandhu ('Pop Goes the Centre' 142).
It is in the potential for the “many masks”, and in the possibilities for self-fashioning and constant re-shaping of the self (and perhaps even the city) that Kureishi’s youngsters such as Karim and Shahid are interested. The vital role of pop music is foregrounded through the depictions of Shahid’s music heroes and role models: Prince and David Bowie. These celebrities incorporate the very ideology of transience in terms of musical identity. In Bowie’s career “nearly every album of his sees him assume a new persona” (Sandhu London Calling 252). Prince alters his music, style, and his name, as well as adopting deliberately androgynous dress codes: “Prince is a satyr, an androgyney, a symbol – the latter, along with ‘The Artist Formerly Known as Prince’, being one of the numerous handles by which he has insisted on being catalogued”(Sandhu London Calling 252). In The Buddha of Suburbia Karim’s aspiration to become an actor reflects a desire for constant self-transformation. It is the perversion of rules that both Karim and Shahid strive for. They love the disorderliness and unpredictability of the city: “Cherishing the opportunity the city allows for sloughing off one’s old ‘square’, socially-constricted self, it doesn’t care very much for office culture, the weekly wage or for the life of the commuter. It privileges randomness, appetency, and sexual hedonism” (Sandhu ‘Pop Goes the Centre’ 147).

Sexual hedonism and experimentation are part of the club and drug scene, as Shahid experiences when he first starts going to raves with Deedee: “Many of the men were bare-chested and wore only thongs; some of the women were topless or in just shorts and net tops. One woman was naked except for high heels and a large plastic penis strapped to her thighs with which she duetted” (59-60). The freedom to create and express identity as an individual, in that there are a wide variety of styles at the club, appeals to Shahid, evident in his appreciation of the dancing, which is described as “frenzied and individual” (60). Shahid very explicitly illustrates the lack of a single self, but does not lament it as a loss:
His own self increasingly confounded him. One day he could passionately feel one thing, the next day the opposite. Other times provisional states would alternate from hour to hour, sometimes all crashed into chaos. He would wake up with this feeling: who would he turn out to be on this day? How many warring selves were there within him? (147)

For these characters London represents a place open to the creation of a seemingly infinite number of multiple and diverse identity creations; Karim, Shahid and Moses celebrate this and the chaos that goes with it. London is described as a stage on which any life could be lived out. The attitude exhibited by these characters can be read as part of a postmodernist discourse. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) celebrate a rejection of the modernist notion of unified, rational and expressive subject. Instead it is replaced by a postmodern subjectivity that is multiple, diverse and decentred from fixed identities. The characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album*, and *Dreams of Leaving* embrace the hedonism and anonymity of the city, the liberty it gives them to wear any, and as many, masks as they desire. Shahid experiences his biggest “high” through music and drugs, as his experiment with ecstasy reveals: “He had been let into a dangerous secret; once it had been revealed, much of life, regarded from this high vantage point could seem quite small” (63). The drug-induced hallucinations he experiences again problematize the idea of a static and stable self for Shahid.

The heterogeneity of London is embraced in what can be read as a postmodern framework, as Frederick M. Holmes in ‘The Postcolonial Subject Divide between East and West’ suggests: “Kureishi like Rushdie, celebrates the hybrid combinations of peoples and cultures that results from the postmodern erosion of boundaries and definitions” (304). The
life Shahid chooses is one of postmodern multiple identities. Alison Lee in *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* (1990) notes: “one of postmodernism’s most important concerns is to centre the humanist notion of ‘individuality’, of a coherent essence of the self” (xi). For Shahid a decentred notion of identity, one which rejects ideas of one coherent self is appealing: “How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and love, following his curiosity” (274). Shahid’s articulation of displacement and multiple character identity is akin to discussions of such in the second phase of Édouard Glissant’s work, *Poétique du Divers* and *Traité du Tout-Monde*.\(^{11}\) As Peter Hallward aptly summarises, Glissant’s choice of character construction attempts: “to articulate ‘the infinite and unpredictable variance [variances] of the chaos-world’” (69).

The conclusion to *The Black Album* highlights the impermanent characteristics of the protagonist’s existence. Rather than a traditional “happy ending” with a plan to “all live happily ever after”, as a more archetypal fairy tale narrative would perhaps have, the plan is to continue: “Until it stops being fun” (276). Evidently this is not a permanent plan for the rest of their lives, but instead a continuation of the type of hedonistic lifestyle that Deedee and Shahid have been living throughout the novel. Shahid does not want to plan beyond the immediate future, considering only as far as the end of their weekend away, and Monday’s return to a Prince concert. Shahid’s continued appreciation of Prince, which was first exhibited at the beginning of the novel during Shahid’s interview for college, gives the narrative a cyclical feel, ending on a similar note to which it began. This narrative strategy furthers the suggestion that Shahid has not undergone the transforming quest of a hero, but

\(^{11}\) As discussed in detail by Peter Hallward in *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (69).
instead is perhaps more akin to a picaro in that he has not changed, developed or learnt from his experiences. Bart Moore-Gilbert locates Kureishi’s protagonists in The Black Album and The Buddha of Suburbia within the picaresque: “Karim, especially, can be read as an example of the flawed but loveable rouge who is the genre’s [that of the picaresque] characteristic protagonist” (109). Seema Jena also locates Karim’s character within the identity of a picaro: “Like a picaro, Karim doesn’t want to conform, has the desire to be different, the desire to be elsewhere” (4), a trait I suggest is prevalent in Shahid’s character also. Therefore both Kureishi’s and Thomson’s earlier protagonist participate in a protracted, hedonistic youth, in that by occupying the role of picaro, they do not develop, learn or mature, but show signs by the end of the novel that they will continue on the same path (as discussed in more detail below), and thus have not been on a quest or a journey of change, as the hero does, but rather are set to continue their hedonistic adolescent lifestyle. However, what happens to the next generation, the generation of teenagers who grow up with parents who continue to act like teenagers themselves? It is to a consideration of this question that I will now turn my focus.

The Next Generation of Young London Protagonists

In their more recent works Haddon, Hornby, Kureishi, and Thomson create young protagonists who have not enjoyed a protracted, hedonistic adolescence. These young characters have taken on the responsibilities of the adult world at a very early age. As I have previously discussed (‘Considering Young Protagonists of the London Novel in the Works of Hanif Kureishi and Rupert Thomson’) in the post-millennial novels by Thomson and Kureishi the young characters experience a greater sense of responsibility and are less able to access the hedonism of their pre-millennial predecessors. Gabriel in Kureishi’s Gabriel’s Gift is too busy looking after his immature parents to explore his own identity whilst the life
of Marcus, in Hornby’s novel, becomes consumed by worrying about his depressed mother. Similarly Haddon’s young protagonist has to navigate his way through adult emotions and feelings due to his parents’ relationship breakdown, which they lie to him about, whilst undertaking his own journey to maturity and dealing with his Asperger’s Syndrome. Thomas Parry in Thomson’s Divided Kingdom is equally burdened with responsibility as he has been prepped since the age of eight to carry out governmental work to ensure the smooth running of the country’s new political experiment, and is prescribed an identity by the government rather than being able to explore the myriad of possibilities that are open to characters such as Moses in Dreams of Leaving.

Pierre Bourdieu in The Rules of Art suggests that the concept of youth plays a fundamentally positive role in the cultural development and establishment of new identities. According to Bourdieu, youth, as a concept, is a basic marker that can be utilised in challenging the status quo: “It is true that the initiative for change can be traced back, almost by definition, to new (meaning younger) entrants … they manage to assert their identity (that is, their difference) and get it known and recognized (‘make a name for oneself’) by imposing new modes of thought and expression” (239-40). For Bourdieu, youthfulness becomes synonymous with change and rejuvenation, in the same way that Campbell argues that the hero becomes a symbol for regeneration. The process that Bourdieu describes, of young “entrants” making “a name” for themselves in the face of obscurity and who then proceed to change things for the rest of us, “imposing new modes of thought and expression which break with current modes of thought”, is reminiscent of Campbell’s heroic monomyth. Campbell states “the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (30). It is not simply the purity of spirit of characters such as Kureishi’s Gabriel and Thomson’s Thomas, but rather that the metaphorical journeys that they undertake
allows them to aid those around them and thereby fulfil the requirements laid out by Campbell of the functions of heroic monomyth.

The re-instating of the heroic ideal of the young protagonist outlined above implicitly links the youthful hero with a sense of renewal and regeneration. This in turn allows the young hero to be utilised as a symbol for the future, and therefore perhaps marks a new direction. Such a change may be read beyond discussions of postmodernism's first-wave. Writers are increasingly moving away from the nihilism and scepticism of formal conventions and overarching narratives and instead utilising archetypal characters and narrative devices as they reengage with the storytelling process. As such Campbell’s theories on the monomyth of the hero offer us an avenue for analysis. The shift towards the hero, away from hedonistic, fragmented, multiple identities, towards a single understanding of self further suggests a need for a consideration of these authors’ characterization beyond the postmodern polemic. Texts which contain marginalized protagonists depicted through the heroic monomyth suggest a certain reach towards neo-humanism, in that they are using a universal archetype in order to express a previously subjugated figure, on a periphery not only because of their age, but also (in terms of the texts considered here) variously in terms of race, class, political persuasion, or as a result of a medical condition.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Campbell describes a “standard path” for the “mythological adventure of the hero” (30) and suggests it is a “magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return” (original italics 30). For Campbell it is this basic configuration of plot which all heroic figures experience, though this can occur in an almost infinite number of variations, throughout time and place.¹² Classic

¹² As commentated above, Henderson accepts that the exact nature of the story of the hero can vary extensively, but it will always follow a basic structure. The fact that the story surrounding the structure can vary greatly is I suggest, what makes it applicable to the texts under consideration in this chapter. By no means have these
examples he gives of a hero include Osiris, Prometheus, Buddha, Moses and Christ: “whether presented in the vast, almost oceanic images of the Orient, in the vigorous narratives of the Greeks, or in the majestic legends of the Bible, the adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit” (35). This basic unit is present in the works of each of the authors considered in this chapter.

Kureishi’s Young Hero

Kureishi’s novel Gabriel’s Gift deals with a protagonist who has to confront his own adolescence whilst his parents seem to have failed to leave theirs behind. In terms of reading Gabriel’s story in relation to the heroic monomyth, Gabriel’s initiation comes in the form of the challenge of dealing with the breakdown of his parents’ relationship. For Gabriel, this means a departure from the familiar world. Campbell suggests that the first phase of the story of the hero involves “the call to adventure”, which he describes as “[a] blunder – apparently the merest of chance reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (51). After Gabriel’s parents have decided to separate, it feels to Gabriel as if London has become a strange and different world. In his neighbourhood “something strange was happening to the weather” (1), as even the everyday becomes disturbed. Within the course of one day all of the four seasons seems to occur:

That morning, when he left for school with Hannah, there was a light spring shower, and it was autumn.

authors re-written fairy-tales or myths, however, I suggest their depictions of youthful protagonists can be read along the lines of the heroic characterization in not all, but a significant number, of aspects. Henderson also notes the appropriate application of what seems to be mythic structures to modern man (107).
By the time they had reached the school gates, a layer of snow sat on their hats. At lunch-time in the playground, the hot flood-light of the sun – suddenly illuminated like a lamp – had been so bright the kids played in shirtsleeves. (1)

The impossible seems to happen, reflecting the extent to which the world seems to have become a different place: “In late afternoon, when he and Hannah were hurrying home along the edge of the park, Gabriel became certain that the leaves in the park were being plucked from the ground and fluttered back to the trees from which they had fallen, before turning green again” (1). As well as the mysteriously changing weather “Gabriel noticed something even odder,” the daffodils appear to be dancing for him “like bowing ballerinas” (1). This unsettles Gabriel: “today was different: the world was losing its mind” (1). The departure of Gabriel’s Dad, Rex, seems to be Gabriel’s route to metaphorically entering a different world, symbolically represented by the strange meteorological occurrences: “Now Dad had gone ... if the world hadn’t quite been turned upside down, it was at an unusual and perilous angle, and certainly not still” (3). This episode is directly comparable to what is defined by Campbell as part of the archetypal structure of the story of the hero and related to the (facilitating) plot structure that initiates the heroic tale: “The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for passing a threshold is at hand” (Campbell 51). Gabriel certainly does “pass a [metaphorical] threshold” as his parents’ marital breakdown means that they become ineffective as parents, and the child-parent role actually becomes reversed. Gabriel’s quest is to coax his Dad out of his perpetual dreaming of a rock ‘n’ roll lifestyle, and to get his Dad to “grow up” and accept the responsibilities of the adult world.
After domestic life has changed beyond all recognition for the 15-year-old, it is Gabriel’s job to rebuild his family home rather than “blow the house down” (‘Never Trust a Man in Platform Heels’ NPg), which, as David Jays suggests, seem to be the aim of a previous generation of Kureishi youth. After Rex leaves, Gabriel’s mother fails to cope or to adequately fulfil her responsibilities towards her son. It is Gabriel’s responsibility to support his parents, who, as Jays suggests are: “bewildered and fitful, weary of fending off blows to the heart” (NPg). The responsibility which falls to Gabriel and the caring role he has to take on towards his parents is demonstrated through Gabriel’s actions towards his mother when she is having relationship difficulties with her new lover George; Gabriel comforts her as they “put their pyjamas on” and “ate chocolates from their ‘emergency’ supply” (Gabriel’s Gift 147).

Gabriel’s duties are not only to his mother, he also has to coax his Dad out of his dreaming world and force him to go to work. It becomes Gabriel’s responsibility to show his father, Rex, that his current lifestyle isn’t going to provide the security that his family needs: “What kind of future will I have watching you sit on your arse and drink all day?” (101). Not only is Gabriel instrumental in finding employment for his father, but he also has to take care of the practicalities of day-to-day life, for instance making sure that Rex is safely on the bus going to work, in a true reversal of parent/child roles. The lexicon used by Kureishi emphasizes this role reversal, describing Rex in a very child like manner whilst Gabriel occupies the more responsible adult/parental position: “Ensuring that his father was hopping and tripping behind him” (56). A lot of responsibility falls to Gabriel; he is far too busy looking after his immature parents to explore his own identity, and although he is close to the

13 “The desire to blow the house down and move on has always been the mainspring of Hanif Kureishi’s fiction. From the exhilarating youngsters of ‘My Beautiful Laundrette’ and The Buddha of Suburbia to the lachrymose adulterers who walk out of the door in chilly recent stories and novels, his protagonists will themselves to move on towards the lives they believe they deserve” (‘Never Trust a Man in Platform Heels’ NPg).
characters of Shahid and Karim in age, his life is far removed from the hedonistic life they indulge in. The responsibility proves to be a great strain for Gabriel: "He saw now how bored he’d been recently, at home; he’d just about had enough of being alone and worrying about his parents" (155). Gabriel’s life is therefore full of difficult tasks which would more traditionally be taken on by a parent.

Campbell suggests that after the call to adventure the next stage for the hero in the monomyth is "the road of trials". Campbell describes this stage in relation to myths: "The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage" (97). Though Gabriel’s Gift does not contain such fantastical elements as those described by Campbell within the monomyth, I suggest an approximation of such can be read in Kureishi’s text. Gabriel does have a helper to assist him with his task of re-uniting his parents, in the form of the character Lester Jones, a pop star who arrives and changes Gabriel’s life. 14 In The Buddha of Suburbia young schoolboys dream of David Bowie changing their lives, but he remains firmly an external figure of fantasy to the harsh realities of life, a point Susie Thomas discusses:

In The Buddha the lower-middle-class schoolboys go down on their knees before a photo of David Bowie, ‘praying to be made into pop stars and for release from a lifetime as a motor mechanic’ (BS 68), but in Gabriel’s Gift a Bowie-like character, Lester Jones, actually appears in the novel, encouraging Gabriel in his artistic ambitions and giving him a valuable picture. (152)

14 Similar to Campbell’s ideas on the monomyth, Propp identifies a helper figure in his morphology of Russian fairytales, function number 12: "The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magic agent or helper" (Toolan 18).
As Thomas comments, the picture that Lester gives to Gabriel is instrumental in his achieving his task of re-uniting his parents. It is also through Lester's encouragement that Gabriel pursues his hobby of drawing. Gabriel can copy exactly the picture he is given, as well as his works seemingly coming to life off the page. Therefore not only does Gabriel have a "helper" figure, but he also discovers a "power" which aids him on his quest. Gabriel's dead twin brother talks to him and is perhaps symbolic of another helper figure, which exists outside the realms of "normal existence". Gabriel describes his brother living within him: "a magic, and wiser, boy – Gabriel's daemon or personal spirit" (19). Such fantastical elements therefore align the text to the archetypal storytelling structure of the hero.

Campbell describes the hero receiving a "boon" during the adventure as another stage of the monomyth. The hero returns with the boon and can use it himself, or "bestow boons on his fellow man" (30). The boon, Campbell suggests, can take various forms, a physical object, such as a trophy, wealth, knowledge, understanding or enlightenment. In Gabriel's Gift both Lester's picture and Gabriel's emotional development function as the boon. Gabriel undertakes a process of "growing-up" within the novel, and it is through his own maturity that he can help his parents re-establish their relationship. These aspects of the text emphasise how this depiction of a youthful protagonist does not fulfil a hedonist's dream, but rather a more challenging and burdensome youth. Gabriel's experience of being young is almost entirely different to that of Shahid or Karim as Gabriel to a far greater extent than Kureishi's previous young protagonists works to aid others.

Kureishi's earlier protagonists do not find happy resolution or positive futures awaiting them at the end of the novel. Karim follows his friend Charlie, to New York but does not find happiness there. When he returns to London he remains discontented, as the end of the novel reflects: "And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself
sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time” (284). Karim is left wanting, and still hoping for change. His big ideas of what London is, and the potential it has, seem to have eluded him. He refers to the “old city” and “tiny island”, descriptions far removed from the grand statements Karim used to use to describe London when he dreamt about it from his home in the suburbs, where he saw London as “bottomless in its temptations” (8). In comparison Gabriel looks forward to a career as a film director in London. Though he has not experienced the same hedonistic London Karim has, the end of the novel is a much more positive one than The Buddha of Suburbia. There is greater possibility for change. Gabriel has a career in film making awaiting him. Unlike Karim, Gabriel’s parents are back together, in which Gabriel, and his drawing talent, played an instrumental part, (as opposed to the end of The Buddha of Suburbia which concludes with the marriage of Karim’s father to Eva, his lover, not Karim’s mother – which is not the result that Karim set out to achieve).

Performance is an important aspect of the attraction of, and interaction with, London for both Karim and Gabriel. Yet Gabriel’s career is firmly behind the camera. Whilst being pre-occupied with looking after his parents, Gabriel has been denied access to a more performative experience of hedonistic London, as experienced by his father Rex, and a previous generation of Kureishi’s youthful protagonist, such as Karim. Gabriel is a director; Karim is an actor; the distinction is clear. Karim has access to the city as a stage and is directly involved with the city as performance, where he can experience a hedonistic lifestyle of excess, drink, and drugs. Gabriel is one step removed; he does not enter the stage but is behind the camera, just as he does not have access to London as a stage during his adolescence. As a film director Gabriel is removed from participating in the action, instead
he is an external force controlling it, a similar role to that which he occupies in facilitating his parents' reconciliation.

Hornby: The Hedonist and the Hero

In many ways the character of Marcus in Hornby’s About a Boy demonstrates the same kind of fatigue from dealing with his parents’ mismanaged lives as Gabriel; yet for Marcus, it is his mother’s mental health, as well as his parents’ “alternative” lifestyle which are the root of his problems. He is burdened with worry, and positioned as the outsider in his new London school. Marcus’ new life in London is in stark contrast to his previous life and home in Cambridge. His parents’ lifestyle choices firmly exclude popular music and all of the other cultural markers which dominate the lives of the children at his new Holloway Road comprehensive school.

In many ways About a Boy is a typical bildungsroman, in which a young character journeys to London on his road to maturity; however, this bildungsroman combines both of the characteristics of youth described above. Will, Marcus’ new found friend and mentor, represents a more hedonistic youth previously enjoyed by the likes of Karim and Shahid. However, the novel is also about problematic youth akin to that experienced by Gabriel and Thomas (discussed above and below respectively); therefore it seems to be something of a crossover text. Marcus’ heroic quest follows many of the characteristics previously outlined, such as venturing into an unfamiliar world; a new city, a new school and his parents separation. He experiences a “road of trials”: he is bullied, witnesses his mother’s suicide attempt, and subsequently “parents” her through her mental illness. In order to combat the difficult times he is faced with Marcus sets about trying to create a support network. In doing so Marcus demonstrates some heroic qualities as his actions have positive effects not only for him, but also those around him. Nicola Allen succinctly notes that Marcus: “expresses a
simple, naive belief in the power of, and the need for, community and attempts to create one for himself” (64). The ability to bring people together, and help others as he makes improvements to his own situation is noted by Will: “You had to hand it to Marcus, he thought: the boy was awkward and weird and the rest of it, but he had this knack of creating bridges wherever he went, and very few adults could do that” (259). Marcus’s actions are far removed from the hedonism of Kureishi’s earlier characters; they also demonstrate an engagement with notions of universality, as this outsider figure is shown to have a shared humanity with those around him, as he is able to bring them all together. This can be understood as distinct from a postmodern challenge to such metanarratives. Marcus, as an outsider “builds bridges” with those around him so that he is no longer positioned on the periphery, as instead of accepting his external status, and rather than assimilating into the mainstream, he creates his own group instead.

Significantly Marcus’ journey to maturity involves a journey to London, but unlike for Shahid, Karim or Moses, London does not represent a “melting pot” of identities and freedom to be “self”; instead he is faced with children who seemingly “patrolled up and down school corridors like sharks, except that what they were on the lookout for wasn’t flesh but the wrong trousers, or the wrong haircut, or the wrong shoes, any or all of which would send them wild with excitement” (13). Cambridge represents a much more liberal environment: “It wasn’t so bad in Cambridge, because there were loads of kids who weren’t right for school, and loads of mums who had made them that way, but in London it was different” (14). London is therefore a frightening place for Marcus. Rather than the city being a place in which he can experience the joy and freedom of fragmentation and disorder, as it is to a large extent for Shahid and Karim, Marcus finds these aspects of London difficult: “There were no rules here [in London], and he was old enough to know that when you went to a
place, or a time, with no rules then things were bound to be more complicated” (185).

Marcus’s youth is defined by maturity, “old enough to know”, rather than youthful inexperience and freedom to learn; he desires “rules” as he often has to function in an adult and responsible manner in the city more than the adults themselves do.

Marcus’ heroic quest is in part about locating the marginal within the centre, as he has managed to create a community for himself, and has shifted to a more central position. Hornby therefore through a heroic characterization achieves the location of the misfit into the centre and by the end of the novel Will is convinced: “beyond any shadow of a doubt, that Marcus would be ok” (278). Though Marcus states after his quest that “I bloody hate Joni Mitchell” (278), a musician he and his mother used to enjoy listening to, his transformation is not based on rejecting his outsider status for a more conventional “cool” identity – but rather he has embarked on a journey towards maturity, and has the ability to understand life and make his own decisions. Significantly, as in Gabriel’s Gift, the young protagonist demonstrates more maturity than the adult characters, as the journey Marcus has completed by the end of the novel, is one which the adults around him are still undertaking: “he was sure that he would be able to cope in ways that they couldn’t. He could cope at school, because he knew what to do, and he had worked out who you could trust and who you couldn’t” (271). Marcus has partly learnt this through forming relationships, and falling in, and then out of love for the first time (with Ellie).

It is acknowledged by Marcus that it is in London (a symbolic centre) that he comes to his self-realisation: “he had worked that out down there, in London, where people came at each other from all sorts of odd angles” (271). Marcus has completed the heroic quest in that he makes the difficult journey from a familiar world (Cambridge) to London, where he undergoes a road of trials, but he also travels back to Cambridge, and it is here that he can
make the above critical reflections on the process he has been through, as he becomes aware of his transformation by comparing himself to those who stayed in Cambridge: “Marcus hadn’t thought about it before, but that evening, you could really tell who lived in London and who didn’t, and the ones who didn’t just seemed more scared of everything” (267). London is the strange and distant land that our young protagonist must conquer, which he does by the end of his tale. At the beginning of the novel he was much more angry and resentful about having to look after his mother than Gabriel is in Gabriel’s Gift; however, by the end Marcus can understand things very clearly: “he couldn’t really see what his dad could offer him anymore, which was why he felt sorry for him, which was why he agreed to go back to Cambridge with him” (267). This entirely selfless act by Marcus, of offering to go back to Cambridge to look after his father, though there would be no personal gain for him, is far removed from the hedonistic, self-centred lifestyle that Will lives, or that is demonstrated by Shahid, Karim and Moses. This represents how Marcus is denied a youth of freedom, and instead has to look after his parents and thus is therefore more of an heroic figure, working for the good of those around him, as opposed to a selfish, individualistic endeavour.

During Marcus’ heroic quest, his mother Fiona, and friend Will, also undertake a journey of transformation. By the end of the novel Will is setting out on his path away from a hedonistic existence that has occupied him for the last thirty-six years, and Marcus’ mother is coping better with her mental health. As Nicola Allen comments: “Marcus has to set about re-educating the adults around him into acknowledging their responsibility for the next generation” (63). Just as it is in Gabriel’s Gift, the responsibility of the older generation falls to the younger one, who seem to have greater insight than even their parents, as Marcus informs his mother “‘If you can’t look after me properly then you’ll have to find someone who can ... All you do is make my meals and I could do that. The rest of the time you just
cry. That’s...that’s no good. That’s no good to me” (41). For Will accepting responsibility involves understanding not just a responsibility towards Marcus, but also general responsibility of being an adult, such as not making up stories. Will is aware of how Marcus is in many ways more mature than he is because Marcus has had to face many difficulties during his youth: “Sometimes Marcus sounded as though he were a hundred years old, and it broke Will’s heart” (109). Will is aware of his own infantilization, but also that Marcus has been denied his youth: “Marcus needed help to be a kid, not an adult. And unhappily for Will, that was exactly the kind of assistance he was qualified to provide” (147).

Will’s pre-Marcus, hedonist’s lifestyle symbolises to a great extent the nature of a late capitalist society in a postmodern world. Nicola Allen comments: “Its central adult character Will offers a devastating portrait of the selfish, isolated, infantilized modern Man” (63). Will is free to occupy many and varying identities, he doesn’t have to be anybody or anything. This is because his father wrote a famous Christmas Song ‘Santa’s Super Sleigh’, from which Will has inherited enough royalties every year to enable him to live very comfortably without having to work. Will’s home is a modern flat full of lifestyle gadgets; coffee machines, ice-cream makers, computer games and video players; none of which he has had to earn money to buy. Will’s father’s song is used, Will explains, to encourage mass consumerism at Christmas, through the song’s use of the image of Santa with a sleigh laden with toys, content that is far removed from any discussion of a religious association with festivities, but is instead based on promoting materialism. However Will’s father was not happy about the manner in which he earned his wealth. He spent many years trying to prove his artistic credibility with other projects, and after many failed attempts, committed suicide. This gives About a Boy a very moralistic slant, not only in terms of engaging with the heroic characterization which reflects a certain moral absolutism to the text, and again therefore
reflects a movement beyond a postmodern challenge to overarching ideologies such as morality.

As a result of his father's financial success Will inherits a luxury lifestyle, however this has the effect of isolating him from the world, as he does not function or even communicate in the same way as most other people because he does not go to work. Rachel sums up Will's state: "I thought you were sort of blank – you didn't do anything, you weren't passionate about anything, you didn't seem to have much to say" (210). Will admits that he spends much of his time reading magazines, filling in questionnaires and watching TV: "Sixty years ago, all the things Will relied on to get him through the day simply didn't exist: there was no daytime TV, there were no videos, there were no glossy magazines" (6). Will's life doesn't really have any meaning in it until Marcus comes along. Marcus teaches him, through his own heroic quest and journey to maturity, the value of having a single, solid identity, rather than a postmodern myriad of multiple selves and a transient way of life in which you mould yourself to fit the situation. Before his encounter with Marcus, Will creates many identities for himself, such as imagining that he has a baby called Ned in order to meet single women at the SPAT group.¹⁵ Will eventually realises through meeting Marcus, and then Rachel, that life and relationships are easier if you have one identity and don't make things up; he mainly achieves this knowledge through observing and interacting with Marcus. For Rachel, it is only Will's interaction with Marcus which gives him any sense of identity: "- when you said you had a kid – ...there is something there" (210).

Therefore Hornby provides the reader with both of the depictions of young male protagonists which have dominated the discussion so far. There is a happy ending for Marcus, as he has a clearer sense of who he is and wants to be by the end of the novel, one

¹⁵ SPAT are a support group for single parents which Will decides to go to.
which isn’t the sole preserve of his mother’s ideologies, but neither is it a complete acceptance of Will’s lifestyle; it is rather him gaining the boon of knowledge that he is able to make up his own mind about things. Marcus is then able to pass on the boon to Will. Will’s attempt to become more like Marcus, who has both characteristics of an archetypal hero, and who has a clearer notion of a single “self”, reflects a movement away from a postmodern myriad of identities as defined by Kureishi’s and Thomson’s previous generation. The choice which Will makes to move away from his more individualistic existence towards Marcus’ model is worthy of further consideration. Marcus demonstrates concerns for the community, since as the hero of the story his actions not only improve his own situation, but also that of those around him, and as discussed above, he works to establish a community for him and his mother to fit into. Will, by the end of the novel, demonstrates a disillusionment with eighties individualism and a movement beyond this towards the valuing of shared community, a move therefore reminiscent of neo-humanism or even liberal humanist endeavours. The reaching towards the universal can also be understood in relation to the form the novel takes. Hornby chooses a more culturally conservative form, that of the heroic characterization, which has amongst other things, been popularised in mainstream fiction, rather than a more experimental narrative form. His text is therefore also reaching towards the mainstream, and by utilising archetypal characterization which by definition is universally recognisable, the text becomes part of a universalising process. This may seem conservative in terms of form (rather than the experimentalism of some postmodern texts) but it does effect a certain democratisation of his work in that by using universally recognisable figures and easily accessible characterization and narrative forms it innately opens up the novel to the possibility of a wider readership.

Thomson’s Next Generation
Akin to Kureishi’s Gabriel and Hornby’s Marcus, Thomson similarly offers the reader an altruistic young protagonist in *Divided Kingdom*, who is the antithesis of Thomson’s earlier hedonistic young character, Moses. The premise of this dystopian fantasy is that the government of an increasingly socially fragmented and conflicted Britain takes the drastic action of dividing the country and the population into four separate “quarters” attempting to create four homogenous zones divided along personality types. The novel opens with what seems to be the abduction in the middle of the night of eight-year-old Mathew Micklewright. It is revealed that Mathew hasn’t been abducted but is subject to the government’s “rearrangement” process, which sets out to create a “divided kingdom” in the hope of creating a series of more harmonious societies. Mathew is removed from his family, and re-named Thomas Parry. He is sent to a government school in the quarter that the government have decided best suits his personality type. Thereby Thomas is prescribed an identity and cannot explore the postmodern myriad of possibilities of identity creation or hedonistic lifestyles that are open to Moses in *Dreams of Leaving*. Thomas is to carry out governmental work whilst still in his childhood.

Post-rearrangement, and once settled in his new school, an official from the newly formed government visits Thomas and his classmates in order to emphasise to the young people the seriousness of their role: “The future depends on the example you set to others. One might even say that the fate of the entire nation rests in your hands” (6). Children are given the responsibility of monitoring the new system. In an Orwellian manner the children are told: “If you should see any behaviour ... which doesn’t fit in with your notion of the sanguine disposition, it’s your duty- your *duty*- to report it to the authorities” (original
emphasis 17). These events can be read in relation to the first stage of Campbell’s monomyth, in that Thomas has entered into a different world, through no action of his own.

After finishing his initial education at the boarding school, Thomas is placed with a new family. He is seemingly positioned there to do governmental work; it is his job to make sure that everyone is abiding by, and becoming accustomed to, the new system:

I sometimes wonder if there wasn’t a sense in which they looked on me as some sort of substitute for Jean, a kind of reimbursement. But perhaps that’s overstating it. Distraction might be a better word. I was something that would take their minds off the violence that had been done to them, something that would alter the shape of their sorrow...my arrival had a beneficial effect, since it forced them to pull together and begin to function as a unit again. (22-3)

Thomas carries on working for the Ministry as an adult, and it is through this work that he is able to escape the confines of the system (slipping away during a bomb explosion in the yellow quarter which he is visiting on governmental business). Thomas experiences all the four quarters which is against the rules of the new system as people are confined within their zones, forbidden to mix at all. Eventually Thomas joins the group known as the White people, mutes, who communicate telepathically, permanently travelling, as they operate outside the official system. Such an adventure reflects the travelling of the archetypal hero, who ventures into an unknown world, of strange and fantastical forces (which the White people represent). The White people are massacred, but the character Odell Burfoot (who

16 Just as the Party of George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four train the children of society to spy on the adults and to inform the authorities if their parents, or anyone else they come into contact with is perceived to be committing thought crime, or is in any other way going against the manifesto of the Party, which is in itself based on the Nazi system of child spies. The use of children to aid and assist adults in this way is also reminiscent of Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go (2005) in which children are cloned to be used in organ donations.

17 Jean is the wife and mother of the family Thomas is placed with post-rearrangement. She, like Thomas, has been taken from her family and placed elsewhere.
possesses the ability to become invisible) rescues Thomas. Odell, born on the day of
Thomas's rearrangement, is eight years younger than him, and she exhibits heroic qualities in
that she protects Thomas and functions as a helper figure in accordance with the roles
identified by Campbell and Propp (as discussed above). Odell acts as a Virgil figure; she
guides the hero through the different quarters, and eventually leads him back home to the red
quarter. The Virgil-like guides such as Odell and Lester in Gabriel's Gift also fulfil another
function of the heroic monomyth, acting (as expected) as quasi-ethereal best friends and
mentors. Such figures are often depicted as being not fully of this world; they share an
almost impossible level of knowledge and wisdom and/or experience that the young hero
needs to help them on their quest. As stated above, Odell aids Thomas on his journey, and
ultimately facilitates his return home as once he has gained the boon of knowledge from
travelling through all of the other quarters he must, according to Campbell's monomyth
framework, return.

Campbell highlights how the return can be difficult, and is sometimes refused by the
hero, who might be reluctant to return to their home community. This process can be
discerned in Thomas's travelling with the White people. He is happy living outside of the
system and is reluctant to return. However, Odell fits the role of "rescue from without",
Campbell defines this role:

The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance
from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him. For the bliss of
the deep abode is not lightly abandoned in favour of the self-scattering of the wakened
state: "Who having cast off the world," we read, "would desire to return again?"
....And yet, in so far as one is alive, life will call. Society is jealous of those who
remain away from it, and will come knocking on the door. (207)
Odell is the figure who comes "knocking on [Thomas's] door", seemingly from within the system she encourages him back into the world he left, as she entices him from the "bliss of the deep abode" he was experiencing with the White people.

For the young characters depicted by Thomson, Kureishi and Hornby there is a perceived future, not just a hedonistic present, indeed, Campbell defines the process of return as a positive one, where the lessons learnt throughout the quest are applied to the character’s future:

[T]he adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labour of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds. (Campbell 193)

At the end of Divided Kingdom Thomas waits for Odell at an arranged meeting place. Her arrival will enable him to start his new life: "To live with her, that's all that interests me" (395). Thomas has gained much from his journey and will take this boon (Odell) and apply it to his new life. However the reader is never to know if Odell meets Thomas, or even if she really exists. She is described as having a magic ability to appear invisible, and seemingly only Thomas interacts with her, further aligning her with a mysterious, unknown power. After completing his quest the hero has returned and has entered into a different stage of his life. Such responsibility, in terms of being guardians and overseers of the implementation of a political system, and being forced to be the tools of the dictatorship, are far removed from the depictions of hedonistic self-centred youth that Thomson and Kureishi use in their earlier texts.
Thomas’s responsibility from a young age is clear, and he is not able to live the life of a carefree child. Therefore for this later generation of protagonists both London and youth have become removed from the intrinsic markers of freedom and the enjoyment of identity creation. Lefebvre’s concepts discussed above of youthfulness being something that adults desire to hold onto, does not seem as applicable for these characters. Gabriel, Marcus and Thomas do not indulge in the reckless hedonism that the previous fictionalised generation did. They have responsibilities to their families, or wider communities, which they must fulfil, willingly or otherwise. Significantly each of these characters (and Christopher discussed below) represent a move away from individualistic actions, as they each in various ways offer something to the community around them, which also leads to positive results for them at a personal level; thereby, these texts contain a highly moralistic message, which is in line with the characterization of the heroic monomyth. Therefore they can be understood beyond a postmodern solipsism and rejection of metanarratives such as morality.

Mark Haddon’s Heroic Young Man

Just as the more recent work of Kureishi and Thomson exhibits discernible development in the way that both writers approach the subject of the young protagonist, Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* can also be read as being much less concerned with the aims and objectives of first wave postmodernism (with its focus on playful identity creation, fragmentation and hedonism) and instead as embarking upon a process of storytelling which evokes mythic themes and structures. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has been published in both an adult and a children’s version. In relation to her discussion of the *Harry Potter* series, Rachel Falconer describes the late 1990s as “an extraordinary period in which children’s literature exploded into the mainstream of popular and literary culture. Suddenly everyone was talking about children’s books, and not just
Harry Potter, not just fantasy, but children's fiction in all its variety and invention” (1).

Falconer states that the current process of an adult engagement with children's fiction in this manner seems to be a unique moment in the history of British fiction: “the Harry Potter series and many other children's books do speak to adult readers, and this is happening on a scale that has not been seen in Britain before” (1). Therefore the genre of the crossover novel should not be ignored, and as such an analysis of Haddon's novel is an important aspect of this chapter. Falconer points out the interesting hybridised position Haddon's text occupies, she notes how the novel won the Best novel category of the Whitbread Award, as opposed to Best Children's category (2). Thereby she suggests that this win “in the eyes of many people consolidated the status of children's literature as serious, literary fiction” (2). As such Haddon's novel challenges previously defined categories in a number of ways, it is described as: “a postmodern blend of realist autopathography, coming-of-age story and detective novel” (The Crossover Novel 2). However, Falconer also asserts (as discussed in the Introduction) that it is within children's literature (and the crossover novel) that a move away from a postmodern aesthetics which was prevalent in adult literature can be identified:

[C]hildren's literature seems to provide, more specifically, a chance to go beyond modernist and postmodern writing. Whereas postmodern writers become trapped in the self-absorbed art of demonstrating their artistry, the children's writer must put the interests of his reader first. ... The story is what keeps the children's writer grounded and savingly unselfconscious. (5-6)

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18 Falconer comments that it is more common for children to read fiction written for adults, giving examples of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Swift's Gulliver's Travels and even the work of the Brontës and Austen being adapted for and appearing on the shelves in libraries and bookshops for younger readers, however: “traffic moving in the other direction, from child to adult readers, is historically much more unusual, and the sheer scale of the flow of traffic in this direction which took place in the millennial decade is unprecedented in British publishing history” (11).

19 An autopathography in this instance is a patient authored narrative of illness.
I suggest an alternative to reading the text as a “postmodern blend” of styles through a consideration of Campbell’s monomyth. The young protagonist of Haddon’s novel can be read as a hero, and thus, through the use of such an archetypal, even moralistic, characterization and notions of a single essence of “self”, the novel can be read beyond postmodern perspectives. Therefore I apply Campbell’s framework to my reading of the character Christopher Boone. Christopher exhibits traits, and completes a task comparable to that defined by Campbell as required of the archetypal hero figure. Through the course of the novel Christopher undergoes many of the stages that Campbell describes in relation to the processes undertaken by the generic hero in many myths. First of all there is a clear link between the protagonist’s name, Boone and Campbell’s “monomyth”; Campbell describes “boons” as what the hero sets out for. Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence in *The American Monomyth* suggest the boon can be a variety of things, from treasure of some kind to simply “awareness”, but whatever the specific nature of the boon, it will usually have a positive impact upon the society the hero returns to. Therefore Christopher’s boon of discovering the truth of his family situation, as well as his uncovering of the mystery of the death of the neighbour’s dog, and gaining greater self awareness of his ambitions for the future comply with such descriptions of the boon.

Following Campbell’s theories, after “the call to adventure” (49) “the departure” takes place, which is the way in which the adventure begins. This can occur, as described above, through “a blunder”, which Campbell describes as: “apparently the merest chance- reveals an unsuspected world, the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (51). Such a description aptly applies to my reading of the beginning of Haddon’s novel. The protagonist has Asperger’s Syndrome, which means that for Christopher the world can seem a very confusing and frightening place. Christopher becomes
embroiled in a search for the “murderer” of his next-door neighbour’s dog, and through this he uncovers a family secret, Christopher learns that his mother has not died, as he has been told she has by his father, but has in fact left Christopher’s father to start another relationship, and is living with her new partner in London. Through the uncovering of this secret, Christopher has to deal with complicated issues and adult emotions. This is particularly difficult for Christopher to understand due to his condition, which means that he sees the world differently, and prefers solid facts and strict routines and lacks the ability to “read” psychological states.

From the opening lines of the novel it is apparent that Christopher has particular difficulty in understanding the world and expressing himself. He explains everything in an immense amount of detail, as he prefers the worlds of maths and science, with their factual and “correct” explanations. He recounts the thought processes that lead him to his conclusions in a very precise and detailed manner:

The dog was dead. There was a garden fork sticking out of the dog. The points of the fork must have gone all the way through the dog and into the ground because the fork had not fallen over. I decided that the dog was probably killed with the fork because I could not see any other wounds in the dog and I do not think you would stick a garden fork into a dog after it had died for some other reason, like cancer for example, or a road accident. But I could not be certain about this. (1)

Campbell’s suggestion that “the call to adventure” is “a blunder” or “the merest chance” is applicable to the circumstances of Christopher’s story. He happens upon a dead dog which leads to his adventure: “I pulled the fork out of the dog and lifted him into my arms and hugged him. He was leaking blood…. I had been hugging the dog for 4 minutes when I heard screaming. I looked up and saw Mrs Shears running towards me” (4). Campbell
describes a common pattern to the call to adventure, following roughly the same structure in many myths and religious stories: “the same archetypal images are activated, symbolizing danger, reassurance, trial, passage, and the strange holiness of the mysteries of birth” (52). Such symbols can be found in Christopher’s story. After receiving “the call to adventure”, Christopher embarks upon a journey to discover the truth. On this journey he ventures to “strange lands” in that Christopher travels to London by Tube. He finds his mother, gains a clearer knowledge of the family situation and an understanding of the complicated nature of adult relationships and emotions. These things constitute the boon. It is this knowledge and better understanding that helps him upon his return, and seemingly with all the events known by all the characters, they can all get on with their lives much easier as they no longer need to conceal lies.

Christopher’s adventure in London is vastly different from the hedonistic lifestyle of Kureishi’s Karim or Shahid. Instead, here it is Christopher, despite his personal difficulties who takes on the responsibility for “sorting things out” for his parents. Christopher, who is supposed to have trouble understanding complex emotions, and is a child, is the one who is able to come up with a solution for the adults. In a discussion of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials Falconer suggests that there is a sense that “the process of coming of age means something new and different in our time; and a sense that the child’s eye view can reinvigorate, transform and even redeem adult lives” (8). This sense of change which Falconer describes is evident within Kureishi’s Gabriel’s Gift, Hornby’s About a Boy and Haddon’s novel as these young protagonists embark on a very different journey to maturity than some of their predecessors. The conclusion to The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time clearly expresses how the journey that Christopher has
undertaken has made things better for him and changed his life as he realises the full potential of his abilities, and he is able to look forward positively to the future:

...[A]nd then I will get a First Class Honours Degree and I will become a scientist.

And I know I can do this because I went to London on my own, and because I solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington? and I found my mother and I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything. (268)

This ending draws from classic storytelling structures. It highlights the fact that the text follows the pattern of the bildungsroman as the hero has undergone a process of reaching maturity. It also reflects archetypal storytelling structures in that there is a “happily ever after” inclination to the end of the novel as the family difficulties have been resolved. Such an ending may also be interpreted in line with Campbell’s theory of the monomyth, in that Christopher has undergone an “awakening of the self” (51). He has learnt about his skills and his limitations. His quest to uncover the mystery of the death of the dog, as well as to write a murder mystery novel are complete. Campbell defines a hero thus: “The hero therefore is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one’s visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought” (19-20). In the conclusion to Haddon’s novel Christopher has battled with his personal problems and family history and has succeeded. He has been able to interact with, and understand better than ever, other people’s relationships and emotions. Christopher has journeyed to an unknown place, literally in terms of going to London, but also metaphorically in terms of his interaction with situations he finds difficult. His journey has given Christopher a way of understanding the world as well as the opportunity to fulfil his personal aim of writing a murder mystery novel (5).
Haddon chooses to narrate the novel directly through Christopher’s unique way of interacting with the world. As an Asperger’s syndrome sufferer the use of pictures, diagrams and mathematical equations form an integral part of the narrative. Such techniques do not seem like classical storytelling methods. However, the structure of the text which Haddon employs does in fact engage with those classically associated with storytelling. The deliberate use of such devices in order to narrate a subjugated character (that of a young person with Christopher’s condition), has the effect of giving a voice to Christopher which does not further marginalize him, but rather places his novel (both Christopher’s and Haddon’s) within a more dominant, classical framework of discourse. Therefore, such an appropriation of the mythic and classical methods of storytelling allows Haddon to investigate alternative methods for narrating young characters at the millennium.

Aside from Christopher’s specific medical condition, Haddon portrays an alternative conception of youth, as opposed to a dominant hedonistic lifestyle. London represents something very different for this young protagonist. In an opposite response to a postmodern appreciation of the city in terms of the opportunity for many, or fragmented identity constructions which characters such as Kureiši’s Karim or Shahid appreciated the capital for, Christopher does not. After travelling to the city as part of his journey of discovery, he sees his future elsewhere, positioning his further route to maturity firmly away from London: “I am going to university in another town. And it doesn’t have to be in London because I don’t like London” (267). Haddon’s choice to depict Christopher as wishing to leave London further locates him within the heroic as opposed to the picaro. Unlike Shahid or Karim, Christopher can envisage his future away from the capital; his journey and experiences there have served the purpose of him reaching the next stage of his journey to adulthood, but as he has grown and developed, he has outgrown the capital. Just like Gabriel, therefore, the reader
can perceive a bright future for this young optimistic protagonist, as opposed to the perpetual adolescence and uncertainty of Shahid, Karim and Moses.

Though not every stage of the monomyth is identifiable within the texts analysed, (Campbell comments that it is quite common for not all of the aspects to be present in every monomyth), London authors are offering an alternative in terms of depicting young protagonists by following the basic structures. Though texts may not immediately appear to follow an archetypal narrative structure or to contain a heroic characterization, aspects of the hero as described by Campbell, are present within the stories of these young protagonists. This process of mythologizing contemporary discourses on youth through the application of the heroic figure and the quest narrative allows authors to move beyond the multitude of micro-narratives that postmodernist discourse proposes, and instead enables them to create texts that are differently situated. Therefore, in response to the statement posited in the title of this chapter, the hero has returned, or is returning, in the work of some key London writers around the new millennium. The heroic characterization can be understood as reflecting how we can move beyond postmodern perspectives, which according to Garry Potter and José López have “gone out of fashion” (4). The appropriation of the mythic offers an alternative framework for engaging with young characters as opposed to hedonistic, drug fuelled models which have previously dominated much of 1990s British fiction and criticism and instead to depict young characters who can be read along more classical lines.
Chapter Three: Here Come the Girls - The Heroine in the Millennial London Novel

Like many feminist writers of the twentieth century, [Dorothy] Richardson believed that only a radically new imagining of the novel’s form could enrich literature with the truth of modern female experience, an experience left out of “all novel” and especially “these men’s books.” (Kristin Bluemel ‘Feminist Fiction’ original italics 2009 114)

As discussed in previous chapters there is something of a discernable tradition within the London novel for a bildungsroman style focusing on the adventures of a male protagonist, such as the figure of Tom Jones, the story of a young man travelling to the capital, seeking adventure and freedom during his route to maturity. Due to such an association I felt the need for the previous chapter to focus on the male protagonist and the heroic adventure, and how this has translated into the millennial text. However, such an analysis provokes the obvious question, if the hero is prevalent within millennial London fiction, what about the heroine? It is this question that I hope to address within this chapter through the consideration of the role of the female protagonist in Bernardine Evaristo’s Lara (1997) and Sarah Waters Tipping the Velvet (1998). As discussed in the last chapter the division of these two chapters is in part made on practicality grounds, but also is to an extent made on grounds of the varying experience of the city based on gender, a difference Waters’s character Nan King describes in Tipping the Velvet:

I was a solitary girl, in a city that favoured sweethearts and gentlemen; a girl in a city where girls walked to be gazed at....I thought then what a cruel joke it was that I, who had swaggered so many times in a gentleman’s suit across the stages of London, should
now be afraid to walk upon its streets, because of my girlishness! If only I were a boy.

(190)

Despite Nancy’s feelings of isolation and “otherness” in the city, there is a history of female characters in London fiction; Moll Flanders and Fanny Hill offer two of the most obvious examples. In this chapter I consider if this tradition of strong female characters has translated into the millennial text in relation to the use of heroic characterization. I will investigate if there is, as I suggest the case to be within the masculine dominated novel, an equivalent engagement with archetypal character roles within the work of female writers writing female protagonists at the millennium. I will consider if, as the title of the chapter suggest, London authors at the millennium are engaging with a heroine figure through depictions of young female protagonist as writers such as Kureishi and Thomson have done with the male characters of Gabriel’s Gift and Divided Kingdom, and if so what the implications of this are. I will also consider if the fiction of Evaristo and Waters concurs with Richardson’s suggestions above, that in order to depict the “modern” female experience the form of the novel must undergo a “radical new imagining”.

**Contextualising the Female Perspective**

Gill Firth in ‘Women, Writing and Language: Making the Silences Speak’ discusses the absences of women within canonical fiction (and the studying of this) during the mid-twentieth century: “When I studied English Literature at university in the 1960s, the literary ‘canon’ consisted almost entirely of work by white men. My course included a tiny handful of books by women” (98). Angela Carter also suggests that women have been absent from literature, as she strongly states the need for a revision of women’s place within fiction: “it is so important for women to write fiction as women” (‘Notes From the Front Line’ 70). Similarly Luce Irigaray (as Maggie Humm summarises) suggests that to engage in feminist
literature there needs to be a reassessment of the form: “To efface a masculine, linear style
Irigarary claims that critics will need to utilise female imagery because only a symbolism
created by women can speak to other women” (original italics Contemporary Feminist
Literary Criticism 96).

Carter aligns a feminist endeavour which seeks to reassess dominant (patriarchal)
form with the decolonising process of postcolonialism:

Writing is only applied linguistics...This is why it is enormously important for women
to write fiction as women – it is part of the slow process of decolonising our language
and our basic habits of thought ... I personally feel much more in common with certain
Third world writers, both male and female, who are transforming actual fictional forms
to both reflect and precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves (original
italics 70).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (in ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’) also critiques the tendency of
institutional and culturally dominant discourses and practices to exclude marginalized voices,
particularly those of subaltern woman. As both the Bluemel and the Carter quotes above
demonstrate, for some feminists the process of giving a voice to those previously
marginalized is dominated by a challenge to form. Spivak, for example, engages with
deconstructionist ideas in relation to her discussion of postmodernism, suggesting that aspects
of a postmodern aesthetic “opens up” Western scholarship to the “subaltern”. Spivak’s
comments echo Carter’s calls for a change in form in order for new voices to be heard. As
discussed in Chapter One, Carter famously allegorises the endeavour as: “putting new wine in
old bottles...I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new
wine makes the old bottle explode” (70), reflecting a postmodern, deconstructionist stance.
Patricia Waugh acknowledges that the likely assumption would be that postmodernism would offer a space for the feminist voice and a forum to discuss gender issues, as she compares feminism and postmodernism: “Both movements celebrate liminality, the disruption of ‘difference’, the undermining of authorial security of the ‘egotistical sublime’” (Feminine Fictions 4). Jeanette Winterson, an author renowned for her feminist fiction has also been aligned with postmodernist ideologies, as Sonya Andermahr notes: “Winterson’s postmodern credentials have never been in doubt” (Jeanette Winterson 5). Critic Laura Doan reiterates this point foregrounding the specific postmodern aspect of Winterson’s early work:

Eschewing realism, Winterson constructs her narrative by exploiting the techniques of postmodern historiographic metafiction (such as intertextuality, parody, pastiche, self-reflexivity, fragmentation, the rewriting of history, and frame breaks) as well as its ideology (questioning ‘grand narratives’, problematizing closure, valorizing instability, suspecting coherence, and so forth) in order to challenge and subvert patriarchal and heterosexist discourses and, ultimately, to facilitate a forceful and positive oppositional critique. (The Lesbian Postmodern 138)

Within Sexing the Cherry Winterson re-writes the Brothers Grimm fairy tale “The Twelve Dancing Princesses”. Regarding this process of revision of old text, a process she herself partakes in during her writing of The Bloody Chamber (1979) Carter states: “I believe that myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I’m in the demythologising business. I’m interested in myths...just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree” (70). Roland Barthes in Mythologies considers, like Carter, myths to be a “created” cultural phenomenon reliant on history: “Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of
speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things" (110). Carter and Winterson seek to demythologise myth in terms of the misconception of its link to nature, particularly in relation to the issue of gender, such as the limited depiction\(^1\) of women within myths and fairytales. Both Carter and Winterson experiment with parody and pastiche during their rewritings of history and fairytales; both offer a self-reflexive, un-trustworthy narrative.

However, during a direct comparison of the work of Winterson and Waters, Stefania Ciocia in “Queer and Verdant” highlights the disparity between the two authors’ approaches to style: “Winterson’s oeuvre is overall marked by a rejection of the conventions of formal realism and the lengthy, ‘three-volume’ narrative scope that Waters instead embraces in her neo-Victorian novels” (NPg). The accuracy of the opening lines of Sexing the Cherry are called into question under the sub-heading “Lies 8”: “It was not the first thing she saw, how could it have been? Nor was the night in the fog-covered field the first thing I saw ... And so what we have told you is true, although it is not” (95). Winterson’s protagonist Dog Woman, a carnivalesque, even grotesque, giant, described at the end of the novel as the imaginary “alter ego” (original italics 125) of the contemporary character, an environmental campaigner, argues that those who are not being listened to have to go to extraordinary lengths to be heard: “The trouble is that when most people are apathetic ordinary people like me have to go too far” (123). Akin to Winterson’s protestors within her novel Winterson is attempting to express a marginal position and to challenge dominant perspective, a challenge which, in part, she lays down through the disruption of narrative (as reliable) and form, as in her magic realist, historiographic metafiction in order to challenge masculine and

\(^1\) In much western mythology and fairytales there seems to be very few character roles for women, particularly in fairytales, there is the princess, the wicked stepmother/queen or the witch. Carter and Winterson offer rewrites of dominant patriarchal, homosexual depictions of femininity prevalent within myths and fairytales, such as those to be found in the writing of the princess character. For example Winterson re-writes the story of Rapunzel. In Winterson’s version a young princess refuses to marry the prince her family have chosen for her to marry. Instead the princess wishes to live with her female lover, Winterson writes: “Her family [Rapunzel’s] were so incensed by her refusal to marry the prince next door that they vilified the couple, calling one a witch and the other a little girl” (52) as Winterson critiques the fairy-tale for its limited portrayal of female sexuality.
heterosexual dominant perspectives of history, fairy tales and gender constructs. However not all writers chose to challenge marginalisation through the application of experimental techniques and/or the adoption of postmodern narrative characteristics and challenges to form.

Waters in her novels can be read as attempting similar challenges against heterosexual dominant perspectives of history, however she does not approach this task with the same experimental narrative and challenges to form as Carter or Winterson. Ciocia also makes this distinction between Winterson and Waters, commenting on Winterson’s challenge to, and rejection of, realism and trustworthy narrative to confront and question identity, gender, and sexuality constructs, defining Waters’s methods as less “militant”: “Waters instead accomplishes her questioning of a unified notion of self and above all of the supposed naturalness of the notions of gender and sexuality through her own revisitiation of popular Victorian literary subgenres” (original italics NPg). Waters’s discussion of sexuality is placed in a timely way, the specific importance of the Victorian era is discussed by Ciocia who states it is “a very significant period of women’s history” (NPg). Ciocia goes on to note the relevance of the specific Victorian literary genres used by Waters “which were first knowingly recognized by nineteenth century critics and women writers as powerful tools to challenge patriarchal ideology and its oppression of women” (NPg). ^2 Karl Miller in Doubles: Studies in Literary History^3 also suggests that traditional gender roles and constructs were particularly being questioned in literature at this time:

[N]ew identities, new conceptions of human nature, declared itself. Men became women. Women became men. Gender and country were put in doubt: the single life was found to harbour two sexes and two nations. Femaleness and the female writer

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^2Referring to Waters’ adaptation of the gothic novel, the melodrama or feuilleton and the sensation novel.  
^3As Ciocia discusses in detail.
broke free; the New Woman, and the Old, adventured into fiction, and might be found to hold hands there, as sisters. ... [It was] an age in which there seemed to be three sexes, an age tormented by genders and pronouns and pen-names, by the identity of authors, by the ‘he’ and the ‘she’ and the ‘who’ of it all. (209)

Therefore Waters challenges the subjugation and underrepresentation of lesbian perspectives and raises the discussion of gendered and sexual identities, but she does so without the use of experimental postmodern fragmentation, disruption and challenges to form. Waugh, through her poignant discussion of the ambivalence with regards to the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, similarly suggests that postmodernism does not have to be the only means to express the marginal, as she makes the point that postmodernism may not fulfil the liberatory potential it may at first appear to offer: “glancing through almost any of the major theoretical postmodernist statements, one is forcibly struck by the total absence of reference to either women writers or, indeed, to issues of gender” (4).

In the feminist rewritings by the millennial London writers considered in this chapter, there is a movement away from a postmodern “exploding” (Carter’s description above) of form. Waters and Evaristo attempt to challenge the white masculine dominated British literary canon yet they do not call into question the legitimacy of narrative in the same manner in which their postmodern predecessors do. Waters’s and Evaristo’s narratives are “trustworthy” in that they do not attempt to confuse the reader, but instead follow a linear temporal mode. Their novels use the archetypal characterization of the heroic, as I aim to demonstrate by applying Joseph Campbell’s theories of the heroic monomyth to my reading.

4 Other critics also voice such concerns as to the nature of the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, including Laura Doan in ‘Jeanette Winterson’s Sexing the Postmodern’; Linda Hutcheon in The Politics of the Postmodern; Christine Di Stefano in ‘Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism’ and Wendy Brown in ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposure’. 
of Lara and Tipping the Velvet. The popularity and the success of Evaristo and Waters; both in terms of popular culture (reaching mass audiences), as well as critical acclaim, allows them to bring the marginalized character to the form as they are positioned within dominant discourses, as they bring the voices of the subjugated to the centre. The use of such archetypal characterization, within the London novel, positions these authors within a cultural mainstream (in terms of form) and at the centre in terms of the capital city, London. Waters positions her text, through the use of the heroic monomyth, alongside a long tradition of canonical fiction which engages with such a characterization, demonstrating that a young homosexual female can equally be a heroine within Victorian London as the heroes more culturally expected within, not only Victorian fiction, but contemporary revisitings of this era (or indeed contemporary texts with a contemporary setting). Similarly, Evaristo removes her character Lara from the subjugation she is described as suffering in her childhood to instead consider her as a heroine, thereby positioning her alongside protagonists who we are more familiar with considering as heroic within British literature. By using such recognised literary forms, the marginalized author and/or character is not positioned as an external “other” but engaged with, critiqued and read alongside those who more “traditionally” occupy the centre.

Lara’s Call to Adventure

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5 Bernardine Evaristo’s Awards & Honours: 2006: Elected a Fellow, Royal Society of Arts; 2004: Elected a Fellow, Royal Society of Literature; 2003: NESTA Fellowship Award; 2000: Arts Council Writers Award; 1999 BT EMMA Best Book Award. Soul Tourists, The Emperor’s Babe and Lara have been Books of the Year 9 times for national UK newspapers and several “Best of Summer Books” lists. (bevaristo.net 2008)

6 Sarah Waters “won the Betty Trask Award for Tipping the Velvet and the Somerset Maugham Award and Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year for Affinity. Fingersmith was shortlisted for both the Orange Prize 2002 and for the Man Booker Prize 2002, and won the CWA Historical Dagger prize before earning her three 2003 Author of the Year awards - from the Booksellers Association, Waterstone’s and The British Book Awards. Sarah Waters is also the winner of The South Bank Show Award.” The Night Watch went to number one in the best sellers chart and was also short listed for the Orange and the Mann Booker prize (’Virago Books: Authors 2008’ virago.co.uk/author 2008).

7 As previously discussed the bringing of the marginalized to the centre represents a key characteristic of London fiction, and in these authors work an intensification of this process can be seen.
In Lara Evaristo charts a young girl’s journey to maturity in a bildungsroman style, and the road of trials she encounters on the way. Lara, the eponymous protagonist, is the daughter of Taiwo and Ellen. The novel recounts Lara’s life growing up in 1960s and 1970s London. The novel begins with Taiwo’s arrival in England from Nigeria, and recounts the love that blossomed between him and Ellen, their marriage and then their family life. Throughout the novel the narrative includes references to earlier times as the narratives of Lara’s ancestors are told, contributing to the story of Lara’s present. However the temporal mode is never disjointed, rather a linear narrative structure flows throughout the novel, as allusions to previous time frames are clearly segregated and demarked as such.

Lara’s journey consists of “a road of trials”\(^8\), one of these being in relation to her growing awareness of her identity. Lara does not think of herself as having an African heritage until her teenage years. As she develops into adolescence she realises her difference from the other children at her school (she is the only non-white pupil). Lara is suddenly aware that her skin colour, and that of her family, marks her as different: “it was bloody embarrassing having a black dad. In the showers at school I began to notice my difference. My skin was drier, pubis curly, titties pointy, bum perched” (70). Lara is treated differently at school because of her colour: “What was so special about Susie’s lips, same size as hers and shape, just a different colour?” (62). Her alienation is reinforced through the seemingly innocent questions from the other children\(^9\): “Where you from La?” (65)

Lara’s difference is evidently unpalatable to some of those around her, such as her teacher: “Miss Hughes on a field trip … discreetly ushered me aside, advised I tone down my colour sense for I’d attract attention” (72). Lara begins to wish herself invisible as she is

\(^8\) Campbell describes “the road of trials” as one of the stages of the heroic monomyth. For a more detailed discussion of this term refer to Chapter Two.

\(^9\) Susie’s childhood question may be innocently asked as a friend, but reflects the undertones of her racist father’s thinking.
faced with operating in a world in which culturally, in many ways, she is denied an existence. There are no black female role models for Lara to follow: “I searched but could not find myself, not on the screen, billboards, books, magazines” (69), as Miss Hughes’s comments suggest, there are some who wish Lara’s absence to continue, but Lara “longed for an image, a story, to speak me, describe me, birth me whole” (69). Lara, responding to her cultural absenting and the comments from people such as Miss Hughes, seeks the invisibility which is prescribed: “History determined I should not flaunt my technicolour Joseph coat and tilting red beret, proclaiming I AM HERE! JE SUIS ICI! Forever. Toujours! You fucking merdes! I was French Noir, Parisian, peu’aps. Our planet revolved, patiently, calmly, eternally, sometimes with me, sometimes not” (72). Lara feeling that the planet “sometimes” revolve[s] with her, and “sometimes not”, reflects her marginalisation, as well as the desires of those who wish to effectively remove her from society and make her “unseen”.

As previously discussed, critic John McLeod in *Postcolonial London* discusses the simultaneous presence and absence in London’s society of those with an Afro-Caribbean heritage, as he records the anthropologist Sheila Patterson’s journey to Brixton. Patterson comments on, as noted earlier, the “sense of strangeness, almost shock” at the sight of “coloured men and women wherever I looked, shopping, strolling, or gossiping on the sunny street-corners” (1). Just as Patterson struggled to see black people as anything other than strangers, Lara is an “other” depicted by Evaristo as being problematic for certain people within British culture and society. McLeod comments that through Patterson’s study “the extent to which, in the 1950s and 1960s, Caribbeans were within, but not a part of, London’s economic and social fabric” (2) can be noted. Patterson records that many of “them” were “waiting near the employment exchange” (1), literally excluded, without employment, waiting significantly outside the employment exchange, seemingly without a hope of being
allowed to become part of the economic framework, and therefore fully-functioning and accepted members of the community. Through the character of Miss Hughes Evaristo critiques the extent to which Lara and her family are within, but excluded from London and provides a fictional representation (as discussed in Chapter One) of what McLeod refers to as the positioning of London's diasporic communities as "strangers' in, rather than citizens of, London" (2). Similarly Hughes denies Lara, on the grounds of her colour, an existence, by wishing her to remain invisible, and so therefore also denies her and her family the "rights of tenure" in London.

Lara's awakening to her difference and her increasingly being "othered" by her school friends and teachers, leads her on her journey. In terms of Campbell's monomyth, it is during this period of her life that Lara receives the "call to adventure". The call to adventure is described by Campbell as the hero receiving a call to action; the call is often announced to the hero by another character who acts as the "herald". The herald can be seen as a dark figure - who by their very presence initiates a crisis. I suggest that in Lara's case the crisis comes when she starts to realise that she is different from Susie and the other children at her school, and the "dark figure" of Miss Hughes underlines Lara's feelings of exclusion.

Shortly after the incident in which Lara is "othered" and segregated by Hughes, the family receive a visit from Lara's older cousin Beatrice. Evidently Beatrice does not subscribe to Miss Hughes' racist attitude which proclaims black people should disappear into the background. Beatrice is described: "an Angela Davis wig topped peach lips, lime green flares draped over pink suede platforms, at nearly six feet she bust into the Best room" (73). Beatrice, vehemently opposing the advice of the likes of Miss Hughes, plays a fundamental
role in Lara’s awareness of her difference. Beatrice acts as a guide for Lara’s curious mind and informs her about what she sees as life’s crucial facts. Evaristo’s chosen guide for her young protagonist shares her name with that of another famous guide from a heroic quest narrative, Dante’s Divine Comedy. In the last book of Divine Comedy, Beatrice takes over the role of guide from Virgil. Such an intertextual reference aligns Evaristo’s text with a literary heritage of quest-like heroic narratives. Beatrice in Lara plays a crucial role in the direction in which Lara will grow up, and conceive of her own identity. When Lara and her siblings make a joke about “black food” (73) during their cousin’s visit, Beatrice is quick to question Lara about her actions: “What’s so funny about being black?” (74) Lara perpetuates the prejudice based on skin colour that has been working against her at school and seems to uphold that being black is negative. Adolescent Lara is quick to disassociate herself from an African identity and culture with a flippant response to her cousin’s questioning: “Lara smirked, ‘I’m not black, I’m half-caste, actually!’” (74). Lara’s supercilious attitude is swiftly extinguished by Beatrice: “‘Oh but you’re very mistaken, lovely... The only half you are is half asleep... They don’t care whether your mother’s white, green or orange with purple spots, you’re a nigger to them, lovely” (74). Lara feels disassociated from the comments Beatrice is making, but Beatrice continues: “I know blacks who were beaten by marauding whites in the race riots of the Twenties... Do you think they stopped to ask them if they were half-caste! ‘Oh excuse me sir, just before I kick your head in, is your mother white?’” (75). Even though Lara has experienced racism first hand, and has noticed how she is outside of dominant culture, the comments her cousin makes in relation to race seem alien to her.

Lara at this point in the novel is a very naïve youngster; she is not only unaware of the full extent of her own subjugated cultural positioning, but she also has no idea of black

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10 A process started by the likes of Susie’s father, Susie’s father initiates Susie’s question of Lara’s heritage, as he doesn’t consider her British because of her colour; and Susie’s boyfriend, who is unhappy that Susie is friends with Lara on the grounds of her race; and Mrs Hughes as discussed above.
history (an issue which is also addressed in Evaristo’s later text Soul Tourists as previously discussed). This seems to be something that is missing from her education, and so furthers her isolation and otherness, as another of Lara’s statements to her cousin suggest: “There weren’t any slaves in England” (75). Beatrice is quick to correct her, and inform her of aspects of her heritage that she should know about: “‘Eeeh! You make me sick. Ignorant? Pig ignorant!’ ‘If your Uncle Sam was alive he’d have a story or two to make your little Afro hair stand on end’ (75-6). In terms of Campbell’s theories on the monomyth, this is a significant aspect of Lara’s heroic quest. Beatrice’s words act as Lara’s “call to adventure”. Beatrice builds upon Lara’s growing self-awareness, initiated through the treatment she receives at school and her realization of a lack of narrative for herself in teenage culture. Beatrice is the bearer of the news to Lara that there are black narratives, histories and cultures available; she just has to find out about them. From this point on Lara is more interested in her family history and wants to find out more, as she moves away from her childhood naivety.

Lara’s first step on her “road of trials” (in terms of Campbell’s framework) towards the discovery of her heritage is to talk to her father. In an archetypal, almost mythically heroic fashion, Lara ventures forth into a seemingly dark, distant and strange world on her pursuit for information into her father’s basement hide away: “Hidden in the moist entrails of Atlantico, the basement passage was body-wide, mildewed, one medieval wooden door arched onto the coal hole” (79). When she begins her enquiries Taiwo is shocked by how little she knows, as she even asks him what language he speaks (80). Taiwo obviously finds it difficult to talk about his past, and is aware, and perturbed by his daughter’s prejudice against Africans: “‘My grandfather was Brazilian!’ Taiwo cut in, ‘Don’t shout! Why are you so excited? You would rather be anything than an African!’”. Taiwo dislikes Lara’s
questioning, finding it uncomfortable to teach her about his past: "'Now that's enough I have work to do" (81). Lara does as her father requests and leaves him alone, but this has left her wanting to find out more: "She left, feeling cheated, feeling stirred" (81).

Significantly Taiwo is unable to articulate any aspect of his homeland (an ex-British colony) when he is in London, the once centre of empire, demonstrating the extent of the feelings of alienation and subjugation he and his family feel living in London. He cannot engage with his heritage and past, it has to remain unspoken. Evaristo's depiction of Taiwo's inability to tell his daughter about his homeland and her heritage is poignantly juxtaposed against the subjects Taiwo is able to speak eloquent about. When Ellen first introduces Taiwo to her parents, she is quick to inform them that: "Taiwo can quote Shakespeare and Shelley" (original italics 37); yet, Taiwo can't tell his daughter about her heritage, or talk to her about his homeland. The lack of narrative for Lara and her heritage represents the difficulty of expressing a post-colonial identity, especially a diasporic one in the mother country. The narrative of homeland has been lost and replaced by those from the mother country through a colonial education system. It is only when the family are removed from London that Taiwo's narrative can be told. For Taiwo to be able to speak of his family and his heritage, he has to be away from the centre of empire, as his colonial education has not equipped him to understand or express his own heritage. In Evaristo's text slave narratives are absent from education, whether within the colonies, or the heart of empire. This lacking in education continues for the next generation and for Lara's 1970's London experience, as her comments to her cousin Beatrice (as quoted above) clearly reflect, her school does not teach her anything about slavery or African history, and the culture and society around her deny her an identity or existence. She is, as McLeod argues was often the case for those with an Afro-Caribbean heritage, present, but simultaneously absent within society in London.
Lara visits her grandmother, Edith, and has more luck on her quest for understanding about her heritage, though it is here that absence continues to develop as a theme in Lara as at Edith’s house “No da Costa photos memoried the mantelpiece” (83). Edith was never happy about her daughter marrying an African, a fact which is poignantly displayed through the absence in Edith’s home of any photographs of her grandchildren from this marriage. Therefore, a large aspect of Lara’s family tree is missing, absent from Edith’s perspective. However Lara’s grandmother is happy to tell her about her own families’ past, especially the female line, which is more than Taiwo can.

Addressing an Imbalance: Evaristo’s Women Speak

Women are mainly the tellers of the stories in Lara; for instance it is Lara who decides to embark on rediscovering her family history and it is through the maternal line\(^{11}\) that the family history is recalled.\(^{12}\) The narratives of men are notably absent in this novel. The male members of the family have been killed in wars, are away working, or silenced, not permitted a voice. Ellen’s father, Leslie, provides one such example, when Ellen starts to date an African, her father, dares to voice his opinion: “I don’t care where you’re from, just look after my Ellen” (37). For this rare contribution he is reprimanded by his wife: “I told Leslie to keep his interfering opinions to himself” (38) because Edith is unhappy about her daughter dating an African and does not want her husband to encourage the couple. Taiwo’s first impressions of Leslie reflect his silence, describing Leslie as a “blank page in the story” (37).

\(^{11}\) Typically investigations into family heritage follow the male line; therefore Evaristo portrays an alternative in her text. It is often more difficult to follow a female line of heritage due to maiden names of distant relatives not often being known – therefore the convention of females changing their surname upon marriage in a Western society results in the consequence of female heritage being seemingly of lesser importance, and more difficult to trace – Evaristo subverts this norm.

\(^{12}\) The reader finds out about Edith, Ellen’s mother, and Mary Jane, Ellen’s grandmother, and each of their upbringings. We read how Mary Jane struggled to bring up her children, escaping the poverty in Ireland after her husband died fighting in the British Army (engaging with another aspect of British colonialism). Mary Jane has aspirations for her children, which are passed on to Edith, who then has ambition for her own daughter Ellen.
Edith effectively removes Leslie’s point of view from consideration. Symbolically the silencing and absence of male narratives in this text offers an alternative to the process of subjugating female narratives within a patriarchal society, culture, and literary canon. The clock in Edith’s house adds another female voice to the family as “the Victorian grandmother in the hall groaned eight hours” (my emphasis 32), as opposed to a grandfather clock, furthering Evaristo’s engagement with female narratives, and the replacing, silencing, or absenting, of male ones (this of course serves a similar function to my discussion of Arthur’s silence in Andrea Levy’s Small Island, in that these authors move away from the voices that are prominently represented in fiction to offer an alternative, as discussed in Chapter One). Absences are always poignant within Lara, absences allow Evaristo to critique a lack within narratives, culture, education systems and the literary canon, a gap which Evaristo’s text goes some way towards filling.

**Lara Embarks on her Journey**

As Lara grows up her perception of herself alters. Lara begins to explore the African part of her heritage as opposed to trying to deny it as she had previously: “I began to dip into my skin like a wet suit, toes first, warily, wriggled about, then legs all in by summer 81 I’d zipped up and dived head first” (87). Her road to self-awareness fits in with Campbell’s theories of a hero’s “road of trials” as it is fraught with difficulties. Along her path to maturity Lara meets Josh. She wants to be like him, she wants to assimilate herself into his Nigerian culture: “Well, you know how we Nigerians are’. Yes I lied’” (89). She tries to learn from Josh: “You [Josh] loved your skin, polished with coca butter, advised I do the same or I’d ‘flake to dust like a relief in an Egyptian tomb’” (89). However Josh doesn’t think Lara could be a Nigerian’s wife: “you don’t even know what Jollof rice is, let alone how to cook it” (90).
Josh is aware that Lara spends time with him because she feels that something is missing within herself, and she wants to find out about a part of her heritage that eludes her: "you hope some of it [Josh’s Nigerian heritage] will rub off on you" (90). But this attempt to find out about African culture does not work. At this point, Lara refuses the "call to adventure" that her cousin has laid down, Lara is disheartened by a few failed attempts and is quick to revert to what she knows, and rejects her challenge. Campbell writes of the heroic monomyth that: “Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible [for the hero] to turn the ear to other interests” (59). This seems to be the path Lara is following. After a brief attempt to find out about her father’s heritage, by asking him, and then through her interaction with Josh, she becomes disinterested in her quest. Campbell explains: “The myths and folk tales of the whole world make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one’s own interest” (59-60). Such an analysis seems comparable to the path taken by Lara. She flirts in a very unsubstantial way with the challenge that has been set for her; she fails, and is quick to return to what she knows.

Lara is reluctant to give up the identity construction of herself that she holds, one that excludes her African heritage. Lara’s course of action is rebellion “I scalped my self, sacked Josh, speared my nose, my little Afro ears coiled a C of silver earrings” (92). Lara is rebelling against the idea that has come to her attention that she has an African heritage; she removes her hair, which had previously acted as a marker of her “otherness”, or “outsider” status at school, compared to Susie’s flowing blond locks. Lara “hated her hair, couldn’t even fit the school beret on, it just bounced off” (63). Taking charge of her appearance

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13 The inability for Lara to get her school hat to fit because of her hair, reflects how, as I quote above, she suggests, that the world “sometimes” revolves without her. The uniform does not fit, as it has not been made with her in mind, as she represents a minority, and so it is as if she does not exist, nothing is designed to fit her, or with her in mind.
through the piercing or her ears, representing her trying to take back and own her appearance, rather than accepting that which has been ascribed through nature, Lara refuses her call to adventure.

Campbell states that the refusal to the call always has negative effects for the hero: "His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless" (59). Campbell suggests that the hero may attempt to carry on in the same vein before the call was received, but that this proves fruitless. Campbell provides the example of the story of King Minor and the Minotaur: "like King Minor, he may through titanic effort succeed in building an empire of renown. Whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death: a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide from his Minotaur" (59). Lara attempts to hide in such a way: "I barricaded myself into an army surplus trench coat" (92), in which she can hide the colour of her skin from herself and others. She avoids the public gaze, resigning herself to the fate Miss Hughes recommended for her, as she attempts to make herself invisible by becoming unapproachable, Lara "fronted a permanent Desperate Dan scowl" (92).

Lara turns to alcohol in response to her teenage anger against the world and as a way of absenting herself (in terms of consciousness) from it and herself. She then decides to travel Europe with her friend as she attempts to hide from her challenge (just as King Minor avoided his challenge through building a labyrinth) and instead embarks on a different journey. However, as with King Minor, Lara cannot escape her call to adventure. The course of Lara's life changes when her maternal grandmother, Edith, dies. It is after this that Lara has an almost fantastical encounter with a ghost like figure in a dream. The death of her relative from her mother's side of her family perhaps represents the end of the silencing and ignoring of her father's side of her dual heritage, as whilst Edith was alive Lara could follow
her lead with regards to not accepting her African heritage. It is this fantastical encounter that encourages Lara to resume her investigation of her father’s side of the family.

The ghost or spirit of her paternal grandmother calls to her in her sleep. Lara seems to be transported from her London bedroom to somewhere far away:

One morning I awoke, not sure if I’d slept at all,
the sun, a Tibetan-monk-orange sprung easily above
the cascade of red-tiled houses down Camden Road
-sunrise at sea. Someone materialised in my room,
like darkroom paper in developer, an image formed,
a woman, I thought, dark skinned, tall, I was not sure
for it quickly faded out into murkiness, then air,
but the music, the wind, the tune, encircled me.
‘Bring him home,’ it sang, ‘Bring him home.’ (101)

It would seem that this is the spirit of her paternal grandmother telling Lara to take her father back to Nigeria. Campbell suggests that it is common for a supernatural helper to appear to those who have accepted the challenge, as well as to those who at first declined: “The hero to whom such a helper appears is typically one who has responded to the call ... But even to those who apparently have hardened their hearts the supernatural guardian may appear” (73-4). Lara’s paternal grandmother appears as a supernatural aid to encourage her on her quest. Lara’s grandmother calls for Lara to travel to her father’s homeland, and so Lara travels with her family to Lagos. It is there that stories of her father’s ancestors are revealed, again in seemingly mystical, spiritual forms, in an almost haunting manner. The inclusion of spirits and ghost-like figures in Lara’s family are fantastical elements in Evaristo’s otherwise realist narrative. Though not to the same degree as Carter and Winterson, Evaristo does challenge
realist conventions. However, I would argue that the manner in which Evaristo does this does not disrupt to the extent of challenging narrative as a viable tool, narrative is not debunked at the level of form, or considered untrustworthy as it is in more formally experimental texts such as Sexing the Cherry.

When Lara first arrives she finds Lagos a difficult place. She has heard horror stories and so is scared (107), she needs time to adjust to the way of life here, as she is homesick for London, and her lifestyle there: "‘What I’d give for a cappuccino and croissant right now’" (107). This represents the “crossing of the first threshold” as described by Campbell, as the familiar life horizon is left behind with trepidation for the new. In myths and fairy tales, the “crossing the threshold” often involves encountering strange and fantastical creatures, such as dragons and ogres. A similar fear of the unknown is experienced by Lara, but during her heroic quest this takes the form of adjusting to a different way of life, such as the different way people interact with each other, travel, and the local cuisine.

Lara has answered her paternal grandmother’s calls in coming to Lagos with her father, and for this the spirits of this side of her family are grateful, as they express to Lara in her dreams: “‘My Omilara, now we take you into memory sleep now, sleep.....” (109). Immediately following this episode Evaristo’s novel takes the reader back to 1931, recounting the history of the island, as well as Zenobia’s (Taiwo’s mother) life and Taiwo’s birth. These stories of Taiwo’s childhood are to this point unknown to both Lara and reader. Through the narrative which recounts Taiwo’s childhood, the reader is introduced to Taiwo’s grandfather, Baba Aguda, who one evening, it is revealed, when Taiwo was a child, he instructed Taiwo to: “‘No go sit on the floor, don’t fidget, shut up and listen as if you were a bat with no eyes’” (120). The story of Baba’s life, and that of his father’s and experiences of slavery are then told: “Baba opened his mouth to speak; ghosts flew out” (130), but, unknown
to Baba: 

"[Taiwo] crept off into twilight" (130). Taiwo, sneaking off as a child means he misses out on these stories: "The world he now entered, Taiwo would never know" (130). Perhaps it is this missed opportunity for Taiwo to learn of his family history which enhances Taiwo's sense of disconnection from his homeland. His colonial education would teach him nothing of this, so like Lara, a generation on, the effects of empire are felt through absence.

After the narrative of Lara's ancestors the novel ends with an epilogue at the point at which it began, with Taiwo leaving for Britain. However, after the epilogue there is another chapter, set in 1995, entitled 'Lara' detailing our heroine as an adult. Lara is in Brazil: "we decelerate into Salvador, where I hope the past will close in on me" (137). Lara continues her travels and her search for her family history. She has changed from the teenager who rejected her heritage, and did not think it important for her to learn about, to being someone who hopes "the past will close in on" (137) her in order for her to learn and understand her heritage. Though her father can't help her, (because he wandered off when his father was telling him about his past) the reader is aware that Lara is in the right place for her quest for knowledge, because the reader was privy to Baba's stories: "Entering the Afro-Brasilerio museum, I secretly hope for a clue, a photograph of a great grandfather or ancestor, whom I will somehow instantly miraculously know" (138).

Lara Completes her Quest

Lara's travels have yielded great results, as although she is not sure how, she feels that she has found what she was looking for: "I watch the jungle fill me up as the boat slices through melted chocolate, its engine, my heart, synchronised" (139). She is happy travelling down the Amazon River, away from her city life, and it is here that she is able to unite, in her head, all of her experiences and the narratives that she has learnt. In a fantastical way the spirits of her ancestors have been able to become her. She is aware of the part of her heritage, and her
culture that was for so long missing, untold: "the river calms me: I become my parents, my ancestors, my gods" (139).

Lara’s journey down the river changes her. Lara is reborn, she reaches an epiphany due to the uncovering of untold stories and histories. Lara wants to make the story known, and through such expression move on, rather than the story of her family being hidden and untold, as it was in Lara’s own childhood. Lara’s journey culminates in her bathing in the Amazon River, a significant symbol often associated with slave narratives, due to the notion of passage from homeland to slavery, as well as the journey Lara has been on to maturity. The river also acts to unite all the disparate elements of Lara’s heritage: “I head for the waterfall at Cachoera do Taruma, descend its slippery banks, strip off, revitalised by icy cascades, I am baptised, resolve to paint slavery out of me, the Daddy people onto canvas with colour-rich strokes” (140). Lara has completed her quest to find out about her heritage and expose that which was hidden for so long and without narrative. Lara is now aware of her heritage: “the African one and embryo within me” (140). Her travels have taught her lessons that she didn’t have access to during her London schooling; and something her father wouldn’t have been taught through his colonial education in Lagos. Lara, in light of the lessons she has learnt, has adjusted her perception of her home: “think of my island – the ‘Great’ tippexed out of it – tiny amid massive floating continents” (140).

Though she has gained a new perspective, she still feels that Britain is home and that she must return: “It is time to leave. Back to London, across international time zones, I step out of Heathrow and into my future” (140). Unlike the protagonist of Sam Selvon’s Lonely Londoners (1956) who ends his quest trapped in the no-man’s land of airport immigration at
Heathrow,\textsuperscript{14} signalling that for him, London is not truly his home, Lara is able to step off the plane, and “into her future”. Lara can return home, and her home is unequivocally London. The similarity between Evaristo’s ending and that of Selvon’s, in that both protagonists contemplate their future and their belonging and both use the symbolism of the “non-space” of an airport (though for Lara the border is something she can easily cross, whereas this is not the case for Moses) positions Evaristo’s text alongside Selvon’s, and a consideration of immigration, home and belonging. The distinction that Lara can return whereas Moses’s re-entry is left in question reflects a change. Lara is accepted back into London, whereas Moses wasn’t, therefore Moses, cannot be aligned with the heroic quest in that he is unable to return to a “home”, as Selvon suggests that Moses essentially doesn’t have a home, which reflects McLeod’s comments (above) that Afro-Caribbeans in London where not accepted as legitimate citizens in many respects. London is without question Lara’s home, evoking a comparison with Selvon’s text suggests a positive change has taken place. The outlook is far more positive for Lara, in terms of the acceptance that her home is London, as it is for characters in Zadie Smith’s \textit{White Teeth} or Monica Ali’s \textit{Brick Lane}. London is represented as much more accommodating, though not without difficulty, than for a previous generation of (fictional) immigrants. However that Evaristo decides to engage with this topic of belonging and home in this, and then again in her later texts suggests that it is still an area in need of consideration.

Lara returns with her “boon” of knowledge, and so completes the quest of the hero. Campbell states the return is a significant aspect of the heroic monomyth, and this certainly is

\textsuperscript{14} Moses having lived in London, returned to the Caribbean for a visit, where he found that he was treated as a tourist. After his trip and whilst trying to return to London he once again occupies the position of a tourist, struggling to get through immigration, emphasising his outsider status. As Sushelia Nasta (1992) discusses, Moses is trapped in a non-place, awaiting to return to London: “Moses caught at the close in a kind of suspended state, just outside (literally) the doors of Britain [more specifically London] at Heathrow airport” (188).
the case for Lara. After her adventure of discovery it is home she feels she must return in order to utilise that which she has learnt, as she has completed the process of growing up, and discovering her identity, so now, having undergone initiation and separation, she must return (initiation, separation and return being the three key stages of Campbell’s monomyth). This is a very positive ending to the novel as subjugated voices of slaves, women and those from the colonies have been heard, and rather than entering life with ignorance Lara has a new perspective as she reaches maturity and ventures forth for the rest of her life.

Lara’s journey is comparable to that undertaken by the writing of the text; both character and author are seeking missing narratives. The production of a text concerned with the marginalized voices of immigrants of the 1960s and mixed race children in London of the 1970s, through the utilisation of a traditionally dominant literary form, the heroic quest narrative, is significant. The use of the heroic monomyth responds to the process of subjugation, absenting and refusal of acceptance as discussed. By using such an archetypal method of characterization, the heroic, which is so strongly linked to myth, Evaristo debunks a popular misconception that up until the middle of the last century Britain was a single-race nation, an ideology which suggests that there was not an African aspect to British culture pre-Windrush. In an interview with Alastair Niven in Writing Across Worlds (2004), Evaristo discusses her own previous misconception on this matter: “Growing up as I did in the 1960s and 1970s we were led to believe that black people came to England post-1948” (280). Evaristo discusses how one historian, Peter Fryer played a fundamental role in changing her attitude. Fryer’s Staying Power (1984) opens by stating how his study provides an account of those people not often found within the history books: “the lives, struggles, and achievements

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15 The Ship The Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury Docks on 22nd June 1948 carrying 492 passengers from Jamaica. The passengers were the first large group of West Indian immigrants to arrive in the UK after the Second World War. The footage of their arrival, and the image of the Caribbean passengers disembarking the vessel, has become an iconic symbol of post-war immigration from the colonies.
of men and women most of whom have been either forgotten or, still more insultingly, remembered as curiosities or objects of condescension" (xi). Fryer states:

Black people – by whom I mean Africans and Asians and their descendants – have been living in Britain for close on 500 years. They have been born in Britain since about the year 1505. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thousands of black youngsters were brought to this country against their will as domestic slaves. Other black people came of their own accord and stayed for a while or settled here. (xi)

Sukhdev Sandhu (London Calling) also provides many examples of people of African and Asian heritage inhabiting the capital city (occupying prominent public position) long before the twentieth century, such as: “A trumpeter from Africa, known as John Blanke (i.e. John White), played for both Henry VII and Henry VIII”,16 commenting “During the sixteenth-century more and more black faces could be seen in the capital” (xiv).

Sandhu demonstrates how the popular misconception of the recent arrival of those with an African or Asian heritage within Britain may be perpetuated: “Popular culture encourages the conflation between London, ethnicity and newness” (xiv), commenting further that:

Part of the problem [in relation to the “othering” and racism experienced by Londoners of African and Asian heritage] may be that blacks and Asians tend to be used in contemporary discourse as metaphors for newness. Op-ed columnists and state-of-the-nation chroniclers invoke them to show how, along with deindustrialization, devolution and globalization, Englishness has changed since the end of the war” (xiv).

16 According to Sandhu “A painted roll belonging to the College of Arms shows him [John Blanke] blowing his horn at the 1511 Westminster Tournament held to celebrate the birth of a son, the short-lived Prince Henry, to Catherine of Aragon” (xiv)
Evaristo becomes, like Fryer, part of the process of readdressing this misconception, and the utilisation of the heroic monomyth is a vital tool in this approach. Just as Fryer firmly states the history of black people in Britain, Evaristo uses a form of characterization which is seen as archaic, related to myths and fairy tales, in order to challenge the attitudes of characters such as Miss Hughes, or Patterson, who feel that characters such as Lara (with an obvious non-white aspect to her heritage) are only entitled to an outsider, visitor status, that “they” should not make “themselves” seen. Miss Hughes’s recommendations to Lara, to be invisible, is synonymous to which has happened to the black history of Britain as Evaristo refers to it as “an aspect of British history that hasn’t been fully recognised and that is still invisible to most people” (Writing Across Worlds 280).

As Lara metaphorically uncovers the missing photographs from her grandmother’s display, Evaristo also re-addresses an absence within British literature. Those previously marginalized are placed proudly in clear view, just like all the other family photographs. Evaristo claims back narrative through using a mythic character of the hero, a characterization, which as Campbell suggests, is universally recognisable. Her novel can sit alongside all those other narratives which contribute to the plethora of voices which make up

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17 Campbell provides many detailed examples of heroic stories which he suggests fit into the heroic monomyth model, over a vast period of time, and from all over the world, as he summaries: “whether presented in the vast, almost oceanic images of the Orient, in the vigorous narratives of the Greeks, or in the majestic legends of the Bible, the adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit above described: a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return. The whole of the Orient has been blessed by the boon brought back by Gautama Buddha - his wonderful teaching of the Good Law - just as the Occident has been by the Decalogue of Moses...Everywhere, no matter what the sphere of interest (whether religious, political, or personal), the really creative acts are represented as those deriving from some sort of dying to the world; and what happens in the interval of the hero’s nonentity, so that he comes back as one reborn, made great and filled with creative power, mankind is also unanimous in declaring.” (35-6). Campbell further suggests that the heroic monomyth is symbolically important within contemporary culture, and that an understanding of the nuclear unit will “help us to understand not only the meaning of those images from contemporary life, but also the singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers, vicissitudes and wisdom” (36). Therefore, the aligning of contemporary texts with the heroic monomyth furthers Campbell’s engagement with the nuclear unit, as I suggest it is a viable expression of characterization within a variety of contemporary London texts, utilised by a set of authors, perhaps engaging with that which is usually at the periphery, in an attempt to suggest universalism, and it is at the level of style, such as linear narrative and heroic characterization which these authors choose to engage with such a process of avoiding subjugation as opposed to a challenge to form.
millennial London fiction, and can be judged equally amongst them, as opposed to occupying a specific place with potentially a narrower readership if it were more experimental in form.

**Reading Sarah Waters's Characterization through the Heroic Monomyth**

Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* offers another example of a text which can be read along the lines of Campbell's theories on the hero. *Tipping the Velvet* recounts the story of Nancy Astley, an Oyster girl from Whitstable. The young protagonist leaves the small seaside town to seek fame, fortune and love in London. The heroine ventures from the safety of her community: “Whitstable was all the world to me...for eighteen years I never doubted my own oyster-ish sympathies, never thought far beyond my father's kitchen for occupation, or for love” (4) into an unknown land, that of London. The story of the path Nancy treads is a very familiar one, it seems very much like a bildungsroman, but what makes it different from the tradition we have come to expect from the London bildungsroman is the gender and sexuality of the protagonist.

Campbell describe the path of the heroic adventurer: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered” (30). The manner in which Waters depicts Nancy's life in Whitstable, as the common and everyday, which she leaves behind to travel to London, allows Nancy to be read as a hero. London is to Nancy a strange and distant land full of “fabulous forces”, such as the variety of people and theatres there: “I had not known there were theatres like this in the world. I had not known that there was such a place as this, at all – this place that was so squalid and so splendid, so ugly and so grand, where every imaginable manner of person stood or strolled, or lounged, side by side” (65-6). This strange mix, of people and places, a world seemingly of opposites represents the mythical world that, according to Campbell, the hero conventionally ventures into.
As previously discussed, according to the nuclear unit of the monomyth, the hero initially receives a call to adventure, "A blunder – apparently the merest chance reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (51). In Nancy’s case, she stumbles upon Kitty performing at a music hall. As soon as Nancy sees Kitty she is struck by her: "the most marvellous girl – I knew it at once! – that I had ever seen" (12). From this first encounter Nancy decides to visit the theatre every day in order to see Kitty. Nancy eventually has the opportunity to meet Kitty through an acquaintance who works at the theatre. Nancy is unsure as to what it is that is compelling her need to see Kitty, as Nancy encounters "forces" that she doesn’t understand.

Nancy becomes Kitty’s dresser. When Kitty gets a contract to work in the music halls in London, Kitty invites Nancy to go with her, which eventually leads to Nancy’s own career on the stage singing and dancing. Nancy’s meeting with Kitty seems therefore to be a "blunder", "the merest chance", but as Campbell discusses, according to Sigmund Freud (The Psychopathology of Everyday Life)18 "blunders are not the merest chance. They are the result of suppressed desires and conflicts… The blunders may amount to the opening of a destiny" (Campbell 51). Nancy’s adventure therefore seems to begin in this way as she happens upon Kitty, which initiates her travels, as well as perhaps her destiny, which is to perform on the stage.19

Campbell aligns the call to adventure with the first stage of adolescences which he refers to as "the awakening of the self", drawing on Evelyn Underhill’s (Mysticism, A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness) work on the development of Spiritual Consciousness.20 Campbell discusses this stage in relation to the Brothers

18 Campbell refers to The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. Standard Edn., VI (1901).
19 Nancy often sang during her work in her father’s shop, and obviously has a talent for singing.
20 Campbell refers in particular to Part II, “The Mystic Way” Chapter II, “The Awakening of the Self”.

Nancy often sang during her work in her father’s shop, and obviously has a talent for singing.
Grimm’s fairy tale ‘The Frog King’: “In the case of the princess of the fairy tale, it signified no more than the coming of adolescence” (51). Campbell further defines the stage as a defining moment in the princess’s life, just as it is for Nancy: “the call rings up the curtain, always, on mystery or transfiguration – a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth” (51). For Nancy this “awakening” is her realisation of her sexuality through the love she encounters for Kitty. The feelings of love she feels confuse her, she is naively unaware that women can love each other as “sweethearts”, as she later admits to Kitty: “I thought, that if you knew I liked you as a, as a sweetheart – well, I never heard of such a thing before, did you?” (107). Nancy’s befriending of Kitty, and leaving Whitstable, her home, family and lifestyle is a significant change in her life, something she seemingly wouldn’t have previously even thought possible.

At eighteen, Nancy has obviously already gone through adolescence, unlike the princess whom Campbell discusses, who is much younger; however, it is not until she leaves her home that Nancy begins her journey of awakening sexuality and maturity. The character of Kitty functions as a guide on this journey, initiating the first step, as it is through Kitty that Nancy discovers her sexuality; up to this point she had a “beau”. Campbell’s description of the guide figure that often appears in myths, aptly applies to the function Kitty has within Waters’s story:

Whether dream or myth, in these adventures there is an atmosphere of irritable fascination about the figure that appears suddenly as guide, marking a new period, a new stage, in the biography. That which has to be faced, and is somehow profoundly familiar to the unconscious – though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality – makes itself known; and what formerly was meaningful may become strangely emptied of value. (55)
This is very true in Nancy’s case; she is obsessed with being with Kitty, and her previous family life and home, which once meant so much to her, is of less importance, almost forgotten: “Now I never went to bed before three, and never woke in the morning before nine or ten o’clock – so swiftly and completely had I forgotten my old oyster-maidish habits” (85). Nancy expresses how she has changed: “Whitstable became not dimmer, in my mind, but overshadowed ... I thought of Kitty and my new life more” (85).

**London and Nancy’s Road of Trials**

By going to London Nancy has passed the “first threshold”, and so begins her “road of trials,” as Campbell describes: “This is a favourite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals” (97). Once Nancy has ventured to the strange and distant land of London, she has to undertake a “road of trials” on her journey to maturity. Campbell comments that the hero faces many trials during the adventure: “The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and illumination” (109). This is certainly the case for Nancy, once she has moved to London with Kitty there are still many challenges she has to face and overcome. Kitty buys Nancy a dress for Christmas, and this acts as a point at which Nancy reflects on how she has changed: “I wasn’t use to thinking of myself as a grown-up woman, but now...I began at last to feel like one – and to realize, indeed, that I was one: that I was eighteen, and had left my father’s house perhaps forever, and earned my own living and paid rent for my own rooms in London” (original italics 95). Though at this time in her life she feels as if she has reached maturity, Nancy later realises, looking back that this is not the case: “I was eighteen, and I knew nothing” (117). The false sense of maturity and confidence coincides with what Campbell describes as an aspect of the monomyth: “Dragons have to be slain and surprising barriers passed – again,
again and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land” (109). Nancy wearing her dress at Christmas can be read as one such “unretainable ecstasy”, a “glimpse at the wonderful land”. Nancy is living and working with Kitty and she feels happy and grown up, but she cannot stay at this stage in her life forever; her quest is not over yet.

One of the biggest challenges Nancy faces is her love for Kitty, a love that is reciprocated, but must always be hidden, and unspoken according to Kitty: “making love to Kitty – a thing done in passion, but always, too, in shadow and in silence” (127). Their first kiss is described by Waters through an indirect narration, the reader is to presume the events and piece together the information that is provided. Literally there are no words to describe their actions, emphasising Waters’s task of writing about something that many people feel has to be kept secret, and with no open literary tradition. As with Evaristo’s subject matter absences and silences antithetically reveal so much. Kitty prefaces their first kiss with: “‘You won’t tell a soul, Nan – will you?’” (102) reinforcing the secrecy which must surround their relationship. To this, Nancy does not reply, but acts: “I dipped my face to hers, and shut my eyes” (103). The silence which surrounds their relationship during the moments of their first embrace acts as a fictional representation of the “closet” Eve Koswofsky Sedgwick discusses, as she discusses homosexuality as that which is subjugated and not openly discussed by society: “silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet...ignorance is as potent and as multiple a thing there as is knowledge” (4). The silences and absences are of course reminiscent of those found within Evaristo’s texts. Nancy recounts their first kiss: “Her mouth was chill, at first, then very warm – the only warm thing, it seemed to me, in the whole of the frozen city” (103). The “chill” of the frozen city around them further
compared to the warmth they share reinforces how Kitty and Nancy are isolated from the rest of the city. Kitty is anxious that someone may see them kissing: “she took her lips away…after a moment, to give a quick, anxious glance towards our hunched and nodding driver” (103), highlighting the constant fear that Kitty feels about her love for Nancy, and people’s reactions to it if they were to find out.

This fear remains throughout their relationship; Kitty always encourages Nancy to “be careful,” but the secrecy frustrates Nancy: “How could it be easy to stand cool and distant from her in the day, when we had spent all night with our naked limbs pressed hot and close together” (original italics 127). Nancy confides in her sister Alice of her love for Kitty, as she feels that she and Kitty should be able to live freely together. But Alice thinks that the love between Kitty and Nancy is wrong, suggesting that the love her family have for her is “proper” (134) love, as opposed to the improper kind she shares with Kitty. Alice believes that Nancy’s feelings are so immoral that Nancy “must never speak of it” (134). Alice’s attitude again reflects how Waters is writing about something that has been marginalized, literally silenced, seeming not to exist, not even acknowledged in law, as homosexual acts between women were not outlawed as other homosexual acts between men were.

21 The cold isolation of London further serves as a fictional representation of the ‘closet’, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick Epistemology of the Closet.

22 The parliamentary “Bugger Act” of 1533 was a sodomy law adopted by England in 1534 and was the first civil legislation against sodomy. The law defined sodomy as an unnatural sexual act against the will of God and man. This was later defined by the courts to only include anal sex and bestiality. The act established punishment of buggery to be hanging. Note other sexual activities were not specifically criminalised, nor were sexual acts between women. “The Law in England 1290-1885” records: “In 1885 Mr. Labouchere introduced an amendment to the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885. It read:-

“48&49 Vict. c.69, 11: Any male person who, in public or private, commits or is party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.” So for the first time private acts were brought under the scope of the law, as were acts other than
There is no open acceptance of Nancy's and Kitty's homosexual lifestyle in society as everything is geared towards heterosexuality: "the great front bedroom with its great high bed that the house-builders had meant for a husband and wife" (146). Nancy feels an outsider; Waters extenuates this feeling through the affinity and empathy Nancy shares with other marginalized people in society. One example is Flora's "beau" Billy-Boy, an African "who had run away from his sailing family in Wapping to join a minstrel troupe" (149). Mrs Milne's daughter offers another example of an "outsider" Nancy empathises with. Gracie is described as "simple", she has a strange attraction to colour, she assigns a colour to each day, and becomes upset if her mother and Nancy do not wear and eat food of the corresponding colour. Nancy however, does not judge her for her difference: "Gracie's way was quite as valid a philosophy, I thought, as many others" (216).

Nancy learns that not everyone thinks that her homosexual love is wrong. Tony Reeves, who introduced her to Kitty at the theatre he was working at, is one such example. When Nancy returns to Whitstable for a few days and visits Tony she believes that he is aware of her and Kitty's relationship: "I had the queerest impression, too, that he knew more than he was letting on — an didn't care a fig about it" (165). Waters's use of the word "queer" here is interesting; it demonstrates alternatives to the homosexual matrix, but also as Emily Jeremiah notes, the repeated use of the word has another effect: "Present-ness is also stressed in Tipping by the repeated use of the word "queer", whose insistent use appeals to and affirms a contemporary queer sensibility" ("The "I" insider "her"" 133). Waters in her anal penetration. This became the famous blackmailer's charter, and was the law used to convict Oscar Wilde."

\<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/englaw.htm\> (03/12/08). Even in the amendment homosexual acts between women were not criminalised, perhaps because it was not thought to exist, or to be of significance to be outlawed.

23 As Emily Jeremiah notes, "The Oxford English Dictionary gives 1922 as the date of the first use of the word 'queer' to denote homosexuality" ("The "I" Inside "Her"" 133). See also Mark Llewellyn "'Queer? I should say it is Criminal!'" for a further discussion of the use of this term.
text gives a voice to those marginalized by the dominant culture, and the use of the word “queer” reminds us of this marginalisation and outsider status. Waters achieves this repositioning through using a heroic character and linear narrative, which firmly places her novel at the centre of a literary tradition. As Campbell suggests, the heroic quest is something that has been used in much great literature to tell a vast variety of stories. Waters’s utilisation of the heroine aligns her text with such literature as opposed to divorcing lesbian representation from the mainstream as Waters challenges the absence of female homosexuality in historic narratives and cultural imagination of “Dickensian” London. Significantly it is to a reimagining of a particular historic period that Waters chooses to reposition the female homosexual experience, “Waters exposes the blind spots in official history through her choice of marginalized, silenced heroines” (Ciocia NPg). Kohlke, also asserts, as Ciocia records, how “Waters’s fiction gives voice to “the historically silenced and forgotten who have no history” (Kohlke, 156, original italics)” (Ciocia NPg).

Campbell suggests that the hero, once on the road of trials, has many thresholds to cross. One such challenge that Nancy has to face is the discovery of Kitty’s relationship with Walter. Becoming Kitty’s lover, and living and working with her had made Nancy feel as if the “wonderful land” had been reached. But the reader realizes, as Nancy eventually does, that this is in fact only a glimpse, as she still has, metaphorically, “many dragons to slay” and many challenges to overcome. Devastated by Kitty’s affair, Nancy leaves their home; she is distraught and confused as she walks aimlessly across London. Waters writes these events in a manner which evokes the heroic quest, she writes of Nancy as being “defeated”: “He [Walter] was my rival; and he had defeated me, at last” (173), evoking an image of Walter as one of the dragons that our hero has failed to slay. Waters’s description of Nancy’s actions after her discovery of Kitty and Walter together further aligns Nancy with the heroic
monomyth; she “fled” (173), an action that evokes images of a hero escaping from a challenge, as opposed to a more “realist” description of someone leaving a relationship. Nancy leaves with a physical burden of her possessions, which represent her emotional burden, packed into a bag, “London absorbed” (177) Nancy in an almost melodramatic scene. This concludes Part One of the novel, hinting to the reader that one part of the heroic quest has been completed, but that many trials lie ahead. As the first stage of the story closes the hero has been defeated and therefore her quest must continue.

In Part Two of the novel Nancy once again uses the name of Nancy Astley, as opposed to her stage name Nan King, signalling the end of this part of her life. Initially at the end of her relationship with Kitty she is very depressed, finding a room to rent, and locking herself in it. She is aware that she cannot express her feelings to anyone as her love for Kitty isn’t supposed to exist. She is isolated, unable to explain why she is so sad. “[T]he world smiled to see” (190) Kitty and Walter together, Nancy recounts, as theirs is a love which is allowed: “They embraced on the street, and strangers were glad! While all the time I lived pale as a worm, cast out from pleasure, from comfort and ease” (190). Nancy’s pain has to be concealed; there are, once again, no words to express it.

**London and the Single Female**

After a few months Nancy reaches an epiphany as she begins the next stage of her life, and passes another threshold (as Campbell describes the hero must). Nancy recovers from her mourning of her lost love Kitty, after months of concealment, she is ready to live again. She experiences a rebirth after the death of her relationship, feeling once again “life” in her limbs:

I paced the floor: but it was not with wretchedness that I paced, it was as if to try out new limbs, to feel my whole self shift and snap and tingle with life. I hauled open the
window of my bedroom, and leaned out into the dark – into the never-quite dark of the London night, with its sounds and scents that, for so long, I had been shut from. (190)

Nancy has to face her next challenge; to live without Kitty. She finds this difficult as she has not previously experienced travelling alone in the city and once again she feels an outsider: “I was a solitary girl, in a city that favoured sweethearts and gentlemen” (191). Nancy feels uncomfortable as a lone female in the city, so begins to dress as a male (she still has her costumes from her time as a male impersonator on the stage). Nancy blunders into a life as a rent boy, just as she had blundered into her stage career with Kitty: “easily – as easily, and fatefully, as I had first begun my music-hall career – thus easily did I refine my new impersonations, and become a renter” (202), this signals Nancy passing another threshold; the passing of many thresholds being a necessary part of the monomyth on the road of trials (see above).24 Nancy’s heart has been broken, she feels that she will never love again, and so doesn’t attempt to find such a life. Instead she takes her stage act to the streets, and manages to detach herself from the things she is asked to do by her clients, as pretence is nothing new for Nancy, as she was forced to live a lie by Kitty, she can’t live freely as she would want to, so she pretends to be something else.

Nancy even begins to empathise with her male clients, who, thinking she is a boy, desire her to carry out sexual favours for them: “His pleasure had turned, at the last, to a kind of grief; and his love was a love so fierce and so secret it must be satisfied with a stranger, in a reeking court like this. I knew about that kind of love” (200). Nancy comes to greater realisation as a result of these experiences, that everything is not always as it may seem: “I had learnt that London life was even stranger and more various than I had ever thought it; but I had learned too that not all its great variety was visible to the casual eye … that some, out of

24 Though Campbell does not refer to cross dressing as a necessary part of the heroic monomyth, the crossing of many different thresholds and the entering of many different worlds can be part of the road of trials.
fear, kept themselves hidden, and only exposed themselves to those upon whose sympathies they could be sure” (200-1). Waters metaphorically represents what can happen to marginal voices in fiction. Nancy has been excluded from having “a happy ending” living with Kitty, and so instead she lives a life of pretence, on the margins of society, pretending to be a rent boy. Male prostitution is not a viable alternative to the life Nancy wants, she can exist, as she later does with Diana, in a homosexual relationship, but not at this point, in an accepted or conventional lifestyle.

Post-postmodernism: An Alternative?

The unsatisfactory alternative that Nancy experiences may be understood as an exemplom of the position postmodernism offers the marginalized following Alison Lee’s definition. Lee aligns the postmodern and the marginal: “In questioning [the] “cultural authority,” and its apparently eternal and transcendental truths, postmodernism shares concerns with those who, because of class, race, gender or sexual preference, are “other” than and have been marginalized, by the dominant tradition” (xi). However Lee’s implication that the marginal perspective can only be expressed through a rejection of the culturally dominant seems limiting. Nancy’s outsider status and isolation symbolically offer a fictional representation of the positioning offered by a postmodernism which denies access to mainstream cultural modes in favour of further marginalisation at the level of form. Though in Lara and Tipping the Velvet Evaristo and Waters provide a challenge to the authority of the culturally “normalised” as they express the marginal, writers such as Waters and Evaristo go beyond Lee’s definitions of postmodernism, and instead can be considered as post-postmodern. Evaristo investigates African slave narratives, colonial narratives, diasporic narratives, and

25 A trait Craig Owens associates with the postmodern as he defines it as a “crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and institutions” (“The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism” 57).
those of dual heritage children in London. Waters challenges the dominant heterosexual representations of Victorian London, and the institutions at the time which excluded homosexual couples. Yet significantly neither Evaristo nor Waters do this through the application of postmodern narrative techniques such as narrative tricks, play, or distrust, such as those found in John Fowles' *The Magus* (1966), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), or Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985), texts Lee closely aligns with her definition of postmodernism.

Lee suggests that: "Typographical complexity, as well as obvious and often strident play with the reader, give the Realist conventions much less authority" (xii). Lee, giving the example of Graham Swift’s *Waterland*, which she states seems at first to be a "Realist text"(xii); argues: "postmodernist techniques challenge Realist conventions from within the very conventions they wish to subvert" (xii) and that though "Realism" may "still have control over the way in which literature is read, taught, and evaluated" (xiii), "postmodern challenges to Realist conventions suggest that this authority ...[is] at least under interrogation" (xiii). However I suggest that, writers such as Waters and Evaristo, as discussed in the Introduction, who, in light of a postmodern challenge to form, continue to engage with traditional forms, rather than simply reject them, can be read as moving beyond the focus on formal interrogation of realism and instead utilise the cultural authority of the centre that a foothold within traditional, realist forms, can bring as they attempt to resituate the margins at the centre. That they engage with traditional narrative techniques and characterization, such as the heroic quest may be due to the relative cultural capital that is still afforded conventional styles and forms in popular discourse, which clearly has implications for the legacy of the postmodern endeavour which Lee describes above as these

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26 An example being how Nancy notes that houses are built with a certain heterosexual ideals in mind, as quoted above.
writers do not use form to subvert realism from within, but rather attempt to subvert the dominant centre through the use of realism and classical styles. It is in light of such a consideration, in which writers focus less on formal innovation and reengage, reimagine, and repopulate the centre with the use of classical forms, that a post-postmodern reading can be applied to these texts. Just as Nancy's impersonating a male prostitute does not fulfil her desire to be able to live freely expressing her homosexual preference, being excluded from culturally dominant forms of narrative for these authors, does not offer a liberatory or equalising effects for the subjugated, marginalized or excluded. They have instead chosen to attempt to appropriate and adapt the centre.

The name of one of Waters's characters, Walter Waters, makes the author's presence felt within the novel, in almost a nod to a postmodern metafictional device as, as previously discussed, these authors often demonstrate within their texts an awareness of postmodern perspectives and narrative devices. Waters includes another instance of an almost metafictional self awareness in that the narrator articulates an acknowledgement of the form and of what is involved in a good story: "I wish, for sensations sake ... But if I said these things I would be lying" (58). However, in every other way Waters remains firmly external to the text and the novel follows less experimental storytelling techniques. These devices seek to further the acknowledgment that the text is moving beyond the postmodern, by providing a small nod to elements associated with postmodernism, as these texts do not simply offer a return to a style predating postmodernism, but in fact the relationship is clearly more complex than such would suggest. This small authorial "play" therefore acknowledges postmodern techniques, but does not detract from the overall credibility of the narrative form, and thus assists in reading the text as moving beyond the domination of postmodernism's first wave. Nancy refers to events and places contemporary to her, as if the reader can share in
these recollections: "If you have ever seen a panto at the Brit" Nancy comments, "you will know how marvellous they are" (148). This furthers the pretence that Waters's text is a contemporary of Dickens or Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and thus assists in the placing of female homosexual narratives within a central group of dominant writers and an association with traditional storytelling styles.

Waters’s characters appreciate structural artifice, Nancy relishes the décor of the music halls and enjoys the convention of their appearance: "Here you know yourself to be not just at a show but in a theatre: you caught the shape of the stage and the sweep of the seats" (original italics 9). Nancy’s joy of the structure of the theatre, appreciating the layout of the walls, the stage, the seating of the audience, can be equated to Waters’s storytelling technique, as Tipping the Velvet reengages with traditional structures of storytelling. Waters’s text is part of a process of appropriation and adaptation of archetypal storytelling structures; while she may change the content (just as the acts within the theatre’s structure which Nancy celebrates can vary) of the "traditional" novel, in that she provides the marginalized female homosexual perspective, the reader can still recognise and appreciate the form and structure. Waters’s novel therefore implicitly suggests that the structure of form does not need to be broken down in order to challenge the content. Waters does not deconstruct narrative or traditional storytelling techniques in a postmodern rejection or fragmentation of these, yet she does offer the reader alternate content in her novel in the form of previously missing, or subjugated voices as by writing a lesbian historical novel Waters participates in a process of centralising a perspective which is underrepresented within fictional reimaginings of Victorian London.

Narratives of the Marginalized
Waters's reference to Narcissus (132) emphasises the association of archetypal characterization, such as those that can be found in myth and the use of culturally dominant motives. During the direct referencing of this mythical character the novel describes how Nancy feels that there is a lack of description for herself, that there aren't even words readily available for her to use (similar to the situation Evaristo's character Taiwo finds himself in) to describe herself. This becomes evident through Nancy's attraction to alternative methods of writing about gender (in a very literal manner), as she spots an advertisement seeking a lodger: “there was something very appealing about that *Fe-male* — I saw myself in it — in the hyphen” (original italics 211). Nancy here is still on her journey to finding out about herself, beyond the in-between space of a hyphen. It is with Florence that Nancy eventually settles down to “live happily ever after”, in a family and with a supportive community around her. Nancy encounters Florence during her quest, but as she hasn’t completed her journey to maturity, or gained the boon of knowledge, Nancy isn’t attracted to her. Nancy spots Florence from her balcony at Mrs Milne's house: “with the lamplight at last turned upon her face I had seen that she was not at all handsome” (221). Nancy in her immaturity is quite shallow: “She is not what you might term a beauty” (224), criticising her teeth, her eyes, and her hair “the kind of hair we had all been thankful, as girls, that we did not have” (224). However Nancy is aware of something interesting about Florence’s manner: “there was something wonderfully intriguing about her tranquillity at my strange behaviour — as if women donned gents’ trousers all the time, as if they made love to girls on balconies so often that she was used to it” (224).

Just as Campbell suggests can be part of the quest, the heroine has seen a glimpse of the “wonderful land”, where she would not be an outsider, because Florence has many homosexual friends, and lives in a community where “otherness” is more accepted, making
Nancy’s actions not a spectacle, or remarkable in anyway. Nancy notices how Florence seems comfortable with female attention, and that “certainly nobody gazing at her, would ever think to sneer and call out ‘Tom!’” (original emphasis 224-5). Florence’s demeanour confuses Nancy. At this point in her quest Nancy does not have the experience or knowledge (the boon) to understand that Florence is not perturbed by female attention because there are many people who share her feelings, living with their female partners in “ordinary” lives, not being labelled “toms”. For Nancy, at this stage in her life, homosexuality can only exist openly in the realm of performance, something done to shock or subvert.

Nancy’s quest is not over, though she has the opportunity to find out more about Florence, she passes this chance up. Nancy chooses the wrong path, away from happiness, and towards another challenge, Diana, and another metaphorical dragon to slay. It hasn’t even occurred to Nancy that she could be happy living with Florence, because at this point Nancy hasn’t realised that she can be happy without Kitty, or that she can live with people who will accept her sexuality. Nancy is still quite innocent, unaware that people have many different sexual preferences, and that Diana may be aware that Nancy is a male impersonator (233). Nancy’s encounter with Diana signals her crossing another threshold, as much of her innocence is shattered. Nancy comments on this change, with the very terms associated with the monomyth: “This was the third and most alarming threshold I had crossed for her tonight” (238). Significantly Nancy’s encounter with Diana sees her resume her stage name, as their relationship is within the realm of a performance, it is akin to work for Nancy. Diana’s “presto” (240) upon undressing Nancy gives their sexual act a theatrical, performance quality. Their physical relationship is aligned to fantasy, rather than emotion, it is “othered” at the level of form, due to the association with performance.
Homosexual acts for Nancy are distinct from heterosexual ones; they can only be aligned with the stage, a spectacle, whereas, I suggest that through the writing of a heroic narrative, Waters eschews such a limiting perspective, a perspective that Nancy herself "grows out" of. Nancy learns a lot from Diana, that there are many women in London who have similar sexual preferences to herself. However, ultimately Diana is just another challenge for our hero, as Nancy has to overcome the hurdle of thinking of sexual relations with women as such theatrical affairs. Nancy detaches herself from her feelings and just becomes an act, but for Diana, instead of on the stage, "Diana was my only audience" (264). Nancy compares the grooming of herself in preparation for Diana, to getting ready for a performance: "It was quite like dressing for the halls again" (264).

Nancy at this stage in her life does not benefit from knowledge or experience, but is young, and "living for the moment", as the example of the Persian story with the beggar and the djinn suggests. This fable aligns Waters's narratives with fairy tales and myths, and so reflects Waters's attempt to write female homosexuality into the history of such narratives, as it is not overtly present within many myths, fables and fairytales; as well as highlighting how Nancy, as a heroine still has much to learn. The use of and associating a fairytale with a lesbian narrative is emblematic of the re-visioning process Waters has undertaken, as Jeremiah summarises: "Waters's work challenges such a view of history [that it is "neat and gleaming and complete"], exposing it as messier and more queer than traditionally assumed" (134). In the Persian story a beggar is asked to choose between seventy years of comfort and five hundred days of luxury. Nancy is attracted to the pleasure and says she would choose the five hundred days of luxury. Choosing Diana over her date with Florence reflects the choice that Nancy has made in the tale, as she is drawn to instant gratification as opposed to believing in long term happiness or the possibility of a lasting relationship. However, Nancy
looking back on her life, having completed her quest and gained the boon of knowledge
realises her mistake: "I never thought to ask what happened to the beggar in the tale, once the
five hundred days came to an end" (250). Waters's allegory of the fable draws a parallel for
the reader between Nancy's story with an ancient one, the suggestion therefore being that
similar stories have happened throughout time, and so seeks to align Nancy's story with
archetypal ones, a commonality can be read, and as such Waters's text can be read in terms of
seeking to fill the gaps in history and repopulate such culturally dominant motives as
Victorian fiction, or even the fairy tale with previously subjugated or underrepresented voices
in a liberal rewriting and revisiting of such moments.

At the hands of Diana, as with Walter, it would appear that Nancy has suffered
another defeat. Diana casts her aside when she finds her having sex with Zena Blake,
Diana's servant. Through her encounter with Diana, Nancy begins a process of awakening,
as Nancy realises that she is not happy in this situation, living as a sex servant for Diana. In
her life with Florence, Nancy is treated very differently from how she has become
accustomed whilst living with Diana: "no one had ever asked me anything, because they
never thought I might have had an opinion worth soliciting; but at least they had liked to look
at me. At Florence's house no one looked at me at all" (378). Nancy is not used to being
considered in this way, distinct from simply being looked at. Nancy becomes involved in
Florence's socialist work. At first Nancy hates her charity work, and doesn't really
understand it. However eventually Nancy changes her opinion and starts to understand what
Florence, and her brother Ralph, and the others involved in this work are seeking to achieve.
Nancy is able to appreciate both points of view, from a wealthy perspective, as well as a poor
one, having experienced both, and realises herself how she is changing, as she meets people
working in terrible conditions to make luxurious clothing that rich people buy. Seeing the
work these women do reminds her of the life she lead with Diana: "The pretty monogram had reminded me suddenly of Felicity Place, and all the lovely suits that I had worn there...I had not known then that they were sewn in rooms like this one, by women as sad as Mrs Fryer; but if I had, would I have cared? I knew that I would not, and felt now horribly uncomfortable and ashamed" (388).

Now Nancy has become less selfish, she has gained the boon of knowledge, by realising how some people have to live, and through Florence she is changing. People like Mrs Fryer have affected her, her guilt makes her give Mrs Fryer some money, but she realises that this is not what Florence's work is about: "I felt as if I had slapped the woman, not given her a gift" (389), as she had embarrassed her. Florence explains that this is not what the Women's Guild are trying to establish; as it is not a charity, and so Nancy's actions go against the equality and better conditions that the Guild are fighting for, as Florence explains to Nancy: "Now she will think the Guild is made of women who are better than her, not women just like herself, trying to help themselves" (389). The discussion of the changes which Florence and the Women's Guild are seeking thematizes the process Waters undertakes. She does not pursue a marginalized position for lesbian fiction, instead Waters demonstrates how her fiction should be accepted into the canon, and the narratives of her characters can be told and read in the same manner and alongside those of the literary "greats". Postmodernism, which in part sought to blur and challenge the distinction between "high" and "popular" art (as Peter Barry discusses 81), and thus centre and margin, therefore seems to relate to Waters's fictional endeavour, however though the distinction between postmodernism and post-postmodernism may seem subtle, it is key. What makes Waters's plight distinct from the aspects of postmodern (as defined in pervious chapters) which are under consideration in this thesis, is that Waters in her fiction situates the marginal within the
centre, rather than a simple blurring of the boundaries. Waters and Evaristo in the texts discussed in this chapter are engaging in an art form which can be judged alongside that which has traditionally occupied the centre. These writers chose not to occupy a marginalized form and challenge the distinctions between the two, or suggest that the centre and the margin should be judged equally; but rather the marginal are brought into the centre. Just as Florence desires Mrs Fryer to be part of a group of equals, Waters's writing situates the historic lesbian novel within the centre, and positions her text/heroine as an equal.

Nancy's living with Florence, Ralph and Cyril is a defining moment in her journey. She can be more open about her sexuality, even though this is not what she set out to do: "I had come to Quilter Street to be ordinary; now I was more of a tom than ever" (403). Florence, Ralph and even the neighbours don't seem to mind that she wears trousers, as people are more accepting of difference, and as it is such a poor area, people don't mind how you look: "in some houses in Bethnal Green, after all, it was a luxury to have any sort of clothes at all, and you regularly saw women in their husband's jackets, and sometimes a man in a shawl" (407). She feels free to wear her hair short, as she prefers it to be: "it was not like she was cutting hair, it was as if I had a pair of wings beneath my shoulder blades, that the flesh had all grown over, and she was slicing free" (405). Nancy comes to realise that there is an even greater mix of people in some parts of London, which means that people are more accepting of difference, not less so, as she thought would be the case: "'The truth is,' Annie went on, 'there is such a mix round these parts, what with Jews and Lascars, Germans, and Poles, Socialists, anarchists, Salvationists... The people are surprised at nothing'" (424).

Nancy is aware of the change that she is going through: "By now I had grown so at home in Bethnal Green that I could barely believe I had ever lived anywhere else, or imagine a time when Quilter Street routines were not my own" (406). She even reconsiders her
opinion of Florence’s appearance, as she develops an attraction to her: “looking again at all the features I had once thought plain” (426). The heroine’s quest is almost complete. Nancy has gained the boon of knowledge, she has completed her road of trials, and now she must return home. However, as Campbell suggests this can be a difficult path. She has to “cross the return threshold”, and for a short period she may be the “master of two worlds”.

Nancy realises that she is attracted to Florence, and has changed her opinion on her socialist work, however, as Florence thinks of a past lover when she is with Nancy, so too does Nancy think of Kitty when she is with Florence: “It was true, I couldn’t say it. It was Kitty I had kissed first and hardest” and after everything that Nancy has been through, nothing “had quite washed those kisses away” (432). At this point, although Nancy and Florence have a relationship, Nancy hasn’t completed her quest, as she has not found love and happiness: “We had struck a kind of bargain. We had fixed to kiss forever. We had never once said, I love you” (438). As Campbell suggests, the hero is reluctant to give up the wonders of the magical world, and for Nancy this is the love that she experienced with Kitty: “The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfilment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life” (Campbell 218). Both Florence and Nancy have difficulty in accepting that their previous love affairs are over.

At the socialist demonstration that Florence has been a key figure in organising, Nancy encounters figures from her past. One of them is Zena, who now has a sweetheart, Maude. Zena remarks that Maude is too young to remember Nancy from the music halls, but is aware of Florence and her work. Maude asks Nancy if she will get Florence’s autograph for her (448). This episode reveals how Nancy has left her music halls days behind her as Florence is the more famous of the two, reflecting how things have moved on. Nancy herself
recollects the journey she has been on since living with Diana: "I hate to think of those days, Zena, I'm all changed now" (449).

At the demonstration Nancy encounters her final challenge as a hero before she can freely live happily with Florence. Nancy encounters, and overcomes, the challenge of her past, Kitty. Kitty wants Nancy to resume their relationship, apologising for the way that Nancy found out about her and Walter, however, Kitty hasn’t changed, she is only offering Nancy the chance to be her mistress as Kitty would remain married to Walter. Nancy realises that Kitty can, and has only ever offered her half a life: "We were so careful, we might as well have been dead" (466). Nancy, through her heroic quest has learnt that there is a better life for her to lead, with Florence: "I have a new girl now, who’s not ashamed to be my sweetheart" (466). Kitty can’t believe that it is possible for Nancy to feel the same about Florence as she once did about her: "You don’t love her ... Not as you loved me" (466). She continues, suggesting that a life with Florence can’t be the life that Nancy wants, as it is so different from her life with Kitty: "You don’t belong with her and her sort ... Look at your clothes, how plain and cheap they are! Look at these people all about us: you left Whitstable to get away from people such as this" (466).

Through Kitty’s comments the reader is reminded that the way Nancy is living in Bethnal Green is similar to how she lived in Whitstable. Such a journey reflects how Nancy has embarked on the final aspect of the heroic monomyth which is "atonement with the father" and to "return home with the boon of knowledge". Through contact with Kitty it appears that Nancy will be able to get back in touch with her family, as Nancy’s family have been in touch with Kitty enquiring after Nancy. Nancy’s life with Florence, in the home of a working class family and her daily routines are similar to the life she used to live with her family in Whitstable. This return to a familiar life can be read as Nancy completing the
heroic quest; she left her family home, entered into a magical, fantasy world (of performance and the stage), but now she must return, as the hero cannot absent themselves forever according to Campbell. Though Nancy has not returned to her biological family home, she has gained a family with Florence, Ralph and Cyril, as well as a community around her, and with such knowledge, Nancy has been on and completed the heroic quest. She informs Kitty of such, as Nancy thinks of all the friends she has made with Florence, the same-sex couples she knows happily living together, socialising with others in clubs, without having to hide, lie, or only doing so to shock and be rebellious: "'You're wrong,' I said. 'I belong here, now: these are my people. And as for Florence, my sweetheart, I love her more than I can say; and I never realised it, until this moment'" (467). Thus Kitty has provided the final challenge, which Nancy has been able to overcome. Nancy has returned to a world in which she can live happily, without secrets, lies or pretence, but freedom to be as she wishes, and love Florence openly. She rejects her past, and the pretence that Kitty offers, symbolically rejecting the name Kitty once had for her, reflecting how, after her heroic quest, Nancy has come back a different person, no longer pretending: "'Don't call me that,' I said pettishly. 'No one calls me that now. It ain't my name, and never was'" (467).

Florence has also simultaneously undergone a change, as she has chosen Nancy over her love for Eleanor Marx, who previously meant so much to her and her political agenda. Broken hearted at the thought of loosing Nancy to Kitty, politics suddenly seems less important to Florence. Fearing defeat in love she had left the demonstration: "I got as far as here and thought, "what would I do at home, without you there?"" (471). Aptly when Nancy finds Florence to tell her how she feels and that she has rejected Kitty for a future with her, Nancy literally can't find the words: "I feel like I have been repeating other people's speeches all my life. Now when I want to make a speech of my own, I find I hardly know
how" (471). Like Evaristo’s character Taiwo, Nancy doesn’t have the vocabulary available to describe her feelings, as it seems not to exist. Through her text, Waters thus critiques the absence of homosexual narratives, which results in there being no words available for her character to express herself with. Waters’s work seeks to readdress this imbalance as she provides the reader with a form of lesbian fiction which is not marginalized in terms of experimental narrative, but rather utilises very familiar forms, and as such is more easily accepted into mainstream readership.

Nancy has completed her heroic quest, as she has returned safely from her adventures to try to establish who she is, a process of departure, initiation and return. She has successfully returned as an adult to live a family life: “You, Ralph and Cyril are my family that I could never leave” (471), as Florence realises that it is Nancy that she wants (and not Lillian): “how different wanting seemed, when I knew it was you I wanted, only you, only you” (472). Waters has therefore provided a narrative for historical lesbian love stories, as Nancy has discovered that she can live happily in this family situation, and that she doesn’t have to hide her feelings away: “careless of whether anybody watched or not – I leaned and kissed her” (472). Waters’s novel therefore ends with the heroine “getting her girl”, looking forward to living “happily ever after with her”, simultaneous to which there is a round of applause (coming from the socialist rally). The cheering in the background of their kiss evokes theatrical convention, as a crowd cheers the end of a performance, so too does Waters’s novel end on a round of applause. The novel’s reengagement with culturally dominant and familiar forms is therefore manifested once again, reflecting how conventions

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27 Nancy had to help Ralph make his speech at the socialist rally, as he had stage fright. Because of Nancy’s theatrical background Nancy was very good at this, and was offered a lecture tour. However, Florence pointed out that they were not her words, that she was only reading someone else, no matter how emphatically she spoke them, Florence thought this an act, that she didn’t really care for what she was saying. However, this, the reader is aware, is not strictly true, as Nancy had become interested in the socialist agenda of the day, and was going through a process of transformation.
and structures do not have to be rejected for the content to be challenged. Those who previously have been absent from the centre of literature can be included.

Therefore Waters’s work can be read in line with post-postmodern thinking, as opposed to a postmodern challenge or rejection of form. As Jeremiah suggests: “In borrowing from and alluding to other narratives [the conventions and style of the nineteenth-century novel, in particular that of Dickens], Waters’s works raise complex questions about realism and representation” (“The “I” Insider “Her”” 135). However, these questions are specifically in terms of a consideration (as previously discussed in the Introduction) about who is missing from the seemingly “neat and gleaming and complete” (Waters Affinity 7) view of history.28 Andermahr also notes the potential “utopian dreaming” of Tipping the Velvet, suggesting that “the novel combines this reclaimed lesbian history with an imaginative and utopian recreation of ‘what it was like’ and what we may wish it to have been like” (‘Utopian Dreaming in Feminist Historical Fiction’ 167). Though in places in her text, Waters may be accused of melodrama, or a little “utopianism” in its revision, her reimagining of Dickensian London is far from fantastical or experimental in its form. This is the essence which aligns her text with the aspects of post-postmodernism under consideration in this thesis, and what allows Waters’s work to be brought to critical attention beyond postmodern perspectives. Nancy can take her place as a Victorian heroine of British literature, and can be situated alongside other bildungsroman protagonists such as Dickens’s Pip.

The text’s openness to marginal voices can be read as part of a postmodern perspective, but that Tipping the Velvet does so through traditional means of narrative style and characterization, without debunking the essential form also means that we can approach

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28 Which as Jeremiah states (and as previously discussed in the introduction) Waters’ work challenges as being “messier and more queer than traditionally assumed” (134).
the text beyond the postmodern. Waters and Evaristo avoid what Martin Amis calls postmodernism’s tendency towards “huge boredom” of narrative tricks as (as previously discussed) Amis asks: “Why all the tricksiness and self-reflection? Why did writers stop telling stories and start going on about how they were telling them?” (Keulks “W(h)ither Postmodernism” 159). Rather than the position which Amis describes, Waters and Evaristo write themselves into the centre and tradition, reengaging with heroic characterization in their depictions of strong female protagonists, rather than a focus on the challenges of form. It is, of course, in part through postmodern perspectives and approaches that the revealing of the subjugation has taken place. These writers working to express the marginal can therefore be read as seeking to offer an alternative to such a focus on disrupting form, but whilst still challenging dominant perspectives, and therefore combines elements of the postmodern, but is also in a part a movement beyond it.

Through my reading of Evaristo’s and Waters’s text it can be read that the heroine occupies a central place in the millennial London novel. Archetypal characterization is utilised by writers in order to challenge marginalisation on the grounds of gender, sexuality and race. Therefore I think it can be concluded that there are female counterparts to the heroic youth of London, offering interesting perspectives for consideration along a post-postmodern reading.

29 Whilst reviewing Don De Lillo in 1991. As discussed in the introduction
Chapter Four: Masculinities - Beyond the Postcolonial and the Postmodern in the London Novel

“Writing by Blacks in Britain has already moved beyond the postcolonial” (Koye Oyedeji ‘Prelude to a Brand New Purchase on Black Political Identity’ 2005 371).

There is an established link between postcolonial perspectives and the London novel. There has been an array of works which consider this aspect of London’s history in the twentieth century, from authors such as Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul, Buchi Emecheta and Salman Rushdie, to the critical focus on this topic provided by John McLeod in Postcolonial London (2004), John Clement Ball’s Imagining London (2004) and Sukhdev Sandhu’s London Calling (2003), as well as the topic forming part of a wider consideration in the writings of the city by Peter Ackroyd and Roy Porter. As discussed in the Introduction, London has a long and established link with the creation of “new” identities and reimaginings of itself. In The Location of Culture (1994) Homi K Bhabha notes this specific association with the city, arguing that London is a place where the “liminality of cultural identity” (170) is experienced, further commenting that: “it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out” (170). Therefore in this chapter I seek to move beyond a focus on the extensively discussed area of postcolonial perspectives, and investigate instead a contemporary trend in fiction for a consideration of changing masculinities.

Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene dedicate their collection of essays Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature (2003) to the discussion of

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1The phrase “move through and beyond” in relation to postcolonial theory originates from the stances of both Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures (1992) and Peter Hallward Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific (2001).
the changing nature of representations of masculinity, and to demonstrating its performative nature (8) within contemporary literature; they state:

Masculinity has now become visible as a gender, and in many of its flesh-and-blood realizations it appears both ready and suitable. However, as a fixed set of ideologically motivated imperatives and ideals, inscribed and upheld by patriarchal heteronormativity, it still proves to be as markedly resilient and persistent as it is now anachronistic. It seems as if the early twenty-first century is a time when both men and women dream of a new, pluralistic, and categorically disordered gendered order. (8)

The model for gender identities offered by Lea and Schoene is clearly informed by both a postmodern and feminist rethinking on issues of identity; especially postmodern in terms of it being "pluralistic" and "disordered". Lea and Schoene go onto define how for them a deconstruction of gender constructions has resulted in a pluralistic approach to identity:

[G]ender identifications, has once and for all lost its traditional transparency as the incontestable biological essence of unadulterated manly being and instead become visible as a performative gender construct...Rather than denoting just one fixed, polarized point on a hierarchically oppositional axis of distinctly intelligible binaries, masculinity has been revealed to oscillate within a virtually limitless spectrum of gender identities, characterized not by purity and self-containment but by difference and alterity (9)

However I will consider Hanif Kureishi's Intimacy (1998) and Gautam Malkani's Londonstani (2006) in light of a discussion of masculinities in a movement beyond both postmodern and postcolonial readings. I will discuss in more detail below how the texts considered in this chapter demonstrate a moving beyond postmodern multiple and
fragmented varieties. Initially I will consider the specific London aspect of the current investigation into genders constructs. As discussed in Chapter Two there is a particular relationship between London and a young man’s investigation of his identity, often involving a road to maturity, as can be found within Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* and more contemporary texts such as Kureishi’s *Buddha of Suburbia* or Nick Hornby’s *About a Boy*. Thereby investigations into masculine identities in British literature have a particular association with a specific London setting. The protagonist of *Intimacy*, Jay, is aware of such an association. Jay describes, in a manner which is distinctly opposite to Nan King’s experience of the city, (as discussed in previous chapters) the opportunities that London may offer him once he has made the difficult decision to leave his family, and become a young single male within the city: “I encouraged myself to think of the pleasures of being a single man in London, of what there might be to look forward to” (15). Jay further engages with the popular association and the literary tradition of a young man’s travels to London as part of his journey to maturity: “I imagined myself walking away like Dick Whittington, with a spotted handkerchief tied to a stick over my shoulder” (25). The recounting of his imagined “spotted handkerchief” and “stick over [the] shoulder” demonstrates the almost archetypal imagery associated with this story. However, the story of the plight of a young man’s journey to maturity and the troubles along the way is not only a traditional London narrative reserved for stories from the past.

Within much of the recent work of London male authors there has been an engagement with what has been termed the “male testimonial” (Bart Moore-Gilbert being one of the critics to use the term) which *Intimacy* is engaging with. It is a feature of Nick Hornby’s *Fever Pitch* (1992), Will Self’s *Cock and Bull* (1992), Tony Parsons’s *Man and Boy* (1999) and Mike Gayle’s *Mr Commitment* (2000). Moore-Gilbert notes this trend and
suggests that understanding *Intimacy* in terms of an engagement with the convention of the “male testimonial” may be a useful method of analysis, suggesting the novella can be “read more productively alongside fictional explorations of contemporary masculinity” (172-3). Moore-Gilbert’s “more productively” suggests that there is a need to investigate different methods of analysis for Kureishi’s text from the much investigated postcolonial focus; he offers a consideration of masculinities as a viable alternative.

Both Malkani’s and Kureishi’s texts deal with issues of gender identity in terms of its “opening up”, as well as engaging with the performative nature of the construct; in this way *Intimacy* and *Londonstani* can be read as borrowing from postmodernism and feminist challenges to essentialist notions of gender. However these texts also demonstrate a seeking to move beyond multiple notions of identity as the characters in the texts instead construct a single essence of self. Both of the protagonists, Jay in *Intimacy* and Jas in *Londonstani* demonstrate that there are elements within contemporary stereotypical depictions of masculinities which they find problematic. For Jay this involves the difficult decision to leave his wife and children in search of happiness and the subsequent problems associated with parenting that the separation will cause, fearing that he “could become an outsider, sitting in the car waiting for them [his children] to come out of the house” (117) as another man may take his place in his sons daily lives. Jas also encounters challenges as he seeks acceptance within the particular social milieu of his choice as he journeys towards maturity. Jas reaches towards a youth sub-culture which he feels he belongs to, but this isolates him from his family and childhood friends. He has difficulties in accepting the “desi” gender roles as their performance of “hypermasculinity” proves problematic for Jas in relation to their attitude towards female sexuality (as is discussed in more detail below). ² Further in

  ² The term “desi” is the name the group use to define the culture they engage with. This term will be discussed in more detail below.
relation to my post-postmodern reading of these novels, it can be seen that the texts engage with storytelling forms and characterizations which move away from a postmodern experimentation and fragmented storytelling to instead re-engage with more culturally conventional forms of realism (discussed in detail below) in terms of narrative as they interact with the contemporary debate surrounding a “crisis” in masculinity.

Both Kureishi and Malkani have an ancestral purchase upon an ex-British colony. Kureishi has, in relation to his earlier works, been discussed in light of a postcolonial theoretical positioning by many critics including Kenneth C. Kaleta in Hanif Kureishi: Postcolonial Storyteller. However both authors, Kureishi in Intimacy and Gabriel’s Gift, and Malkani in his debut novel, have made a concerted effort to produce texts which can be read in a way which moves beyond the demarcation of the postcolonial. For Kureishi this takes the form in Intimacy and Gabriel’s Gift of the ethnicity of the main characters not being overtly defined for the reader in much the same way that writers such as Martin Amis or Ian McEwan do not overtly name the ethnicity of their characters. In Londonistani ethnic identity, religion and a marking of a heritage based within a process of migration are important aspects of the young people’s identity creation, however, Paul Gilroy comments that what may seem to be an identity construction in terms of race, may in fact be understood in terms of gendered identities.

The need to consider issues of identity beyond solely the concerns of race is noted by Gilroy during his discussion of confusion within analysis of “black” identity. He comments that there is a common belief “that the contemporary political and economic crises of blacks in the West are basically crises of self-belief and racial identity” (The Black Atlantic 194). Gilroy proffers an alternative perspective suggesting the area of gendered identities needs to

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1 As I have talked extensively about Gabriel’s Gift in Chapter Two, in this chapter I will focus on Intimacy.
also be considered in relation to a discussion of crises of identity, Gilroy suggests: “These crises are most intensely lived in the area of gender relations” (194). Gilroy further comments on the intrinsic link which leads to the misconception between racial and gendered identities for the black individual in terms of identity performance: “The integrity of the race is thus made interchangeable with the integrity of black masculinity” (194). Gilroy calls for a change in such thinking, stating that this perspective “must be regenerated at all cost” (194).

Though of course Gilroy’s discussion focuses on the issue of Afro-Caribbean identity constructions, the comments he makes can be read across race grounds, as he is stating that thinking should be moving beyond issues of racial identity, and moving towards a consideration of gender issues. Therefore I will consider Intimacy and Londonstani in light of Gilroy’s discussion of this issue.

**The Relationship between Postmodernism and Postcolonialism**

As my approach to these texts is to consider them in light of alternative analytical strategies in a movement away from a focus on postcolonial perspectives and postmodern fragmentation and experimental notions of identity construction and narrative, it is necessary, before I begin my discussion of the texts, to acknowledge the relationship between the two perspectives I am reading these texts beyond. In terms of a concern to denaturalise understandings of identity, postmodern perspectives overlap with those of postcolonialism as within key aspects of postcolonial thinking there is an emphasis on a deconstruction of essentialist thinking in terms of assumptions about identity based on race and colonial exploits (Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall being two key theorists discussing such issues). Similarly a challenge to the binary oppositions of centre and margin is a key consideration both for postcolonial discourses and, as has previously been discussed, a significant element for a selection of postmodern thinkers, in terms of being part of a challenge to metanarratives
and cultural authority, as well as a celebration of the difference, the multiple and fragmented. Jean-François Lyotard famously ends ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism’ (Trans. 1984) with a rousing celebration of difference and an engagement with the multiple (a sentiment he refers to here in terms of the process of representation): “Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witness to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences” (82). Critic Tim Woods discusses the relationship between postcolonial and postmodern theoretical positions, noting the “intensification” postmodernism has brought to a postcolonial concentration on “deconstructing the authoritarian and logocentric master narratives of European culture” (42). Woods goes on to draw further parallels between the two theoretical perspectives, and the symbiosis of their concerns: “Postmodernism has therefore promoted a renewed focus on non-Eurocentric cultural narratives, both in terms of the ways non-European cultures represent themselves, as well as in a focus on the politics of the representations that the European has made of its ‘other’” (42).

Bhabha’s The Location of Culture (in particular ‘Signs Taken Wonders’) discusses the hybrid or “in-between space” in terms of a postcolonial identity. Though Bhabha suggests that a hybrid identity can be something which is the result of the blending of two-diverse cultures or traditions, such as colonial power and colonised cultures, Bhabha stresses that hybridity “is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (162). The “third space” Bhabha discusses challenges preconceived ideas and a metanarrative which position margins and those “othered” into what is portrayed as a “natural” grouping together, or as he defines, an “organic notion of wholeness” (Woods 44). It is through the position of the hybrid that this challenge to cultural authority and “normalisation” can be made by disrupting the mechanisms which have produced such domination and “naturalized” ideas in the first instance, Bhabha elucidates: “Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value
from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power” (162). Bhabha’s theories thus in some ways correspond with a poststructuralist challenge to totalities and essentialisms. As such, and as Woods suggests, Bhabha’s notions of identity construction “dovetails” (45) with postmodern characteristics; as does the privileging of the depthless, and the loss of “essential truths”. Bhabha states that: “Hybridity has no such perspective of depth or truth to provide” (162), therefore for Bhabha a postcolonial identity is differential and relational, rather than fixed and essential. He does not pertain to a nostalgia for the notion of “roots” in terms of a construction of identity, as this would, for Bhabha, suggest an “essentialist” understanding of identity construction that has been inherited from a dominant discourse, the very discourse he wishes to challenge: “colonial hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism” (original emphasis 162).

Like Foucault, Bhabha is keen to reveal the mechanisms behind the process of constructing a marginalized identity, and through theories on the hybrid suggests that this can be revealed: “Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition” (162). Bhabha’s approach is to disrupt, to “split” dominant discourse “along the axis of power” (162), rather than to simply reveal the mechanics of the discourse. Therefore in significant ways a parallel can be drawn between some of the elements of postcolonial and postmodern thinking in relation to issues of identity.

**Reading Londonstani in relation to Postcolonialism and Beyond**

The analysis I suggest for Intimacy and Londonstani involves, in essence, a seeking to move beyond rather than a rejection of that which has come before. In important ways both
postcolonial and postmodern readings of the text considered in this chapter can offer a rewarding analysis and many aspects of each theoretical position are relevant as starting points. In Londonstani London is depicted as a multi-cultural city. The Hounslow desi sub-culture Malkani depicts preoccupies the group of young people within the novel. Desi, the word this group privileges so much and uses to label themselves and others is essentially related to diaspora as Malkani explains:

The word “desi” literally means countrymen and refers specifically to the diaspora. It is broader than terms such as Indian, Pakistani, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, and yet narrower than the term Asian or even South Asian. It acts as a self-determined alternative to the word “paki” and the enthusiasm with which it has been embraced suggests a conscious decision against appropriating the offensive word paki and trying to turn it into a positive the way black kids have done with the word “nigger” (‘Mixing and Matching: What’s Wrong-Right With Asian Boys’ NPg.)

Therefore in the very naming of the group issues of a postcolonial and immigrant past are highly relevant. The appropriation of the term “diaspora” to “desi” to describe their group demonstrates how Londonstani can be read in relation to Bhabha’s theories of the hybrid in terms of rejecting the authority of genealogy, as the “self-determining” nature of the term does not seek to resolve a tension between two cultures (as is discussed and defined below in more detail), and it attempts to challenge preconceived ideas and metanarratives of colonial discourse, as it is about a uniquely British identity, as opposed to a colonial or postcolonial one (again as elucidated below). Therefore the group’s name can be read in light of Bhabha’s suggestion as quoted above that: “hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism” (original emphasis 162), as the desi identity for these young characters acknowledges their heritage,
but it is not problematic in terms of genealogy, but rather is about creating and owning their own identity on their own terms.

Bhabha’s rejection of the idea of “roots” is relevant to a discussion of this text in that Jas, a boy of European heritage, who was, as were his parents, born and brought up in London participates in a sub-culture which draws heavily on south Asian influences and religions. However, it is not just for Jas that Bhabha’s notion of a rejection of “roots” is significant. The children of Asian immigrants in this particular group in Hounslow create their own identity as they reject their parents’ culture such as by choosing to speak different languages from them: “Hardjit says something to us in Urdu slang so that his mum can’t understand” (69). They also have different religious beliefs: “[Hardjit] didn’t like the way his mum had hung pictures a Hindu Gods on their landing at home next to their pictures of Gurus. But then there in’t no point tryin to talk to your mum or dad about religion innit. They don’t know jack bout religion” (81). The desi culture is not about negotiating an acceptance for second generation immigrant youths into a British identity, or even the creation of a “third space” which “resolves the tension between two cultures” (162) and thus in line with Bhabha’s theories. Rather the desi culture described in this text is about creating a youth culture which reflects the cultural mix of this part of London but also creating and inhabiting a distinctly London, if not British, as well as masculine identity; one which represents a variety of influences, but which is essentially within rather than external to that culture.

The desi identity combines and consists of many parts drawing on cultural and religious references from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India as well as Britain, but it is in essence a British identity, rather than a postcolonial or immigrant identity. Malkani illustrates this point in an article in The Times in which he discusses his novel and the characterization of
the desi through a discussion of American hip-hop: “Just as hip-hop culture is neither West Indian nor African, but American, so too desi beats is as quintessentially British as punk rock was in the 1970s, acid house was in the 1980s and Britpop was in the 1990s” (‘Mixing and Matching: What’s Wrong Right With Asian Boys’ NPg). Malkani goes on to argue how the characters’ desi identity is about being British, rather than seeking segregation from British culture, describing what the boys are engaged with as a British product, and, as is befitting to their consumer based lifestyles (as discussed in detail below) becomes a product, even an export: “it is arguable that what is being asserted today is no longer simply an ethnic identity but a new, sustainable subculture, it is important to stress its Britishness. Not only was it born in the UK, it has been exported around the world - including back to India” (‘Mixing and Matching: What’s Wrong Right With Asian Boys’ NPg).

Therefore in important ways postcolonial theories such as Bhabha’s can offer an interesting starting point for analysing the text, but we can also read beyond issues based within the exploits and consequences of empire. Though the culture Malkani describe may appear to be about ethnicity, and to have Asian origins, the youth sub-culture Jas and his friends subscribe to is only inspired by symbols from cultures, religions and traditions based in the Asian continent as experienced in Britain. As the children described here, being born within the centre (London) a long time after the process of colonisation, and indeed decolonisation began, they therefore have a different relationship to this aspect of their heritage, than perhaps the first generation of immigrants. In Londonstani the boys’ teacher Mr Ashwood comments on what he perceives as a negative aspect of the sub-culture’s reliance on ethnic markers, highlighting a generational distinction that he sees as occurring between a migrant position and that of subsequent generations:
[Y]ou boys do have some kind of worrying anti-integration, anti-assimilation ethic going on and quite frankly I don’t intend to rest this old body of mine until today’s youth culture stop being so divided along ethnic lines. Do you boys have any idea how hard your parents worked and how hard they fought to be accepted by mainstream society? Well do you? And all for what? So you boys could just throw it all away by acting like hoodlums and by volunteering for segregation? (126)

However this group are not divided by ethnic lines in quite the segregated way in which Mr Ashwood describes, rather there is a vast mix of heritages making up the group, and through this mixing the boys are attempting to create their own distinctively British and masculine identity. Therefore, though they are not undergoing a process of “assimilation” into the mainstream that Mr Ashwood describes their parents undertaking, they are also not seeking segregation in terms of race, but rather in terms of the youth culture, and perhaps even in terms of gender and sexuality.

The London streets Karim and Shahid cruise through in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995) welcomes them but in part, as Deedee’s interaction with Shahid suggests, because of their “otherness” and “exotic” identity, whereas Malkani depicts a very different scenario for his young characters. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* Karim describes the ultimate fashion excludes him: “The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it” (53). Essentially Malkani presents an alternative. Hardjit and his group, whilst touring London with Sanjay, experience the nightclubs and restaurants from within. The clubs and the restaurants appeal to their tastes and style as these boys are an integral part of the London youth scene. Therefore Hardjit and his friends represent and reflect an aspect of the interior of the capital as opposed to being positioned outside of it.
Reading Intimacy in relation to Postcolonialism and Beyond

In distinctly different ways Intimacy by Kureishi can also be read as moving away from an overt discussion of the creation of or seeking to occupy a postcolonial identity. There is a distinct shift in terms of Kureishi’s focus for his novels after The Black Album (1995) as issues of race and ethnicity are no longer foregrounded in his fiction. Many commentators have remarked on this shift, including Moore-Gilbert who states this as a significant change in Kureishi’s work: “the most important development is the diminished importance of issues of race and ethnicity” (152). As stated above, the ethnicity of the characters within the text is not discussed. Susie Thomas succinctly notes Kureishi’s “postcolonial” positioning: “Unlike Salman Rushdie (born 1947) or V. S. Naipaul (born 1932), he is not a displaced postcolonial writing back to the centre; he writes from the centre” (Hanif Kureishi original emphasis 1). This position from within rather than as an outsider or “writing back to” is significant as Kureishi functions within the centre (i.e. London, in terms of a postcolonial dichotomy) and writes about the centre (characters lives within London). Thereby in this text Kureishi is not engaging with a discussion of the need to “navigate a third space” which Bhabha discusses in terms of the migrant position, nor is he overtly engaging with a debate about the influences on his writing from a Pakistani heritage, but rather he chooses to, and can engage with other issues, such as masculinities and family relationships. Thomas notes how in much of Kureishi’s work a focus on ethnic identity has been replaced with a focus on issues of gender: “[T]he main debate...has centred not on representations of ethnicity but on masculinity” (4). As discussed above, this shift locates Kureishi alongside other contemporary writers, for whom the issue of a crisis of masculinity was a preoccupation, as

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4 Moore-Gilbert also notes this shift away from issues of race and ethnicity in relation to Kureishi’s short stories: “None of the three stories in which they remain central was written later than 1994” (152).
well as being a topic which has received much critical attention. Moore-Gilbert highlights how *Intimacy*’s engagement with issues of masculine identity positions his work alongside other contemporary writers, rather than being demarked along grounds of ethnicity: “To this extent, Kureishi is now part of a dominant socio-cultural formation, rather than writing from a ‘subaltern’ perspective” (155). Therefore as a writer who has previously been labelled a “postcolonial writer” Kureishi demonstrates how he does not have to position himself or his work overtly within a postcolonial framework. This represents therefore an interesting shift in terms of considering Kureishi in light of postcolonial theories, and also suggests a certain neo-humanism to the change being made in that the crisis of masculinity is a widely discussed issue within contemporary debates about literature.

**A Return to Realism**

*Intimacy* can be read in light of movement beyond postmodern concerns in that in the novella Kureishi utilises storytelling styles of the culturally dominant, rather than using more postmodern experimental, fragmented or disrupted narrative forms. Thomas comments on the distinction between Kureishi and other, more overtly postmodern writing: “Rushdie was an early mentor, but magical realism had no impact on Kureishi’s novels, which belong to a tradition of comic realism” (Thomas 1-2). Magdalena Mączyńska charts in the late twentieth century a gradual movement away from classical realist representations, due to what she describes as “the influences of international postmodernism” (137). She discusses this move away from more classical styles specifically in relation to the London text, and how more experimental forms offered a greater opportunity for challenging the dominant centre: “London’s turn away from the mimetic has been seen by many as subversive in nature, aimed

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5 There are many examples of texts which consider such issues such as Sage’s ‘Men and Masculinities’ series and Victor Seidler’s *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity and Social Theory* (1994). There is also a ‘post-feminist’ analysis of the situation such as that provided by Ros Coward in *Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium* (1999) and Susan Faludi’s *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man* (1999).
at questioning the official representation of the city and its dominant political social and
symbolic orders" (Mączyńska 137). She goes onto suggest that:

Realism's privileging of reason and scientifically inspired epistemological and
ontological models has been denounced as a Lyotardian 'grand narrative' and a
restrictive, totalizing paradigm... Consequently, writing that rejected traditional
methods of representation was perceived as subversive, liberating, and free from the
oppressive grip of the enlightenment West. (137)

However, Londonstani can be read as moving beyond such a period of intense
experimentation in narrative form, yet still, offers a consideration of dominant ideologies and
the mechanisms behind them. The novel's plot has many elements associated with the classic
nineteenth-century novel of the sort by Jane Austen, containing a love story; the preparation
for a wedding; and a tragedy, as one of Jas's young friends, Arun, commits suicide because
of the pressure of the preparations for his wedding and the family expectations he feels he
must meet. Mączyńska discusses a return to realism in relation to the ethnicity of the authors,
suggesting that "'front line estate realism'" (139) is popular within Black London writing –
the goal of which is to "'tell it like it is'" (139) and bring into the social conscious traditions
of the nineteenth-century realism and naturalism:

The physical appearance of the Black urban neighbourhoods is also given carefully
detailed treatment, perhaps best represented by [Alex] Wheatle's evocative descriptions
of Brixton's haunting tower blocks and graffiti-covered alleys. What we see here is the
resurgence of a nineteenth-century London tradition, bearing the mark of writer-
journalist Charles Dickens (140).

Wheatle, Kureishi and Malkani can be read as revisiting more traditional storytelling styles
and utilising more dominant forms, such as that akin to nineteenth century realism, rather
than an overt concentration on experimental style. Maczyńska’s comparison of Wheatle’s work to Dickens however, offers us another line of investigation rather than in terms of an overt concentration of analysis based in terms of the author’s skin colour. A comparison with Dickens, a writer so renowned for creating works which can be read as capacious social canvases of sociological observation of specific urban (and more specifically London) settings, invites the reader to apply a political reading to the texts and to consider the need for social reform.6 Therefore inherent in the comparison is the suggestion that the “social realism” of the ilk of Wheatle’s, or as I extend Maczyńska’s argument, Malkani’s with its “carefully detailed treatment” of the setting, and the use of realism, calls to the reader’s mind a need to consider a variety of issues that perhaps readers are more used to considering in relation to texts such as Great Expectations. As such the contemporary texts discussed here are concerned with an exposition of socio and economic situations not just issues related to a postcolonial situation, but also issues of class and gender in contemporary society.

In Malkani’s text, a discussion of the dominance of capitalism within contemporary society is prevalent in terms of the consumerism which preoccupies this group, as well as the lack of opportunities for the young people. These issues can be read as being similar to the issues which preoccupied Dickens in his later works, as Brian Cheadle notes: “Increasingly...as he grew older, a profound questioning of such basic conditions of Victorian life as class privilege and the effects of capital became the ground base of his work” (78). Therefore in some key ways the London writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are occupied with similar concerns as those of a writer of the nineteenth century. As well as offering a consideration on postcolonial issues, and the plight of the migrant, diaspora and subsequent generations, both Kureishi and Malkani can also be read as engaging

6 As Hilary Schor discusses in ‘Novels of the 1850s: Hard Times, Little Dorrit, and A Tale of Two Cities’ (64).
with universal issues in terms of the socio-economic situation of the interior of London they depict, issues that have a long association with being the concern of the London writer.

Ranasinha asserts that Kureishi’s aesthetic style, particularly in his later works, functions in a similar manner in which Zadie Smith states that a change is needed, in terms of engaging with texts through more classical models, as a return to more classical reading and writing models allow readers to participate in familiar storytelling modes, as opposed to being an observer of an author’s critique on form. Smith comments on a need for greater reader participation in the process of reading a text as opposed to a passive consumption, commenting that a return to more classical styles of writing and reading models, in which readers aren’t passive observers, are more rewarding:

The idea we’re given of reading is that the model of a reader is the person watching a film, or watching television. So the greatest principle is, “I should sit here and I should be entertained.” And the more classical model, which has been completely taken away, is the idea of a reader as an amateur musician. An amateur musician who sits at the piano, has a piece of music, which is the work, made by somebody they don’t know, who they probably couldn’t comprehend entirely, and they have to use their skills to play this piece of music. The greater the skill, the greater the gift that you give the artist and that the artist gives you. When you practice reading, and you work at a text, it can only give you what you put into it. It’s an old moral, but it’s completely true.

(from an interview with Zadie Smith on KCRW’s Bookworm program, 2006)

Ranasinha’s observation of Kureishi’s style relates to Smith’s calls as Ranasinha suggests that Kureishi’s later works are “putting more onus on the viewer or reader to take a position, forcing them to think and see the familiar afresh” (121). Significantly, as Ranasinha points out, this is not achieved through the utilisation of experimental narrative modes, but a return
to storytelling which may be understood as formally more conservative, as she states that “He achieves this with his use of realism” (121). Though Ranasinha goes on to suggest that this may be “undercut by satire, elements of farce and comic exaggeration and pervasive ironic distance” (121), she notes that it is to the traditional, rather than the experimental that Kureishi turns in order to “see the familiar afresh”. Perhaps therefore the use of a form which is associated with the centre demonstrates a reaching towards the universal, and can in fact be another way in which to challenge and debunk “colonial” segregation, and to allow a certain occupation of the centre by the previously subjugated, and thus is how we can use the traditional to see “afresh”. In his essay ‘The Rainbow Sign’ (1986) Kureishi calls for “a new way of being British” (55), one which is more accepting of Britain’s many and disparate parts, it is not a matter of “minorities assimilat[ing]” (56) or “a small group of irrelevant people who can be dismissed as minorities” (56), but rather as Thomas summarises “about the humanity, equality and justice of British society as a whole” (3). By not focusing on issues of ethnicity in his later works, Kureishi’s texts demonstrate such, by engaging with universal issues, such as gender concerns and family difficulties, issues which are prevalent in the work of London’s contemporary authors across racial lines, Kureishi engages with topics which demonstrate a shared humanity, things which can affect many aspects of London’s diverse community. Therefore by engaging with more conservative or traditional narrative styles, Londonstani and Intimacy depict a London in which once subjugated voices are described from within rather than at the peripheries, and engage with prevalent contemporary issues of identity beyond a focus on race.

Post-Postmodern and the Essential Self

7 For instance within contemporary London (even British) fiction there has been much work produced which takes as its focus relationship break downs and the complicated resulting issues of parenting, especially in relation to the role of the father or masculine identities. Kureishi’s Gabriel’s Gift addresses this issues, as does Will Self’s The Book of Dave and Nick Hornby’s About a Boy to name but a few.
The desi culture the boys of Londonstani uphold is something that is purchased. To be part of the group they are required to buy designer clothes and the latest gadgets such as mobile phones. This sub-culture instead of going against consumerism and searching for the individual seeks conformity and mass consumerism is celebrated. They are the “bling generation”. Sanjay, one of the older characters within Jas’s group, provides some apt self analysis of their identity, he reflects how it is based within an upholding of capitalist consumer ideologies and becoming part of the mainstream as opposed to existing at an oppositional margin: “This isn’t about society becoming more affluent, this is about a subculture that worships affluence becoming mainstream culture” (171). This group feel that they have a very clearly defined single identity rather than Kureishi’s earlier young protagonists who approach identity as something which is multiple and changing. Kureishi’s character Shahid provides a useful comparison in terms of a summation of the possibilities of identity construction available:

How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and love, following his curiosity (The Black Album 274).

Here Kureishi’s protagonist suggests a postmodern challenge to notions of identity and the construction of the “essential self”. As discussed in the Introduction, bell hooks warns against the assumption that there is a liberatory potential to the rejection of the notion that there is such a thing as an “identity”. Sanjay’s understanding of his identity is very different from Shahid’s: “You can be a hippie or a punk and then one day grow out of being skint and stoned or having ridiculous spiky hair. But you won’t one day wake up and say, I know, I
want to be less comfortable, less well off, less sexually attractive and healthy” (Londonstani 170-1).

That Londonstani’s young characters do not understand identity as something which is multiple, and instead believe in an single identity for themselves, which is based on, according to them, universal values, means that this identity construction can be understood in relation to a movement beyond a postmodern experimentation with the idea of multiple-selves, and instead as a return to a more neo-humanistic understanding of such. These young people are attempting to define their identity in relation to British culture, and demonstrate their part within it. They are expressing “essentialist” ideas in relation to the desi culture, in that they suggest that there are markers which define one as part of, or external to this group; though, as the figure of Jas demonstrates, this is an identity beyond issues of race, even though it borrows from a variety of racial markers in its construction. Therefore, hook’s warning (as previously quoted) “We should indeed [be] suspicious of postmodern critiques of the ‘subject’ when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time” (Postmodern Blackness NPg) seems particularly relevant to an understanding of these texts. Malkani’s characters are seeking to occupy a sub-culture which will become mainstream, suggesting their desire to be located firmly within the centre, as opposed to on the margins, of British culture as they are looking for universal values which reach across ethnicities. Their identity may have an array of influences, and functions within what may be perceived as the neo-colonialism of capitalism, but it is not as located in the twentieth century’s process of departure and arrival in relation to

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8 Aijaz Ahmad’s article ‘The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality’ in Race and Class (1995) raises the issue that the economic and social situations today in some of the poorer nations reflect to an extent the fortunes of many countries with a history of colonialism, in part, in relation to a capitalist modernity. Arif Dirlik’s essay ‘The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism’ in the journal Critical Inquiry (1994) is also of significance to this discussion in that Dirlik goes further than Ahmad claiming that current thinking within postcolonial criticism is inhibiting intellectual debate about the relationship between economic power, global capitalism and colonial exploits.
colonial and postcolonial exploits in the same way as for Kureishi’s earlier protagonists. For Malkani’s youth their desi identity is also about occupying “economies of discourse” (as defined in Chapter One) which have previously lead to subjugation, and in the process demonstrating the mechanics of them, and therefore, how they are constructions, rather than “essential truths”. These writers can therefore be read in terms of a moving beyond postmodern experimentation and challenge to realism.

As previously mentioned within Londonstani there is a nod to the late capitalist world of postmodern mass consumption and the “loss of the real” which can be interpreted in relation to the work of theorist Jean Baudrillard. His theories almost define the two-dimensional personalities of the characters, who in many ways are little more than a screen onto which images from advertising are projected onto. Londonstani includes a reference to the film The Matrix (1999). During the early scenes of the film one of the characters Neo, hides his illicit software in a copy of Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation. It is significant that Malkani chooses to reference this film, a film in which Baudrillard’s theories are implicit. The idea that the symbol has taken on new meaning and become more “real” than the “real” is highly relevant to Londonstani. Jas and his friends have taken on, and are performing an identity that they see in the media. Baudrillard describes the “image” of “reality” within different phases, he refers to the fourth stage of the image as having “no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (Simulacra and Simulation 6). It is the symbol that this group of young people are performing, they are engaging with the “hyperreal” (Simulacra and Simulation 2). Therefore in terms of characterization Londonstani in part borrows from Baudrillard’s theories and is functioning in a manner which engages with postmodern perspectives; but it does not adopt all of postmodernism’s
experimentation. These characters do not engage with multiple notions of the self and in
terms of form the text uses classical realism (as discussed above).

All the way through the novel Jas's religion is not disclosed, which is notable because
it is an important part of the description of the others characters. The reader is also not
informed as to Jas's surname, the reason for this omission is stated as because it is always
pronounced incorrectly, a problem Hardjit also complains of encountering. Therefore all the
cultural markers the reader is given in terms of how he talks, dresses, and speaks, even the
food he eats, aligns Jas with his friends (essentially this is the point of the novel – it is about
Jas trying to assimilate himself into this group). However at the end of the novel when Jas
has been beaten up and is hospitalised as a result of a mobile phone scam which went badly
wrong, Jas's full identity is revealed by his dad: "What nonsense is this you don't even
respond to your own name? Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden ...? Then Dad grabs the clipboard
from the end a my bed an, like, shoves it in my face. – Look, he says. – It says your name
here on your medical chart: Jason Bartholomew Cliveden, aged nineteen, white, male“ (340).
However, even after his father challenges him over his identity construction Jas is sure of
who he wants to be. Jas continues to chat up the “desi nurse”, guessing the origin of her
name, and using the Hindi word for thank you (342). Therefore for Jas, the desi identity is a
choice which he has made, and he feels this is the only identity for him.

In Intimacy Kureishi also writes a character that has a preference for single notions of
self as opposed to a celebration of the fragmented and the multiple. The novella's
protagonist, Jay, envies his friend Asif, who seemingly has a single very solid notion of his
identity, he is described thus: “he refused all that eighties cynicism. His beliefs give him
stability, meaning and a centre” (41). Jay also displays notions of a single identity
construction as opposed to multiple varieties. As he is about to embark on a new phase of his
life he is aware that when he leaves his family home, wife and children, he will leave aspects of himself behind: "Naturally to move on is an infidelity – to others, to the past, to old notions of oneself" (6), but the understanding that what he will leave will be "old notions of oneself", rather than leaving one self to become another, reasserts that Jay believes that there is only one version of him, as opposed to the multiple and constantly changing understanding of identity that Shahid holds (as quoted above). He accepts that as he progresses to the next stage, he is not to become someone else, but that he is moving to the next stage of his life. The envying of a character with a "centre" and "stability" in terms of his identity creation, and Jay's understanding of identity compared to Shahid's reflects a movement beyond a "postmodern exhaustion" (Keulks, 'Winterson's Recent Work' 148) of such ideas. Asif's denial of "cynicism" and reassertion of a notion of trust in terms of a "centre" and "stability" in "beliefs" can be read in light of both Keulks's suggestion of a "post-postmodern age" in which there is a "post-ironic" voice ('W(h)ither Postmodernism' 158) and Raoul Eshelman's understanding of a "post-postmodern era" (as laid out in Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism) in which the notions of trust, dialogue, performance and sincerity are described as working to transcend postmodern irony. Therefore, both authors in various ways can be seen to be, or have previously, engaged with concepts and notions relevant to postmodern thinking, but also both can be discussed in ways which can be read as a movement beyond the postmodern.

Gender as Performance and Hypermasculinity

My discussion of these texts in terms of post-postmodernism and beyond postcolonial perspectives is based within a discussion of masculinities, therefore, intrinsic to this debate is...
a discussion of the relevant gender theory. French feminist theorist Simone De Beauvoir discusses gender as a performance in her epoch-making *The Second Sex* (1949 Trans. 1972), famously stating: “One is not born a woman one becomes one” (249). The concept “woman”, she argues is one which has been invented: “No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature” (249). In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler develops De Beauvoir’s suggestion that gender is a social and cultural construction towards the suggestion that feminine and masculine are opposing, but mutually defining positions, artificial constructs which support and impose heterosexuality. Butler works towards a deconstruction of gender positions suggesting that the possibilities can be opened up to a multitude of varieties and gender can be understood in a much more fluid manner as opposed to in terms of binary opposites. Significantly therefore Butler discusses gender in terms of a performance. In relation to the performance of drag Butler writes: “gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real” (xxxi). Through her discussion of such Butler suggests that the performance of gender can reveal the mechanics of its construction:

His/her performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operate. Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? (xxxi)

Gender, as has already been established, is a key issue to discuss in relation to the characters interaction with racial identity in *Londonstani*. Ethnicity is used by the principle characters as a method of displaying and interacting with a gendered identity. Malkani also makes this point, suggesting that his characters: “were reaching for ethnic paraphernalia
rather than, say, football paraphernalia” (Mixing and Matching: What’s Wrong Right With Asian Boys’). Malkani discusses how his research leads him to see an association between cultural markers of this subculture and an assertion of a gender identity:

The conflation of questions of masculinity and race had been well documented in studies of Afro-Caribbean communities, and each time I went back to Hounslow to conduct another stage of fieldwork yet more anecdotal evidence would convince me how useful it could be to look at ethnic identities as tools or props for the bolstering of boys’ gender identities. (‘Mixing and Matching: What’s Wrong Right With Asian Boys’ NPg)

The group’s attitude towards women and sex demonstrates how they perform their identity through machismo. Social interactions create this group’s gendered identities mirroring R.W. Connell’s discussion on masculinities, in which he concludes that “Masculinities are neither programmed in our genes, or fixed by social structure, prior to social interaction...they are actively produced, using the resources and strategies available in a given social setting” (12). Connell notes that because masculinities are experienced through social interactions and environments, there is a need to consider the experience of masculinities in relation to the race and class of that society: “Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender ‘intersects’ – better, ‘interacts’ – with race and class” (29). That is not to say, as Gilroy’s comments above reflect, that “the integrity of the race is ... interchangeable with the integrity of black masculinity” (The Black Atlantic 194), such is a position Gilroy (as quoted above) warns against. However Connell’s comments do involve an understanding that since gender is a social construct, the societal influences around the
construct will have an impact on that masculinity, and therefore both race and class are relevant to the discussion.

Though it would seem that the many fights Hardjit in Londonstani has, often encouraged by his friends, are in relation to issues of a boy dating against the "traditional rules" and therefore is in relation to race, in fact we can read that Hardjit is asserting and performing his masculinity through the guise of ethnicity. Malkani makes this point, suggesting that at the heart of these boy’s problems with interracial relationships is not the issue of a multicultural society, but rather a gender issue as Hardjit and his friends want to control what the girls are doing in terms of a sexual ownership by controlling who they date as a method of asserting their idea of masculinity, which they have acquired from the images of this gender which surround them:

If another expression of virility is the ability to dictate a female’s sexual relations (as illustrated by hip-hop’s abhorrent glamorisation of the professional pimp), then it was little surprise to see aggressive ethnic identities employed by both Sikh and Muslim boys in order to punish those who had relations with girls across that traditional ethnic divide. (‘Mixing and Matching: What’s Wrong Right With Asian Boys’ NPg)

The heterosexual sexual act being understood as a symbol of male dominance over the female, is as Lynne Segal suggests omnipresent: “The ubiquity of the discourse and imagery of ‘conquest/submission’, ‘activity/passivity’, ‘masculinity/femininity’ constructing heterosexual intercourse as the spectacular moment of male domination and female submission, is inescapable” (‘The Belly of the Beast: Sex as Male Domination?’ original emphasis 102). The boys’ “beef” and wish to control the girls’ sexual relationships is an assertion of gendered identity as they are participating in a well established stereotypical heterosexual masculine gender role of male dominance of the heterosexual act. During his
discussion of black masculinity Richard Majors suggests that there is an intertwining of a performance of gender identity through an appropriation of racial markers and specifically relates this discussion to sexual relations, however, Majors also brings to the discussion issues of socio-economic class. Majors makes the link between a lack of socio-economic prosperity and opportunities to certain performances of masculinity, especially in terms of a domination of women. Therefore, the issue of gendered identities becomes detached from essentialist notions of racial identity and can be understood in terms of issues related to socio-economic circumstances:

Because of the many frustrations resulting from a lack of opportunities in society, many black males have become obsessed with proving manliness to themselves and to others. Lacking legitimate institutional means, black males will often go to great lengths to prove their manhood in interpersonal spheres of life e.g. fighting, the emotional and physical domination of women, and involvement in risk-taking activities (211).

This argument that males will go to "great lengths to prove their manliness" if they are in some way denied opportunities seems particularly appropriate for the young group of men in Londonstani as they live in a social class which seems to offer them very limited opportunities for success. Significantly the gender performed varies from the masculinity which Jay in Intimacy displays, who is living a much more comfortably middle-class existence.

The socio-economic background of the group members in Londonstani is complex and varies a great deal for each individual. Jas lives a lower middle class (verging on working class) existence, his dad works in a very small business, and in terms of the array of possessions he is described as having, is much less well off than some of his friends.
However, other members of the group are variously described as driving luxury cars and having the latest technological gadgets including mobile phones and games consoles. Hardjit in particular seems to have a very comfortable existence; his expansive house even has a bathroom dedicated to the act of hair removal of various kinds. However, once again things may not be as they first seem. The car the boys cruise around the city in is not Hardjit's, but his mother's, he tries to pass off the effeminate colour of the BMW as his colour of choice in a very machismo manner: “He said lilac was his favourite colour a ladies’ underwear an he wanted the outside a the car to match the panties pulled off inside” (14).

The boys are currently re-sitting their A’ levels whilst their peers go off to university, but instead of attending their college lessons they become involved with the underworld of mobile phone scams and illegal activities. Therefore even though some of the boys' families are described as seemingly having a comfortable lifestyle, the opportunities open to these young men are limited. They are operating on the margins of society in terms of their criminal activities rather than functioning with the mainstream and attending university in the hope of future success. Therefore just as Majors notes, we can in part read Hardjit’s dominating attitude towards women in relation to a lack of opportunity to function within “legitimate institutions” as he instead turns to other means to express his masculinity in relation to what Majors describes as “a frustration resulting from a lack of opportunities in society” (211). This lack of opportunity can indeed be read in terms of a social positioning in terms of Hardjit’s class and race; but rather than reflecting a crisis in expressing his ethnic identity, or in relation to the process of migration and immigration, Hardjit’s gender performance perhaps reflects his socio-economic subjugation. Though these characters do not agonises over a cultural othering or outsider status, rather, as discussed above, they demonstrate how they are part of creating a new culture for their generation which they are
firmly within rather than peripheral to, but Hardjit may be frustrated by a lack of opportunities that Londonstani depicts for Asian children like himself, even for those from relatively well-off backgrounds.

Kureishi’s Jay offers us a very different discussion and interaction with notions of masculinity. The lifestyle Jay and his family enjoy is far from the criminal underworld Jas and his friends participate in, as is revealed through Jay’s description of his house: “There are deep armchairs, televisions, telephones, pianos, music systems and the latest magazines and newest books in every room” (11). Significantly Jay is aware of the luxury he has access to: “Most people don’t have comfort, plenty and ease like this” (11). Jay appreciates the luxury his successful career has allowed him to have: “Being lower-middle class and from the suburbs, where poverty and pretension go together, I can see how good the middle class have it, and what a separated, sealed world they inhabit” (29). The sealed world that Jay describes is the one which Malkani’s characters seem excluded from, as these young men are fighting and scheming in a criminal and drugs underworld in order to try to find access to the luxurious things they desire, significantly, rather than through the legitimate means that Jay has acquired them.

The “crisis” of masculinity which Jay is described as having is in relation to the parenting role (or lack of) he is expecting to have once he has left his family home. Kureishi portrays an extremely close father-son relationship between Jay and his two boys, and as such the hurt and pain he is going to cause the children worries him: “Susan gives the younger boy a bottle, which he holds up to his mouth two-handedly, like a trumpeter... He giggles and squirms. What a quality of innocence people have when they don’t expect to be harmed” (10). However, Jay’s desire to leave, though in part is based on his sexual desires for his younger mistress, are also related to his own experience of family breakdowns: “As a boy I
would sit in my bedroom with my hands over my ears while my parents raged at one another downstairs, convinced that one would kill the other and then commit suicide" (25), a fate he wants to avoid for his children: “the children are more agitated than usual when Susan and I are together with them, as if our furies are infectious and they are weeping on our behalf” (116). Many of Jay’s concerns revolve around his desire to be a good parent: “I am a liberal parent, afraid of my occasional rages. I always regret any superfluous restraint. I wouldn’t want them to fear me; I wouldn’t want them to fear anyone. I don’t want to break or discourage anything in them” (17).

Intimacy describes gender roles against traditional stereotypical constructions of them, Susan has the more time-consuming job while Jay is more creative, and at home with the children. He makes this observation in relation to his friends also: “As usual the women were talking about work and the men about children” (118-9). Londonstani also provides an interesting discussion about gendered identity in relation to family situations but the gender roles described in the family in this novel are more stereotypical. There is a distinct lack of male role models in the text; Jas’s father is always at the office working, which means that the family is often visited by Uncle Bobby who taunts Jas with homophobic language, and Jas’s father isn’t there to defend him. Jas’s relationship with his father is poor, which Jas bemoans: “Hardjit’s dad was chattin some blatant shit bout ladies, at least the man was chattin bout ladies only time my own dad ever talks to me bout women is if he’s got an important female customer or supplier or whatever. An that’s hardly ever” (58). During an interview with John O’Connell, Malkani highlights his characters need to perform a gender identity as a result of their personal isolation from masculine role models: “They were trying to be men in households that were dominated by women” (NPg). The defining of masculinity in opposition to their mothers as opposed to in relation to their father results in what Malkani
defines as “hypermasculinity”. Their hypermasculinity involves an overt and exaggerated display of masculinity, emphasising characteristics which are stereotypically male, in part, such as that which have been described above in relation to the desire for ownership over women.

**Hypermasculinity as a Performance of Heterosexuality**

A major aspect of the performance of a hypermasculinity this group engage with is in terms of their opposition to homosexuality which is both effeminised and asexualised by the group of teenagers, quite literally being referred to in terms of an absence, lacking male genitals, i.e. “dickless” (12). There is a lot of homophobic language used by Jas and his friends as they opt for a hypermasculine and highly, strictly heterosexually, sexed personality. Jas refers to his previous state, before he became part of the group and interested in the desi culture as a state of “dicklessness” (12). The desi culture is defined in opposition to a youth culture which engages with indie rock music by bands such as Coldplay, a culture associated with androgyny, such as the wearing of skinny-jeans and long cardigans by both genders; a culture with roots in the Brit pop of the 1990s. The culture Kureishi depicts his young protagonist Shahid engaging with at nightclubs and raves with Deedee reflects an asexualised fashion, one which it is difficult to distinguish between the boys and the girls because they wear almost exactly the same clothes: “They went to a pub. The girls wore short skirts or white Levi’s. The guys in black or blue jeans” (112). Gender is also attempted to be hidden in the fashions of the young characters Zadie Smith engages with in *White Teeth*. Irie Jones, a girl described as who “had weight; big tits, big butt, big hips, big thighs, big teeth” (265) aspires to an “English rose” idea as she, through “belly reducing knickers and breast-reducing bra” and “meticulous lycra corseting – the much lauded nineties answer to whalebone” (265) attempts to conceal her frame. She feels disadvantaged with what she has inherited: “The
European proportions of Clara’s figure had skipped a generation, and she was landed instead with Hortense’s substantial Jamaican frame, loaded with pineapples, mangoes and guavas" (265). Her voluptuous female form increases her anxiety over being an outsider: “There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a strange land” (266). Irie’s ideal body shape is an asexual figure. In the line drawing in the novel which illustrates Irie’s aspirations for bodily figure there are simply two straight lines with a very small bulge (which could depict small breasts) (267). The drawing has little to determine if it’s male or female, there are no curves for hips for instance. Frankie, one of Charlie’s girlfriends in _The Buddha of Suburbia_, as the name suggests, also reflects this fashion for androgyny, as Karim describes: “She was skinny Frankie, and it looked rather like going to bed with an umbrella” (254), physically her figure is devoid of feminine shape. It is in part this youth culture and fashion which Londonstani’s youngsters are defining themselves in opposition to.

For the characters Malkani depicts gender and sexuality distinctions are very clear, homosexuality is ridiculed and promiscuity simultaneously honoured by the males, and despised in the female characters, for instance, Hardjit thinks that a “real desi girl” should not have sex before marriage. However Jas does not entirely prescribed to Hardjit’s version of masculinity and gender roles and goes against the boys’ boundaries of dating in terms of race lines. Jas is attracted to a Samira, when in front of his friends he expresses these feelings he is immediately reprimanded: “Samira outta bounds for all a us bredrens an you know it. She Muslim innit. We best all stick to our own kinds, boy, don’t b playin wid fire” (49). It is mainly Hardjit who enforces such rules, as Ravi warns Jas: “If any of us ever got with Samira, her mum an dad’d probly kill her and then try an kill us. That’s if our own mums an dads din’t kill us first. An then that’s if Hardjit didn’t kill us before they did” (49). Hardjit’s
rules are so strict “you ain’t allowed to fantasise outside your own race” (53). Despite Hardjit’s stipulations Jas and Samira begin a relationship, which they have to conduct in secrecy, significantly, they learn not in fear of Samira’s parents as Ravi is incorrect in his assumptions. Samira demonstrates a strong opinion and free will, as opposed to the depiction of femininity which Hardjit and his friends purport to exist which is either meek and her virginity is in need of protection, or in terms of a sexual conquest. Hardjit seems confused as he is going through a process of trying to understand gender roles, and how he should perform his masculinity: “Hardjit sometimes gets pretty vexed bout that kind a shit. Porn, hookers, slutty ladies. Other times he’ll be laughing along, actin like a pimp. Honest to God, one minute he’s talking bout how he’s gonna get inside some desi girl’s lace kachian an the next minute he’s actin as if a girl’s gotta be a virgin if she wants to be a proper desi” (53).

Samira introduces Jas to her father at the very beginning of their relationship in a very overt opposition to Jas’s preconceptions of the situation: “Firstly, you’re not my boyfriend yet. Secondly, even if you were, my dad wouldn’t want to kill you …He probably wouldn’t even have a problem with us going out. He sees himself as some kind of wise old man who’s above all that stuff” (221). This encounter with Samira allows us to read the attitudes about Hardjit’s wish to control the relationships of his group’s members as not about race, but rather his own ideas on gender roles. The couple have to hide their relationship from Samira’s brothers and from Hardjit and his friends as controlling the sexuality of women and an ownership of them is an important part of the masculinity of the desi culture (as discussed above). Female sexuality for this culture is something that can be possessed and as a possession must be protected in an assertion of a masculine rather than a racial identity.

For the younger generation in Smith’s White Teeth race is also less of a distinguishing feature amongst themselves as their sexual identity is what occupies them: “In Glenard Oak
Comprehensive, black, Pakistani, Greek, Irish – these were races. But those with sex appeal lapped the other runners. They were a species of their own” (269). There has been a shift away from identity politics to a focus on the individual, and it is in London, at this particular moment that *White Teeth* locates this shift: “It is only this late in the day, and possibly only in Willesden, that you can find best friends Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other because Sita is white (her mother liked the name) and Sharon is Pakistani (her mother thought it best – less trouble)” (327). Smith even historizes the migrant experience as she describes the future generation in a London playground:

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Issac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a direct collision course. Names that secret within them mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals and medical checks. (326)

Smith far from suggests that the history of migration and immigration is irrelevant, rather it is an essential element of identity, in that it is to be found within the very names of the children which she describes. However, she discusses this aspect which contributes to the children’s identity with the use of the past tense. In a novel which comes at the end of a century (*White Teeth* was published in the year 2000), Smith’s approach can be read as a symbolic summing-up of a key aspect of the history (that of colonialism and migration) at the end of the century, innately suggesting a movement beyond for the new century. The diversity and mixing happening within the playground maybe a preoccupation for the outsider observer rather than for the children themselves, as Nicola Allen in *Marginality in the Contemporary British Novel* suggests: “Smith depicts a Britain in which the ground has shifted to the personal, the
next generation are not interested in racial prejudice as much as a kind of consumer-driven competitiveness over who can wield the most power through their own sexual attraction” (86). In this respect White Teeth’s young characters can therefore be understood as on a par with those in Londonstani. Jas and his friends are preoccupied with identity (and gender and sexuality) construction through consumerism, in terms of wearing the right trainers and buying the right music in the hope that this contributes to their sexual attractiveness. Hardjit, the dominant male of the group is described as looking like he has been shopping with American rap star P Diddy, having the latest Nike airforce trainers, as Jas points out, before a song is written about how good they are, thereby giving him the authority of the group, and the assumption that he is also the most likely to “get the girl”.

Conclusion

Not only are both of these texts producing more culturally conservative narrative styles in that neither proffer any overt formal innovation, the same could be argued in terms of content, as their characters are less politically radical. Thomas summarises Kureishi’s middle and later periods of writing: “Kureishi seems to have lost faith, or lost interest, in the 1970s agenda which saw literature as an agent for political or social change. Now he is more likely to talk of literature’s role in considering the ‘human condition’ than in examining the ‘Condition of England’” (151), which is seemingly translated into the characters he writes such as Jay. In Intimacy Jay describes what he perceives to be changing times: “In the late sixties and seventies I did feel that I belonged to something, to other young people, and to some sort of oppositional movement ... But there is something I miss: losing oneself, yes, in a larger cause” (146). He further comments on how the focus for him has shifted to the personal: “Freud was our new father, as we turned inwards” (154). These texts, through their characters seem to be describing a culture that is less politically radical and adopting more
conservative forms as they move beyond a period of postmodern high experimentalism and the previous era of a perceived (at least by Jay) political radicalism to instead describe a culture which is focused more on the individual and personal relationships.

A movement towards considering these texts in light of a post-postmodern reading can in part be understood as a process of engaging with texts by writers who are from, or have an ancestral purchase upon, an ex-British colony “beyond” the rubric of postcolonial theory. This process is in turn relevant to that of bringing once marginalized voices to the centre, as these texts can be understood in terms of many current critical debates. bell hooks comments (as previously discussed) in relation to writers of Afro-Caribbean descent, that it would be limiting, if not offensive, to presume that any author is only concerned with a single issue because it is personally relevant to them, such as racial identity, and for that author to be excluded from discussions of any aesthetic (even theoretical) movement:

[R]acism is perpetuated when blackness is associated solely with concrete gut level experience conceived either as opposing or having no connection to abstract thinking and the production of critical theory. The idea that there is no meaningful connection between black experience and critical thinking about aesthetics or culture must be continually interrogated. (Postmodern blackness NPg)

Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal whose debut novel Tourism was published in 2007 addresses a similar issue to that raised by hooks, as he comments on the recent inauguration of the Decibel prize, a “black-British writing” section, or “postcolonial writing” category added onto The British Book Awards (in 2005). Dhaliwal states that he does not want to be judged along distinctions of ethnicity: “I don’t want the marginal recognition that might come with winning the Decibel; I want to go toe-to-toe with Whitey. I want to compete with Amis, McEwan and all the other big shots” (‘Gosh, brown and Talented? Super’).
Oyedeji describes Evaristo’s *Lara* (1997) and Diran Adebayo’s *Some Kind of Black* (1996) as “preludes to a brand new black political identity – *preludes* because they were literary precursors, visible signs that Black British literature was steering itself in a different direction” (original emphasis 120). Oyedeji is hopeful that these “preludes” signal change: “[i]mplicit in their narratives were protagonists in search of new ground, new breathing space, and the autobiographical admission of the authors implied that they themselves were using their texts as vehicles in search of the possibilities, of new positions, the new paradigms, and the new perspectives that await them” (120). Towards the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, I suggest therefore, that “black political identity” can be seen to be changing, and the possibilities of “different directions” has opened up. Though Kureishi emerged in the 1980s, a decade defined by Heidi Safia Mirza in *Black British Feminism* as one which was “consumed by identity politics and claims to authenticity through marginalized subjectivities” (9), he has rejected any restrictive focus as, he is not “concerned to incite white liberal guilt and sympathy over the hierarchies of oppression that minorities occupy” (Ranasinha 121). Instead, Kureishi has participated in dominant forms, styles and issues, and by doing so has engaged with a variety of different concerns within both the aesthetic field, and social issues, and posed difficult questions: “his work subverts and transgresses dominant notions of national and ethnic, gendered and sexual identity, and asks probing questions about all forms of authority, affiliations and ideologies” (Ranasinha 121). As Ranasinha suggests, therefore, the progression we can identify within the different phases of Kureishi’s work elucidate a process of challenging the subjugation of voices, as well as revealing the ideologies and the mechanism which work to subjugate them. He has in part achieved this by being at the forefront of contemporary issues, bringing them to the fore, and occupying his place as a significant figure within the contemporary literary scene, as such Kureishi is engaged in an important process, which Oyedeji describes as
beginning with Evaristo’s *Lara* and Adebayo’s *Some Kind of Black*. Kureishi himself comments on the need for marginalized writers to have access to the wider ground: “If contemporary writing which emerges from oppressed groups ignores the central concerns and major conflicts of the larger society, it will automatically designate itself as minor, as a sub-genre. And it must not allow itself to be rendered invisible and marginalized in this way” (Hanif Kureishi ‘Dirty Washing’ 25-6). Kureishi’s and Malkani’s work can be read beyond the postcolonial as they engage with contemporary debate and their texts can be discussed in relation to wider aesthetic and theoretical issues, therefore they can also both be read beyond postmodern perspectives.

In order to carry out such a reading of being beyond the postcolonial and the postmodern I have chosen to consider these texts in relation to current debates on masculinities, there are of course many other ways in which these texts could be read in light of an analysis beyond the postcolonial and the postmodern. However Segal makes a poignant point in relation to the discussion of gendered identities, demonstrating the continued need for this particular discussion, noting that: “despite two decades of fierce feminist criticism, ridicule and the use of every available weapon to undermine and transform sexist ideology and practice in the West, male sexuality is still constantly presented to us as predatory and overpowering” (109). In *Londonstani* the sexuality Hardjit portrays is one based in terms of overpowering in relation to a desire to take possession of the women in his society. In *Intimacy* Jay is attracted to his mistress because she consistently carries out all of his sexual desires, such as parading herself in public, as she informs him, with no underwear on, and lets him eat strawberries off her. Jay’s sexual attraction to Nina is therefore about dominance, about him being able to carry out the acts he wants, even though the masculinity performed in this text is not as overtly about dominance and overpowering women as the portrayal of male
sexual identity in Londonstani is. The strong female character of Intimacy, Jay's wife, who is not at his sexual beck and call, is abandoned in preference for the more sexually complicit woman, Nina. Therefore, despite a long period of discussion of gendered identities and of male sexuality, that these novels at the millennium chose to provide very conservative depictions of male sexuality (and as Segal above notes), suggests that debates surrounding these issues are far from over.

The critical reception of Intimacy, in terms of the discussion of gender roles sparked much debate: "the critical divide has been between those who see Kureishi exploring new forms of masculinity in a post-feminist era, tackling the contemporary breakdown of heterosexual relationships with honesty and insight, and those who argue that these works are misogynistic" (Thomas 4). Intimacy therefore represents a distinct commentary on gender issues which as Moore-Gilbert suggest, and Kureishi provides us with a textual representation of, is a key contemporary issue which needs to be discussed: "the fact that Jay's notebooks remain largely blank perhaps suggests that for Kureishi a satisfactory script of contemporary masculinity is as yet unwritable" (179). Intimacy and Londonstani demonstrate how the debate is a continuing one, as Moore-Gilbert notes: "Intimacy contributes to making such a script more feasible" (179). As such both of these texts participate in a meaningful way to contemporary discussions other than those which revolve around a purely postcolonial basis. They become part of an exposition of current identities for London's men, in that the texts by multicultural authors, and the male characters they write, can be understood through a variety of critical approaches, avoiding any "ghettoization" of the author of migrant, diasporic or subsequent generations heritage into a postcolonial sub-category of contemporary British fiction. Thereby I offer an analysis of Intimacy and Londonstani in light of current
discussions about masculinity and postmodernism as a significant and rewarding method of reading these two texts.
Conclusion

"Rash judgments and lack of consensus aside, it is clear that the discourse surrounding postmodernism – regardless of its ‘death’ or maturity – has irrevocably changed, begging the teleological questions what comes ‘after’, what lies ‘beyond’?" (Gavin Keulks ‘W(h)ither Postmodernism’ 2006 159)

One of the persistent features of London literature is its engagement with the processes of bringing marginalized voices to the fore, such as Charles Dickens’ portrayal of the poor; the shell-shocked in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway; anarchists in Joseph Conrad’s The Secret Agent; daring feminists in George Gissing’s The Odd Women; and the plight of the migrant in Colin MacInnes’ City of Spades. A consideration of London fiction at the millennium reveals that there has been a recent intensification of this characteristic. The writers considered in this thesis are all in some way “marginalized” and/or are engaging with marginalized characters; and they are also all, to some extent, reengaging, adapting and appropriating traditional, dominant and mainstream storytelling techniques and styles. The use of the archetypal characterization of the hero and the appropriation of the historical novel for these perspectives means that these texts can be read as reimagining the “centre” with previously underrepresented voices.

Even though a consideration of the marginal and the periphery have long been important locales for British fiction, as Peter Childs’s comments on the longevity of the novel flourishing there (as quoted in the Introduction) suggest, as well as the writing of the outsider figure being an especially prominent feature within London literature (as the above examples demonstrate); the continued use of this trope in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries
by London authors suggest that it remains a key area of investigation, and continues to be an important site for innovative fiction. Throughout the thesis I have considered the texts in light of recent post-postmodern thinking. Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (British Fiction Today) suggest that in Yellow Dog Martin Amis "designates the end of the postmodern, reducing it to a series of stylistic gestures" (xvi). That the writers considered here continue to write about protagonists that are marginalized on the grounds of gender, race, sexuality, age or medical condition, or indeed about the processes of such subjugation taking place, using classical styles as opposed to more formally experimental techniques suggests that they can be read beyond a postmodern disruption of form.

Mengham and Tew go on to discuss how it is partly through a "series of global traumas" (xv), such as the 9/11 disaster; the Bali bombs; the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars; the 2004 Tsunami; and the 2005 London bombings that a change in representation has occurred: "Many writers conceive that major world events have reshaped both aesthetic and cultural sensibilities" (xvi). It is perhaps too early to assess or even understand the full extent of the impact of such events on literature, or indeed the reasons or implications of a movement towards more conservative or traditional styles of storytelling. However, what I hope has been evident from my treatment of the texts considered in this thesis, is that it is possible to begin to read the works beyond a sole consideration of postmodern perspectives. It can be noted that in substantial ways the authors considered in this thesis do move away from disruptions and rejections of form, aspects often found within postmodern texts, towards narrative styles more commonly found within traditional archetypal fiction, as literary realism, the heroic quest narrative and melodrama permeate these texts.

This study has considered a selection of London fiction at the millennium, reading it beyond the confines of postmodern perspectives. In Chapter One this took the form of a
consideration of the re-stabilisation of historic storytelling in the female London writers in
light of Michel Foucault's work on power and its relationships to knowledge and discourse as
I considered how Evaristo, Levy and Waters engage with key historical moments in order to
provide representations of the minority, marginal or the "outsider" figure without disrupting
conventional formal narrative techniques. I suggested that they do so in order to both
highlight the processes of occluding some peoples from history and also to offer revisions
and reimagining of these specific moments with the inclusion of those previously
marginalized. Thus widening the scope of, rather than challenging the idea of the validity of
the historical record. In Chapters Two and Three I investigated contemporary London
authors' use of the heroic characterization and suggested that this facilitates a process of
situating the marginalized figure within familiar literary styles, and moves away from a
postmodern fragmentation of notions of "self" and identity. These writers, through the use of
the heroic archetype, also offer an alternative, generally more optimistic depiction of
London's youth to that of the 1990s hedonistic youngsters. In Chapter Four I considered the
changing masculinities expressed in the work of Kureishi and Malkani in relation to a post-
postmodern reading, as opposed to a focus on postcolonial subject matter which has received
much critical attention in relation to London fiction.

Though Keulks suggests "the backlash against postmodernism has been exceptionally
impassioned and self-congratulatory" ('W(h)ither Postmodernism' 159) there have as yet
been relatively few suggestions as to how we should understand an era that comes after
postmodernism. The response from recent scholarship, Keulks suggests, involves a return,
suggesting that: "the preferred approach stipulate[s] a wistful return to realism" (159). A
philosophical approach has in part involved a move towards "'Critical realism,' spearheaded
by Roy Bhaskar and Rom Harré" (Keulks 159); whereas literature offers another response:
"Literature has been more effusive, suggesting 'dirty realism', 'post-modern realism', 'neorealism', 'deep realism', 'spectacle realism', 'fiduciary realism', 'hyper-realism', and most recently, 'hysterical realism'" (Keulks 159). Raoul Eshelman in Performatism supports Keulks's claims that there is a need for greater critical attention towards what appropriate analysis may be made in thinking beyond postmodernism: "In spite of a widely held feeling that both postmodernism and its theoretical adjunct, poststructuralism, are on their way out, there is little or no interest in inquiring about what a succeeding epoch might look like or what other theoretical tools could be used to describe it" (x).

However, Keulks's theories on post-postmodernism in relation to Amis's late works which he describes as being "an artistry that endeavours to revive and rehumanize — or 're-hume'" (161) do offer an interesting avenue for investigation. The novels considered throughout this thesis can be read as seeking to move towards a more universalised repositioning of the marginal, as opposed to a decentred subject and a focus on formal experimentation. For instance, Stanley in Soul Tourists wonders why he was not taught about the Moors and points to a fault in his London schooling, and Nan King in Tipping the Velvet, unaware that female homosexuality exists, also draws attention to absences within her cultural discourse. These texts address that which has been occluded from official knowledges, as taught in schools, or common perceptions of the nation's past. This can be interpreted as an almost neo-humanist endeavour to readdress an imbalance of voices coming from the centre ground, as these writers revise traditional forms from the perspectives of the marginalized, and thus gain a purchase on the dominant literary traditions as opposed to a challenge to form. Therefore, rather than the periphery offering an opportunity for subversive formal experimentation and innovative aesthetic endeavours, these marginalized writers position their revision within the centre by choosing to situate their narratives within
the capital city, and by evoking or employing traditional and mainstream styles. In so doing, such texts are indicative of the extent to which previous postmodern and liberal humanist endeavours opened out the novel and widened participation, as writers who are drawn from groups that were once excluded from an open representation now reach for the centre ground. Whilst, at the same time, the texts studied hint also at some of the limitations of those previous exercises, the pull that traditional or conventional narratives still wields over otherwise politically liberal texts is interesting in itself and represents an area worthy of greater investigation than a single thesis could ever hope to provide. This thesis therefore necessarily considers a representative sample, and can but make a preliminary contribution to a fledging field of study.
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