

own place of origins had become threatening or undesirable. London had become an international city with a large community of resident writers from elsewhere who were either employed in England or used it as a home while being part of the literary scene. Neither immigrants nor birds of passage, such resident migrants had similarities to those at the end of the colonial period in the 1940s and 1950s who were at home in England while retaining homes elsewhere. Instead of being part of the Empire they were products of internationalization.

II. Prose: Remapping England

Black Britain

Black British became the usual term for the new black popular fiction, the urban naturalism that evolved from such models, as well as the serious detective stories written by Mike Phillips, and a generation of new writers, many of whom were of mixed race. If black British could be the basis for separatist assertion, it could also mean racial pluralism. There was an increasing interest in what might be thought the white side of blackness, how white working-class and women's lives were like those of blacks and Asians, what it was like to be white in a mixed marriage. A small but significant number of writers avoided racial or ethnic classification. Besides the increasing prominence of Nigerian, British Nigerian, and British Asian authors, there was now a large community of resident writers from parts of Asia.

Black British pulp fiction started when Xpress published *Yardie* (1992), the first of Victor Headley's trilogy about D, a Jamaican sent to England as a gang courier. Instead of delivering the consignment, he uses the cocaine to become a British gang lord and is soon being pursued. Intended as a film script, a British version of Michael Thelwell's classic *The Harder They Come*, a violent Jamaican movie about a tough young man, *Yardie* concerns becoming self-sufficient in an environment of poverty, drugs, and crime: the main character, a criminal, is treated as a hero, someone to identify with, rather than a villain.

Two journalists who worked for *The Voice* hoped to raise money

for the *Yardie* film by getting the script published. Unable to attract a publisher, they printed the novel themselves. It attracted attention in the press, sold 12,000 copies, and was taken on by Pan, a mainstream paperback publisher. Steve Pope and Dotun Adebayo had stumbled on a previously untapped literary market, black Britons who wanted to read books about themselves and the places where they live, written by one of themselves in a language and manner that approximated black urban life—books by those felt to be part of the community. As journalists who wrote for black publications, Pope and Adebayo knew how to reach their community and make it identify with their product. Xpress advertised in black areas of London the way dances or records were publicized with fliers that looked like record covers. The novels often allude to Pope, Adebayo, other Xpress books, or Adebayo's radio programme. Xpress asked its readers to submit manuscripts about their lives; many of the characters in the novels think about turning their lives into stories for Xpress. Such novels gave their readers a feeling of being intimately part of the contemporary black, especially West Indian, scene in Brixton and the estates.

Xpress novels assume that blacks live and have their own society in a racially prejudiced nation in which life can be tough and many youths become criminals. The law of the street is survival. The novels also assume free will, the ability to distinguish between what becomes harmful and what is useful to the individual and to the black community. There are moral choices to be made, and the morals are conservative, although not those of white Conservatives. While the novels of Selvon, Lamming, and Okri were felt to be written for whites, here was something that followed the conventions of popular black West Indian culture, yet was British. Xpress novels used black street talk, had black British characters in situations where they were not often portrayed in fiction. The novels were designed to be pulp fiction with much sex, violence, excitement, humour, and sounding off about such issues as the difficulty of young blacks finding jobs, the brutality of white police, and the unwillingness of black men to settle and bring up families. There was another social reality, often ignored by those advocating multiculturalism, behind such fiction. Large-scale new immigration brought new criminals. British criminals were being challenged and

replaced by Chinese Triads (as in Mo's *Sour Sweet*), Jamaican Yardies, and other newcomers.

Yardie was a runaway success; *Excess* (1993) and *Yardie 3* (1994) were Headley's sequels about D in the criminal world and 'front line' (where police and the community clash) of black London. Soon Xpress books were being sold at W. H. Smith and other chains, first print runs of 10,000 were usual, and such trade publishers as Abacus and Fourth Estate began looking for books about black Britain, involving Jamaican immigrants, set in black ghetto communities, written in black street talk, and concerned with crime and the dangerous life of inner-city youths. This reinforced, as Mike Phillips complained in *London Crossings* (2001), an existing stereotype of black England, especially of black urban youth, as trapped victims in a culture of drugs and violence imported from the West Indies, a model itself based on stereotypes of black American inner-city violence, a stereotype earlier exploited by Chester Himes and more recently by Walter Mosley.

Yardie was an immigrant novel, a hybrid, that transferred a Jamaican stereotype to England. England was tough, but not as violent as Jamaica. While England was another territory in which to hustle for a living, it offered hope of a better life than the islands. The close relationship of early Xpress writing to Jamaica can be seen in Tony Sewell's *Jamaica INC.* (1993), which traces a century of Jamaican history from shortly after slavery until recent murderous drug-riddled politics. Because of the large Jamaican presence among British West Indians and because of the associations of the island with crime, many Xpress novels are set in Kingston. Dirk Robertson's *Highland T'ing* (1998) begins in Kingston with a throat slashing followed by setting aflame cigarette-lighter fluid in the victim's ear. Although the narrative soon shifts to London and Scotland, it is the Jamaican connection that matters. Colin Moore's *Obeah*, a thriller told in patois about murder in rural Jamaica, was awarded the 1995 Xpress prize for new fiction. In such tales about Jamaican brutality and crime, a New World vision of Caribbean and black American crime as deriving from slavery and being part of the black man's survival was imported to England.

Besides creating a formula for stories about the lives of blacks in Britain's inner cities, Xpress fiction avoids white characters. The

assumption is that blacks want to read about black lives, not about blacks in a white or a mixed society. Xpress also redefined how black British patois was written. This was not the language of Selvon, but something more contemporary, a patois heavily influenced by Jamaican English. Its notation was difficult to understand for those unfamiliar with the sounds.

Cop Killer (1994) tells of how two sons of Jamaican immigrants respond to the murder of their mother by corrupt white police who mistakenly kill her while seeking a drug dealer from whom they are not getting their percentage. Her one son is studying for qualifications and a better life and settles for financial compensation after the police literally get away with murder. He also returns to the West Indies for a period where he learns that he is not a Jamaican and must accept being British. He will have a career, marry, and have a family. The other brother, a taxi driver, trains himself in the arts of revenge, kills several police including those involved in his mother's death, and at the end of the novel is still driving his cab undetected. The story can be said to show, 'There ain't no justice—just me!', a line several times repeated in the story and quoted on the cover. He learns, however, that his mother's death was caused by a black giving false information to the police which made them suspect that his own brother was a drug dealer. While justifying black anger Donald Gordon shows, through the mother and brother, alternatives to violence when faced by white hostility. A common formula in black British fiction is such doubling, the use of a brother, sister, or close friend whose behaviour is the opposite of the protagonist's. Often the double is killed or wounded by the police. As bad as England may appear, Jamaica, we learn, is more corrupt, crime filled, and violent, and the authorities more unjust. The taxi driver reflects that if he had not taken to revenge killings he might have written a love story for Xpress.

Xpress novels are moralistic about the bad effect on the black community of drugs, guns, and male irresponsibility. Rather than joining in gangsta rap, the novels are written against their valuation of the macho killer as urban black hero. The readership of Xpress novels is overwhelmingly black women and the novels show how a culture of drugs and violence destroys the family and leaves children fatherless, perpetuating from generation to generation a community

pathology of single-parent families and irresponsible men. Karline Smith's *Moss Side Massive* (1994; rev. 2000), set in Manchester, concerns war between two gangs of young blacks. The narrative inevitably leads to a bloodbath in which the gangs shoot it out to see which survives. Such a conclusion is inherent to the basic notion that life consists of a struggle for territory over which a person or gang rules and needs to expand their domain which leads to a war for survival once 'respect' (fear of one's violence) is lost. The story shows the terrible effect of the macho gangland culture on families. Once part of a gang the men become trapped and no longer have a family life. Towards the end of the novel the leader of the stronger gang realizes that a member of the other gang is his half-brother. His father left his mother and had a family by another woman. Male irresponsibility, caused in part by the economic problems of black men, destroys the family as the basis of community and creates a culture of male bonding in which gang competes with gang.

After *Yardie* the best-known Xpress books were Patrick Augustus's *Baby Father* trilogy, republished as *The Complete Baby Father* (1999), followed by *Baby Father 4*. The series observes four black men through their early manhood, relationships to women, and their fathering of and separation from their children. Written within conventions of TV soap opera, in which the stories reflect on each other, with each scene often ending with the unexpected and outrageous, the novels portray representative successful, desirable black men. The central incidents involve men straying outside relationships, their lies to women and themselves, and what they and others suffer as a result. Now that there are child-support laws men can no longer increase and multiply without paying for it, yet by law are denied access to their children. Many Xpress novels portray black women as more serious about work, finances, and security than black men. Carl Peters's amusing *Diary of a Househusband* (1998) indicates some of the social and gender tensions in contemporary England, especially in the black community, where women may hold better paying, higher powered jobs than their men and where other roles might be reversed.

Many Xpress novels seem shaped by the same editorial hand, Dotun Adebayo (b. 1959), the newspaper and radio columnist and older brother of the novelist Diran Adebayo. There are recurring

types of jokes, allusions to Xpress books and Adebayo's columns, ways in which chapters end, and social and ethical comments, which feel familiar and will either seem predictable or make the reader part of the Xpress circle of readers. Dotun Adebayo edited almost ninety titles, of which some thirty have been heavily edited, and some totally rewritten. He probably should be considered the author of many Xpress novels. Dotun Adebayo's only book of his own work is a collection of essays and newspaper columns, *Can I Have My Balls Back?* (2001). The Adebayos had become a significant British literary family. Besides the novelist Diran Adebayo and Dotun there is a third brother, Yinka Adebayo (b. 1957), who has written children's books for Xpress beginning with *Age Ain't Nothing but a Number* (1998).

Besides publishing original books, Xpress republished black classics and had its own Xpress Book Club. The reprints and club selections were usually of American texts such as James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Charles W. Chesnutt's *The House behind the Cedars*. These are established older classics of African-American literature which could be republished at no cost for royalties. In this Xpress followed the formula of Virago, which made a reputation and money from rediscovering out-of-print female authors.

Xpress's pulp fiction helped give birth to a more serious black popular fiction, an inner-city naturalism, about the young British of West Indian origins who feel trapped on the estates and other black neighbourhoods among drug dealers and gang violence and who see no way to better themselves. While highlighting the situation of a decaying West Indian working class and how society's neglect of the problem results in crime, these are not protest novels addressed to white liberals. Although sold by mainstream publishers, the novels intended for black readers combine social determinism with a moral perspective. Besides helping map part of black Britain, the novels are rich in the language and speech of the community. They are a new urban fiction distinct from previous novels about London.

Courtia Newland's fiction developed beyond the Xpress formulas and influenced others through his ability to convey a sense of inner-city life, his complexly structured action-filled plots, and his notation of black speech. Newland wrote intricate plots with action and

suspense, and brought an intensity to Xpress conventions, making them almost Gothic in bloodiness, urban squalor, danger, and the inevitability of disaster. Using pulp fiction formulas he wrote serious novels about black British communities. The characters are Linton Kwesi Johnson's rebels after the revolution failed. They are victims of race and economics, but more directly of their environment, of other blacks, and their own lapses and wrong choices. There are also criminals of an intensity unusual to serious fiction. The problem is how to survive and leave such a hard world. What should a black youth do? As in much black British fiction survival is a main theme, but what a person does to survive can be self-destructive.

Newland's first novel *The Scholar* (1997) is subtitled 'A West Side Story'. The narrator carefully describes Greenside Estate, a mis-conceived, unfinished housing project whose time has passed. Greenside and nearby estates have become holding pens for immigrants, especially those West Indians who have not made it in England. Crime and drugs flourish, the youth are unemployed except as drug dealers and petty criminals. There is a subculture in which gangs rule, survival requires gang loyalty, and the police are viewed as enemies by thugs and their victims. Most of the youths lack the discipline to progress through education and some parents are supported by their children's dealing in drugs. The youths are in a trap from which escape is unlikely especially for those already wounded or unable to ignore the pains of others. Whenever the characters are faced by uncomfortable decisions, they light up a joint or take drugs. They appear always to be high on drugs and unable to make or stick to decisions. The line between documentary and judgement is fine.

The interrelated stories in *Society Within* (1999) portray a group of people whose vision and contacts is limited to Greenside Estate, and the volume has the tight focus that the unities give classical theatre, with a similar concentration of effect. This is a book about what 'cool Britannia' ignores. No one goes to a university or belongs to the professional classes. Some parents returned to the West Indies; there are single mothers with out-of-work, live-in lovers; the adults smoke dope while warning their children against becoming involved in drugs. There is always the temptation to drift into crime. While people need to survive, violence results from displays of pride and

seeing life as a predatory battle (which is implied to be the ideological inheritance of Thatcher's England).

The volume begins and concludes with portraits of Elisha, who has just arrived from another estate, and who is one of the few self-disciplined characters who actively seek work; at the conclusion she has gained a boyfriend who is a drug dealer. How long will she remain different from the others? The penultimate story is ambiguously upbeat; Nathan wants to create a pirate radio station and manages to bring his friends and some dealers together to finance and run it. However, it is a 'pirate' station outside the law and there are allusions to other stations being busted or going broke. Nathan had not even thought of getting advertising. While for those brought up in such an environment the way out begins beyond the law, most of the youths are too undisciplined for work; they prefer 'signing on' as unemployed to taking boring jobs: assuming something better will turn up, they become involved with petty crime. As in *The Scholar*, there is an inevitability about events, a feeling that given the social and economic situation, worse crime and killings will happen. Newland has tried to vary the routine with a love story as a way of showing that there is more to such people than crime and drugs, but he is less convincing about romance.

Newland tried to avoid getting stuck in a niche as novelist of black urban ghettos and phonetically rendered black British speech. He has written a black detective story about the murder of a black MP and his daughter. *Snakeskin* (2002) combines Xpress's sex and violence and its almost totally black world with Mike Phillips's black private detective who surveys society while trying to learn about the past of the murdered. *Snakeskin* suggests that the black professionals and the brown mixed race are as immoral and violent as those from the estates.

Each of the novelists who followed Newland's direction in writing about black Britain made a particular location their speciality as if the mapping of the place was itself of importance. Stephen Thompson's first novel *Toy Soldiers* (2000) concerns the rise and fall of a young drug dealer in Hackney, East London, during the 1980s. Alex Wheatle also portrays the political, economic, and social history of his community, noting its particular problems, and recording its speech, turning the chaos of the recent past into an

understandable narrative. Whereas Newland's focus is on the estates which are regarded as black ghettos, Wheatle looks at the black working class in Brixton, especially during the early 1980s, a period now as mythic as the earlier Notting Hill has become.

Wheatle's first novel *Brixton Rock* (1999) is set in Brixton during six months of 1980 when an angry young man of mixed Jamaican-English parentage attempts to find his parents and in the process discovers something of his origins and the dangers of love, a theme which recurs in Wheatle's *Seven Sisters* (2002). Brenton Brown is raised in a brutal children's home and at 16 is hardened, amoral, and filled with rage. He meets, falls in love with, and has a child by his elder half-sister, who, in giving him the love and family that he lacked, takes on his pain and her mother's guilt. Wheatle offers a portrait of second-generation black Britain with the young following sound systems and making social distinctions between going to soul rather than reggae clubs. It is the time of 'sus' law under which black youth were stopped, searched, questioned, and often roughed up by the police. As seen from the death of Blair Peach, a white activist killed while campaigning for nuclear disarmament, police brutality can be colour blind. Wheatle tries to be colour blind; if the police are always 'pigs' and 'the beast' who speak and act like racists, there is enough black violence and crime in the novel to make liberals uncomfortable. Regardless of the causes, this is a portrait of a largely lawless community.

Several well-known black British authors have written about being given away by parents unable to face the personal and social pressures at the time. *Brixton Rock* is a *Brighton Rock* for contemporary England, a story about the inner life of a wounded social outcast who is redeemed while becoming a criminal. Unfortunately the development of the story is predictable and feels contrived and its realism is too literary. There are few sentences without clumsy foregrounding of black slang; the piling up of tough-guyisms becomes unintentionally comic.

Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane* (2001), also about black south London during the 1980s, begins with Biscuit being threatened by a feared Brixton crime lord for whom he sells marijuana and commits petty crimes. Biscuit wants to quit but he has no other career. Barely out of school, he is the oldest of three children and he supports his

family. His young brother and his sister, who does little beyond demand more clothes to go to dances, have different fathers, while his mother pretends not to know the source of their family income. Eventually the sister leaves home and is forced into prostitution which leads to a battle in which the crime lord is killed by a gun originally purchased to murder a white policeman. As the novel ends, Biscuit and his family are reunited, he has given up dealing and intends to start studying at a university. He also wins over the woman he loves.

In 1981 Thatcher's England was stunned by riots in the black communities. *East of Acre Lane* shows black youth unemployed with no chances for jobs, and continually hounded and often treated brutally by the police. They live in a demoralizing environment of poor housing, broken homes, and a culture which sees its problems as the result of British racism, a view which has become an ideology of resistance proclaimed in the popular music that is continually played at home and dances. Such an attitude is self-fulfilling. The youths refuse to join training schemes, feel that they must have the latest clothing, and deceive themselves that they will escape without making an effort. The final events in the novel are set against the April 1981 Brixton riot and even here there is irony as the disturbances begin with the locals mistakenly thinking that a policeman had wounded a black youth when actually the policeman wants to take him to hospital after he had been hurt by someone else. The novel is filled with black British social history including fashionable shoes, clothing, and records. As in many books about black Britain, an excess of historical facts clogs the flow of the story while the social determinism works against the message that life can be improved with will and education.

The most successful of the black ghetto novels is Rocky Carr's *brixton bwoy* (1998) published by Fourth Estate. This story of a young rural Jamaican transplanted to England and his evolution from school bully through various stages of petty crime to a hardened criminal seems a descendant of *Moll Flanders*. Want to be a pickpocket? Use your first two fingers as pinchers. Best to do it as part of a gang so that if caught you can scare your accuser, even beat up the unarmed British police. Know how to avoid being caught as a 'creeper' stealing from offices? And if you have many women, two

already mothers of your children, are regarded as a hero at local dances and nightclubs, and live from day to day, waiting to see what might come up, it could be a good life while it lasts, especially if by the time you are 20 you are unqualified to do anything else and are bored by monotonous, poorly paid jobs.

Carr is both moralist and determinist who shows how lack of discipline affects schooling thus blocking future employment, how the brutality of one generation is passed to the next, how the excitement of living for the moment become addictive and destructive. This is not a novel about racial victims, but about the ways personality and early choices influence economic survival. Pupatee is already a truant from school in rural Jamaica and hardened to punishment from his father and teachers when he is sent to England to live with an older, sadistic brother. Pupatee is a social misfit, awaiting gangs, reform school, and older criminals to teach him the tricks of what will be his only trade. Many of the West Indians he knows, however, have jobs, are planning careers, live in racially mixed neighbourhoods, go to racially mixed schools and social events. People belong to their neighbourhoods; even the West Indian gangs have some Asians and whites. Some police are prejudiced, brutal, and plant evidence; others are sympathetic softies. The police are themselves injured when outnumbered while making arrests. The real problem is Pupatee's lack of discipline as represented by the difficulties he has in learning Standard English, reading and writing. In this novel conventional morality and the ways of social advancement sit side by side with the fascination of criminal life.

Mike Phillips's fiction differs from the black British ghetto novels, set in the estates or Brixton, that became popular during the 1990s. Although his novels include similar scenes and concerns about the problems of black British youth, they are also about university-educated adults, portray the interaction of whites and blacks, include mixed-race children, and are partly set among the professional classes. The novels mediate the problems, tensions, and successes of the West Indian immigrants as they become part of the middle class—tensions which include the increasing distance between the successful and those left behind, especially among the youth. Phillips is concerned that black British writing should not follow African-American or African models. Set in the immigrant

and ethnic areas of New York City, with concluding car chases in California and Arizona, *Point of Darkness* (1994) contrasts the sense of community still found in black England with the United States where, despite talk of black brotherhood, it is dog eat dog. Phillips assumes that the West Indian community in England has become British, that a person has many potential identities which appear in varied situations, and that the West Indian experience is central to the development of a multiracial England. His position is political and sociological, not cultural or racial.

In *Smell of the Coast and Other Stories* (1987) he shows that there is no essential 'black', no essential West Indian, no international black community. Several stories take place in the United States, which at first appears a paradise as blacks rise to the top and become millionaires in sports and entertainment, are sought by prestigious colleges, and hold university professorships. The land of opportunities is also a land of violence and social fragmentation in which black youth turn towards drugs and crime. The stories criticize simplistic notions of racial or Third World identity. Phillips is concerned with representation (an interest he shares with many literary theorists in recent decades); how people are represented in fiction or art reflects cultural assumptions and creates prejudices. In *Windrush* he claimed that the presence of an overwhelmingly unemployed, young male West Indian immigrant population had in the 1960s and early 1970s led to crime and confrontations with the police, leaving an image which persisted although the black population of England was mostly now settled, employed, married, bourgeois.

Exploring such topics, Phillips adapted the conventions of crime novels using a cynical, financially insecure detective and his girlfriend. Sam Dean, the 'detective', is a black journalist and his girlfriend a partly black, partly British, Argentine. Sam also has a son—which allows Phillips to comment on the situation of black youth in England. While the novels can be read as allegories of racial and class relationships, there are numerous parallels, echoes, and ironic vibrations in each novel between the stories of different characters so the themes are treated from various angles. In *Blood Rights* (1989) Sam is constantly aware of how black England has changed since mid-century, of which districts have black histories, of black–white relationships, of black British politics, of the differences

between West Indians from diverse islands, and of dissimilarities between black West Indians, Nigerians, and black Americans. He wants his son to know black British history and its social and cultural nuances. Now that there are blacks in the professions and in politics, whites ignore how difficult it is for many young black men to rise from poverty and living by crime. A theme of the novels is how males learn from their fathers, and the consequences to the individual and society when there is no father present to pass on the wisdom of experience.

The exploitation of and rejection by the white British of the black part of their past is represented in *Blood Rights* by Roy Akimbola Baker, the unacknowledged son of Greville Baker, a wealthy powerful Tory MP who in his youth had a black mistress. The story shows that white Britain and black Britain need to accept that history has made them a family which will continue to hurt itself until there is mutual recognition and accommodation. The punning title of *The Late Candidate* (1991) alludes to those running for nomination in a parliamentary election in a traditional Labour borough. The two black candidates are killed and the police—following stereotypes—blame black men, although the obvious candidates for the murderer belong to an Irish group challenged by the new minorities. In showing England and the Labour Party changing, the novel warns about resentments that result from social change. Besides the killings being compensations for the murderer's own humiliations, they represent the rage of white working-class losers.

In a Phillips novel what begins as a chase goes in other directions and brings in different stories. The conclusion rounds off the novel, but much of what was initially sought remains unsolved or found to be unconnected. *An Image to Die For* (1995) begins with a murder that has no bearing on the story, and the murder of the white wife of the black man is never solved. There is a psychopathic killer who pretends to be a detective. Life is chaotic without much predictability. The results of actions are often unexpected. As Phillips moved from the detective story towards complicated thrillers which are not resolved by catching the criminal, he also turned towards the international novel about the world's migrants. Besides wanting to distinguish the black British from black Americans, Phillips was interested in the blacks and other minorities, such as Romas (gypsies)

and Turks, in Europe who he felt had much in common with the black British. Migration and refuge were international problems. At the conclusion of *The Dancing Face* (1997), Osman, a Nigerian studying in England, destroys a great work of African art and says 'I turned my back on history. After that it was easy' (p. 251). Osmond, the son of a former minor chief, had served in the Nigerian army and seen opponents of the government massacred; he knows it is time to forget dreams of an ideal Africa as home, better to begin again in England.

As can be seen from the *Wasafiri* special issue, 'The Long March: Migrant Writing in Europe' (no. 32; Spring 2000), as the black and Asian British community felt settled it began to explore its relationship to people of colour in Europe. The 'shadow' of Mike Phillips's *A Shadow of Myself* (2000) is a previously unknown brother in Eastern Europe of a well-off black Briton, but also the many other people of colour who are the 'blacks' of Europe. The novel opens in Hamburg with an image of Africans, gypsies, Turks, Uzbeks, a young German, and others drumming, playing musical instruments, hustling, begging, selling lottery tickets, perhaps picking pockets—a small international crowd outside the train station being watched by George Coker, an East German born to a Russian mother and a father from Ghana. George dislikes the sight, resents the Africans who he feels mock his desire for a more inspiring ancestry and as representing what so often happens to the uprooted. His father studied in the Soviet Union and was separated from his mother by Communist Party officials who were racists. The image of the Africans drumming among a crowd of hustlers, beggars, and tourists is one of many pictorial images that visually communicate themes, emotions, psychology, or history. This early image includes migrants from many lands seeking or forced to seek new lives in alien lands. *A Shadow of Myself* is about the hopes and social upheavals that brought people from throughout Eastern Europe and Asia to England. Phillips interweaves an action-filled plot with the remembrance of things past by many people, using six different narrative voices.

Phillips offers a vision in which the West Indian turned black Briton is representative of the ways people and societies change and form new communities, and especially of England, which for all its

faults, including racism, is a place of refuge and comparative innocence from the greater violence of most of the world. The novels show how the desire for excitement leads people to migration, interracial love, and attempting to solve mysteries. One theme is the unwillingness of the white liberal to accept the black as an individual in contrast to a victim. Life is more complicated than simple racial or national categories. Phillips reverses the each-man-for-himself existential universe of most crime fiction; what begins as a quixotic search through a labyrinth of false clues, dead ends, and wrong solutions shows that people are part of a community—no matter how chaotic society may seem, life depends on others, even if the others are unreliable. People are products of a time and place which gives them their consciousness. Phillips's stories are about moving on, neighbourhoods changing, and his plots and the structure of his novels are themselves designed to create excitement and surprise. It seems likely that some later black detective fiction such as Nicola Williams's *Without Prejudice* (1998), in which race is significant, had Phillips in mind.

Kinds of Black and White

By the 1990s the presence of writers from various backgrounds and cultures as well as those born in England and those of mixed race, was strengthened by an increasing number who, although British by birth, had lived part of their life in other countries. The size of the black and Asian literary community, the patronage given through various literature boards and arts councils, and a general liberalization concerning matters of race and sex meant that such writers were no longer outsiders. The range of themes and subject matter also increased. There were such tendencies as the imagining of a black British history beyond tales of slavery, a complementary need for people of colour born in England to learn about the places from which their parents came to England, and the setting of stories in areas of the imagination and society beyond the usual territories of black fiction. In some novels the race of the characters was insignificant or not emphasized as if the authors felt they could now be writers without feeling their tale need directly to be about race.

One of the more influential novels of the 1990s was S. I. Martin's

Incomparable World (1996). Steven I. Martin was born in 1961 in Bedford to black parents of Antiguan descent. After Bedford Modern School, he worked as a postman and in a hospital before becoming a journalist. Set in late eighteenth-century London, *Incomparable World* tells of those American blacks who fought on the side of the British during the American War of Independence and of their lives afterwards in London where they became part of an impoverished black underclass which had existed for centuries. Rich in historical detail, social notation, criminal slang, and the ways the poor survived, if they did, the novel emphasizes the grotesque, the filth, the horrors of the period, and the insecurity of life at the time whether from criminals, mobs, or lack of sanitation. The Americans stand together as ex-colonials trying to live by their wits as the British government fails to honour its promise of pensions to these former soldiers. Means of surviving include crime, prostitution, working on slave ships, being a servant to rich whites, ornamental guardsman if young, and for the few who manage to accumulate some wealth, shop owner. Those who travel abroad learn that rather than being African or Brazilian they are now English, bound by a shared language to the whites, that London is home. A recurrent question is how many centuries it will take before the blacks in England are no longer impoverished beggars who turn to crime to survive.

Incomparable World is a product of research in the micro-history of black England to find a usable past for people of colour in their claim to be British rather than recent alien immigrants. Although part of several decades of retrieval, such as Joan Amin-Addo's *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham* (1995), *Incomparable World* shares in the specific interest in the prominent black presence during the eighteenth century. *Incomparable Worlds* influenced Dabydeen's novel *A Harlot's Progress*. Fred D'Aguiar's poetic novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) used economic and legal details of the slave trade during the eighteenth century. Martin's *Britain's Slave Trade* (1999), with an introduction by Trevor Phillips, includes a discussion of the influence of the slave trade on racism, how representations of black people were formed as a consequence of whites defending slavery, the part-white parentage of many British blacks, and the need for England to recall the past and understand its continuing effects if it is to become a multicultural society.

Ferdinand Dennis (b. 1956), a Jamaican who came to England during the 1970s and then taught for a few years in Nigeria, continued an earlier tradition of seeking roots in Africa. Besides *Back to Africa* (1992), he wrote *Duppy Conqueror* (1998), a novel about a West Indian who must visit Africa to lift a curse on his soul. Dennis also helped record recent black British history in *Beyond the Frontlines: Journey into Afro-Britain* (1988) and *The Last Blues Dance* (1996). Whereas the former tells of individuals from previous generations, such as an African sailor from the Second World War, whom Dennis met in England, the novel is about a West Indian immigrant who recalls the excitement of black night life in earlier days, which is contrasted to his unsuccessful club which he gambles away, symbolic of the passing of a generation and an era.

During the 1990s the history and origins of black England had become a recurring theme of its literature. Andrea Levy is a light-skinned, mixed-race West Indian whose autobiographically based fiction is set in North London where she was born. *Fruit of the Lemon* (2000), her third novel, shows the need of black Britons, especially the children of West Indian parentage, to gain knowledge of their history. Faith, whose parents came from Jamaica, grows up in London among white English students and friends, knowing nothing about her family. Having been taught in school about slavery, she imagines her parents as captives on banana boats, although her parents tell her that they paid for their passage, ate at a proper table, and danced every night. Their troubles began when as a married couple they arrived in England soon after the Second World War and found the British and themselves living in conditions far worse than those in Jamaica. Their story is that of the Windrush generation as West Indians made their way from families sharing one room and looking for work to middle-class careers, often in professions they had to learn to survive. Her father, trained as an accountant in Jamaica, owns a large business as a house painter and decorator in London.

Levy recounts social history for those confused about their 'blackness'. Faith, who has a good job, breaks down after experiencing unexpected racial discrimination and witnessing a National Front attack on a black women. She accepts her parents' suggestion that she visit Jamaica for two weeks. There she is told a complicated

family history including poor whites, wealthy blacks, black Americans, Cuba, Panama, Africans, blacks passing as whites, browns sending their children to England to become white, near whites going to Africa to become African—a West Indian past far different from the clichés of tropical paradise or slaves on plantations. Her family genealogy becomes longer and longer as former generations and various branches are added. She starts to feel at home in what at first appeared a strange foreign culture and can return to England knowing who she is and from where she comes. As she leaves, Faith is told that her parents sent her to Jamaica as she was making a mess of her life in London. Their version of her life is unlike her own and contributes to the notion of history as an uncertain story told from different perspectives. Indeed she keeps being told different versions of family history.

Joanna Traynor shares in another tendency of black fiction during the 1990s, the use of models developed in popular and pulp fiction. Traynor herself is part Nigerian and her life is the source material for her first novel. *Sister Josephine* (1997), winner of the second Saga Prize, is a house of distorting mirrors as it mixes pulp fiction with Jacobean grotesque. The central character, Josie (Josephine), is half West Indian. Her father is unknown and she does not know her mother who abandoned her. Not chosen as an orphan child, probably because of colour, she is eventually sent to strictly observant Catholic foster-parents with whom she carries on a war, until she is passed to another terrorized family which uses influence to have her accepted as a trainee nurse. Unable any longer to harm others by acting spoiled, she begins making friends, has sex, faces racial prejudice, and describes operations as if they were comic horror films: 'They were birthing them in one room and bottling them in another' (p. 159).

At the intersections the drill went in. Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! Blood spurted out of the head in jets. Squirts and squirts of it in all directions. The theatre, surgeon, anesthetist, nurses—drench in blood. The lights dripped with it. The floors awash. The excitement. My little legs jellied. (p. 164)

The hospital represents society; besides the professional hierarchy with its various titles, there is a sexual pecking order with doctors having their choice of nurses. Access to drugs offers a source of

corruption which is protected by violence and links the hospital to the outside community. Towards the end Josephine fears for her life as she has witnessed a killing.

While *Sister Josephine* can be contextualized in relation to blacks abandoned by parents and brought up in white foster-homes and the new awareness of 'mixed race', its power is its instability of tone, its theatre of repulsion, its grotesqueries. As we see through Josie's eyes we empathize with her, but she is as nasty as others in the book. Instead of a hospital romance or even comedy, the book keeps veering towards shock comics. It asks why we live, and the only answer seems to be fear of death. Yet it is upbeat in its energy and in-your-face attitudinizing. The language mixes the banal with the unexpected in ways literary language rarely does.

Divine (1998) is poised between serious literature and a popular thriller with a trial providing much of the excitement. It offers a portrait of English youth, especially its university students continually using soft drugs, and the police framing minorities. Both portraits are part of larger implied picture of England as a land governed by class and money; the drug culture with its financial and organizational hierarchy is a reflection of the larger economy. Although those at the bottom through class, poor jobs, lack of money, or bad looks are discriminated against, that is no reason to whine and give up; for those who strive there are opportunities and pleasures. The novel's structure is of interest because of its split time scheme. Framing and interspersed throughout the story are various phases of a trial. The narrative, which if rearranged chronologically would lead up to the trial, concerns Vivian Jackson, a 20-year-old university student who is part-black, facially deformed by a childhood accident, and who has indeed sold soft drugs but not the hard ones she is accused of selling (as she was still working her way up the hierarchy of dealers and was not yet given the chance to sell heroin).

Vivian's face is used symbolically for race, class, sex, and other relationships in which people are judged by appearances. Vivian's father is black working class, a miner living on a pension, her mother white, and her sister a graduate with a First Class degree from Oxford with a good job in Paris. Vivian resents her attractive bright sister as having everything in her favour. Although Vivian complains about racism, she does not divide the world into races.

Those with money, regardless of race, avoid problems. A wealthy British Pakistani friend uses drugs, sleeps with white men, but will have an arranged marriage, divides the world by colour, and feels her culture is superior. The novel's title not only alludes to the sister, who in an unexpected ironic development has a lesbian lover with whom she is going to live in a commune in Vietnam, but also to the irrational chances life offers: at the novel's conclusion Vivian has two men competing and there is a possibility of improving her appearance by new surgical techniques. If she is found not guilty she will move in with the man she wants, a drug dealer.

Traynor's third novel, *Bitch Money* (2000), a thriller, begins with a gang planning a crime in Manchester. Jonathan, a black layabout, is the driver of a van of stolen TV sets. Returning from the robbery he runs into a car, killing the driver, and flees to Spain where he does odd jobs among the British along the Costa del Sol, meets an old girlfriend, and is torn between wanting to live off and loving her. He is tracked down by one of the Manchester criminals, who wants his money. The girlfriend is forced into a porno film where she is drugged, gang-raped, slashed, and becomes crazed. She and Jonathan escape to England where while going through customs she starts tossing piles of money into the air, claiming it is his. Her bag is filled with drugs she has stolen from the pornographers.

Jonathan is part of the yob culture produced in an England where money is all that counts and where many of the working class are unable to climb out of a life of near-poverty, violence, and crime. Unwilling to study or discipline himself to any job, he even makes a mess of his crimes. All he can do is complain, especially at his father who tells him to get and stick to a boring but steady job. Traynor provides a map of the British abroad in Spain where they stick together yet remain divided by class, and avoid the 'natives'. 'Abroad' is the good life of getting drunk or laid; selling property or sex has replaced the romance of the Med. Set during Thatcher's England, the novel shows a violent free enterprise society of winners and losers in which money and love are both 'bitches' and in which there are no values beyond success. Jonathan and his family are the only blacks in the novel except for some illegal 'African' immigrants in Spain.

An extreme example of writing without race can be found in the

novels of Mike Gayle (b. 1970), the Birmingham music and advice columnist whose softie lad's fiction includes *My Legendary Girlfriend* (1998), *Mr Commitment* (1999), *Turning Thirty* (2000), and *Dinner for Two* (2002). Written within formulas made popular by Nick Hornby and Helen Fielding, the novels concern the relations between the sexes, especially the problems that arise about dating and marriage for urban British whites in their twenties and thirties. The sexual attraction, the fights, the breaking up, the reconciliations are set within the context of the differing tastes and expectations of men and women, a context sketched in by references to meals, records, TV shows, restaurants, clothing, to make the story seem up to date and trendy.

While Gayle works within a kind of best-selling British fiction without trying to revise it from a black perspective, the way Mike Phillips has with the detective story and thriller, the kind has been reworked for a black readership in some of the Xpress novels, such as the *Baby Father* books. The Xpress novels offer more sex, more sociology, show men more irresponsible and women more combative and angry, and have a less convincingly realistic texture to the narration, but the formula is similar to *Mr Commitment* in which the male feels threatened by being tied down for life to one woman while the woman feels she is wasting her life with someone who will not make a commitment to marriage. A difference between the Gayle novels and the Xpress books is that Gayle offers basically weak 'new' men who are self-conscious and ashamed of their selfishness and who easily cave in when, for example, the woman becomes pregnant, and the women are less demanding of material things, whereas in the Xpress books the men father children without a sense of responsibility towards the mother, and the mother is often financially demanding.

An intensely serious writer with an interest in popular fiction, Leone Ross (b. 1969) appeared in many anthologies during the 1990s including books of pulp and science fiction. Ross, the product of a broken West Indian family, was born in England, spent part of her youth and received her first degree in Jamaica, and lived in the United States, before settling in London. Her writing reflects her varied background including being of mixed race. *All the Blood is Red* (1996), which was nominated for the Orange Prize, tells a

complicated tale of three West Indian women in England and their insecurities concerning appearance, men, careers, and colour. Tall, light-skinned Nicola, who when young thought she was ugly, always wanted to sleep with white men and has become a famous actress in a play by a famous white director who wants to marry her. Nicola forgoes the chance of starring in a Hollywood film to care for her new friend Jeanette who was badly harmed by a black serial rapist who, thinking he is ugly, revenges himself on women. During the trial the black press and protest groups accuse a leading police officer of having made a racist comment, while the rapist is judged not guilty after the defence gets one of Jeanette's former lovers to testify falsely that she likes roughing up. Alexandra, who feels rejected by Nicola's new friendship with Jeanette, loses her job working for an independent television company when she rejects the advances of the black man in charge. The three women are part of a new Britain in which black women go to university, have careers in the media, and are the subject of media attention. Interwoven throughout the novel is another story told in thick patois by an uneducated black Jamaican who recounts her impoverished childhood, then life as a prostitute, and her present condition cleaning toilets in England where she has come in the hope that her two daughters will escape from the kind of life she has led. They are already turning bad. A powerful novel about the ways in which people corruptly use power, the ways in which people think and act in racial categories, and in the ways women are disadvantaged in society, *All the Blood is Red* suffers from passages which sound like teenage gush about insecurities, appearance, and male–female relations. Like several other new writers in the late 1990s, Ross mixes serious with popular, even pulp, fiction. Her verse in Kadija Sesay's anthology *Burning Words, Flaming Images* (1996) sacrifices technical sophistication for amusing sexual realism.

Orange Laughter (1999) descends from Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* by way of that African-American classic, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Tony Pellar, the narrator, is literally underground, living in the tunnels of New York City's subway system while recalling his youth in Edene, North Carolina and telling of the present. He is desired and haunted by dead Agatha, whom he calls the Soul Snatcher. At first it appears she wants him sexually as he

imagines her being angry when he is with other women, but this is because he uses sex and is used erotically in the North to avoid recalling his past. Agatha needs Tony to take over her task as storyteller. The narrator's story is also an allegory of African-American history, including the migration from the rural South to northern cities. Tony's language is colourful, knowing, and allusive, close to rapping, filled with rhymes, that of black popular music. It is also unpunctuated, an ongoing flow, as Ross creates an equivalent to an oral hip-hop style for her narrator.

Agatha, Mikey, and other Southern characters were part of a community whose lives Tony recalls, explaining how the characters are related; they show how the civil rights movement of the 1960s changed the South, often at the cost of bloodshed by those intending to end segregation, and the fears and violence suffered by Southern blacks as a consequence. The unexpected inclusion of the conventions of protest fiction within this otherwise original novel is part of the meaning—the need for contemporary urban black culture to retell its past in new ways. Agatha, as we learn in her story, is a hero, a black feminist role model, and white Mikey (now a university professor) turns out to be related to her in one of those complicated, violent, interracial stories that are often part of Southern family histories. This brilliant novel about America written by a black Englishwoman is an example of ways literature has become internationalized as a result of the continual movement of people back and forth across national boundaries and of how the literature of other countries and races has become assimilated within what was formerly a specifically white British cultural tradition.

Pauline Melville, who appears white, is of white British, black, and Amerindian Guyanese origins and shares in the ways many writers from Guyana cross races and cultures in personal background and in imagination. Although the magical in her writing is offered as an ironic Indian readjustment of the European world view, it is also in the tradition of Wilson Harris. In her writings the unexpected is even more unexpected because her tone is flat, understated, spare, even dispassionate. She is also an amusing, witty writer, whose barbs at first bring a quiet smile, but leave an after-sense of the intensity of her dislikes. The stories in *Shape-Shifter* (1990) begin in Guyana, move on to the West Indies and London, and then return to Guyana. There

are the usual diaspora feelings of nostalgia, of not being at home anywhere, of always thinking life is elsewhere, as well as celebrations of small triumphs. Melville's characters are not heroes and heroines, indeed are seldom likeable. Nor is Guyana a tropical paradise. In the first story it is ruled by tyrants; in the concluding story a woman in London returns to her childhood home and finds Guyana now a place of poverty, shortages, economic failure, decay, intense racial awareness, and small-minded bitterness. Yet the England of the stories is a place of failed marriages, bad jobs, isolation, loneliness, for the English as well as for the immigrants. 'McGregor's Journey' tells of a working man who feels that 'Mud. Cold. Shit. Wind. Steel. Rain. Tiredness. That's all I've got to look forward to for the rest of my life' (p. 94). In the underground he is attracted to a drunken black woman who asks him to dance and whom he thinks the only person who has treated him decently. His temporary happiness is shattered when a black cleaner warns him to be cautious as many black youths will consider him another white man exploiting black women. That night he is arrested for smashing shop windows while shouting 'I want you to know that I never owned a fucking slave in my life. Never' (p. 98).

Many of the stories are about imagining and the artist's relationship to evil. In the most striking story, 'You Left the Door Open', a minor cabaret artist tries to create a new character, a criminal, and decides the act will not work. Soon she is attacked by a male who claims that he gained entry because she left her door open. She fears he will rape and kill her. After a protracted battle she escapes but the people find her story odd as there is no evidence of the events. Later when another woman is harmed and the police ask her to testify that it is the same man as her attacker, she finds that he is identical to the character she made up for her act. Did she foresee reality or did her imagination create a monster?

In the 1930s a cuckolded and recently converted Evelyn Waugh went to South America hoping to heal his heart. As a result he wrote a travel book *Ninety-Two Days* (1934) and part of *A Handful of Dust*, which concludes with a Waugh-surrogate trapped endlessly reading a Dickens novel aloud to his host who is his captor. Waugh's point is that while civilization can be savage, to be civilized in savage lands can be worse. In Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997) a

divorced Englishwoman, Rosa, doing research on Waugh's attitude towards the tropics, goes to what was British Guinea in search of those who remember his visit. She has an affair with a grandson of those she seeks, but she is unable to interview his grandmother who was there and has documents from the period. Rosa will never know that Waugh missed a more interesting story than his own. At the heart of Melville's novel is a tale about a freethinking white Jamaican who goes native in British Guinea, takes Amerindian wives, and whose resulting son and daughter fall in love and commit incest. They flee and are caught and separated by a Catholic priest who will be poisoned by the daughter, who emigrates to Canada where she marries. Their story combines Wapisiana Amerindian incest and creation myths, which are alluded to during the novel and which are its religious context in contrast to the rationalism of the father or the Christianity of the Father.

Melville treats of three generations of Amerindian life with respect. It feels real, complete, unsentimentalized, and is not understood by Europeans who come seeking escape, savages to convert and educate, scenes in which to set their own stories, minerals and culture to mine and exploit. *The Ventriloquist's Tale* shows that where Europeans see nothing and feel bored there are much more interesting and passionate stories than their own. It is a complicated novel with all kinds of parallels, ironies, echoes, and allusions, allusions to the novels of Wilson Harris, even to Andrew Marvell's poem 'To His Coy Mistress'.

The title of the novel, like the title of her first book, *Shape-Shifter*, alludes to Melville's ability to enter the world of others, to offer their perspective dispassionately, without justifying, analysing, or explaining. The Ventriloquist is Macunaima, an Amerindian mythic figure, who mimics his prey, and who here is the story-teller mimicking realism to trap the reader. Melville has a talent for storytelling in depth. She has what appears a natural instinct for making metaphors, images, and convoluted plots. She is also a self-conscious writer who has a character offer a Claude Lévi-Straussian structuralist analysis of Amerindian myths that obviously applies to the novel; Rosa also alludes to such current topics of postcolonialism as the intellectual colonization of others.

Beginning with the opening paragraph of 'The President's Exile',

the first story in *The Migration of Ghosts* (1998), there is an extraordinary narrative voice; a captivating storyteller, for whom the imagined and real are the same, moves without hesitation through unusual moods, across spaces. Most of the twelve stories move suddenly into unpredictable territories: 'The Migration of Ghosts', a moody tale of an Amerindian wife's rejection of her husband's Europe, suddenly erupts into her confessed humiliation that her people have not built anything so lasting, although until then the story concerned her more justifiable sense of alienation in a strange, cold, foreign culture. 'The Migration of Ghosts' is, like most of Melville's stories, a metaphor for the relationship of the Old to the New World, the past to the present, and such related themes as cultural contact, cultural memories, and the migrant's sense of alienation. The past lives on in the imagination and emotions. Melville appears to find Europe cold and rational in contrast to Guyana, a topic at the heart of the amusing 'The Parrot Descartes'. A South American green parrot is taken to England in the early seventeenth century as a royal wedding present, observes with Shakespeare a terrible production of *The Tempest* (which being a parrot it memorizes while hating), and is carried around chilly Europe, where it is horrified by Descartes expounding the separation of body and soul, the start of the modern era. Back in Guyana it is shocked to hear priests introducing Cartesian ideas. Captured in 1800 by some strolling players who make him part their production of *The Tempest* and clip his wings, the parrot is taken to North America. The allegory is comic yet suggests how South America has been invaded by Europe, parroted its culture, and consequently become in bondage to North America.

Melville's themes are not, however, only the effects of imperialism, they are primarily the difference between the free imagination and reason. The unfixed imagination of the artist can be seen from the titles of her three books to date, *Shape-Shifter*, *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, and *The Migration of Ghosts*. She is the opposite of a dreamer or dreamy. Her language is often straightforward about sex, and her Amerindians are unsentimental and tough, unlike the Europeans, who for all their rationality and cruel sense of business, are romantic and soft about personal matters. These are stories in which death is seldom feared. Central characters kill without

emotion or bringing any condemnation from the narrator. We are told that in some Indian mythology people live on after death for a time, then evaporate. These stories celebrate a different kind of imagination, a non-European vision. In Melville's fictions there is an implied parallel between the mysteries and seeming irrationalities of the story, the cruelty and lack of taboos in Guyanese myths, and the imagination of the author.

Nigerians and British Nigerians

During the 1990s Nigerian as well as mixed-race perspectives on London were beginning to replace the West Indian eye. It is significant of the new role of Africans in the literary scene that the most active anthologist and promoter, London-born Kadija George (b. 1962), is of Sierra Leonean descent, while the co-founder of Xpress, Dotun Adebayo, is Nigerian. As conditions in Africa deteriorated and as Africans settled in England, England had its own African literature. Although many continued to write about Africa, others started to write about life in England. Some writers from racially mixed families moved back and forth between cultures and wrote about life in elite British schools or found a place in the London cultural and intellectual scene. Nigerians who planned to use London as a base for careers in journalism stayed on. Soon several Nigerians wrote their own version of earlier British literary works. Gbenda Agbenugba is the pen name for Ola Opesan (b. 1966), the London-born author of *Another Lonely Londoner* (1991) and *Many Rivers to Cross* (1998). The former novel updates Selvon's classic, partly in Nigerian pidgin, by having a British Nigerian portray the Nigerian scene in London. The main character is British-born but after being taken to Nigeria in his youth, he flees to England a decade later. Although sympathetic, he and many of the Nigerians seem unable to tell the truth, stay within the law, or keep a job. He returns to Nigeria having been influenced by Black Power and claiming racial prejudice. Although the main character of *Many Rivers to Cross* is also a young Nigerian in London and part of the novel is set in Africa, Opesan combines such Xpress formulas as showing how black youth culture leads young men into trouble, black men ignoring responsibility for their children, conflict between the youths

and the police, and a setting of drugs and violence. England, however, is shown a better place for blacks to live than the lands the immigrants left.

Simi Bedford's (b. 1942) *Yoruba Girl Dancing* (1991) was a sign of the changing times as writing by British Nigerians moved on from themes of cultural assertion and nationalism to the social differentiation of West Africans and to examine life in England for its African immigrants. In its history of a Yoruba family that returned from Brazil to Sierra Leone and then eventually settled in Lagos where it became part of a westernized elite, *Yoruba Girl Dancing* refers to a similar Yoruba past to Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*, while its semi-autobiographical descriptions of life in a British public school during the 1950s brings to mind such stories of outsiders as the Nigerian Dillibe Onyeama's *Nigger at Eton* (1972). Bedford's tone is light, and perhaps aimed at a young adult readership, as Remi offers an amusing portrait of a wealthy family of eccentrics in which she was brought up in Lagos until the age of 6 when her father sent her to be educated in England to prepare her for a role in a soon to be independent Nigeria. At first everyone she meets assumes she is an uneducated savage whereas Remi is far ahead of British children her age and part of a family which for generations has demanded high achievement. Tired of people expecting stereotypes, Remi invents stories about her savage African family.

Once she has left school and moved to London while awaiting entrance to university, she enjoys the social life of other outsiders from Africa, Asia and Latin America, and becomes the Yoruba girl dancing of the novel's title. More like Meera Syal's upbeat social comedies of young Indians learning the ropes in England than the studies of cultural conflict common to African literature, *Yoruba Girl Dancing* is also about losing identity while undergoing a western education and later regaining a sense of one's self.

Adewale Maja-Pearce was brought up in both Nigeria and England. An intellectual and essayist rather than a creative writer, he has written about the Nigerian novel, a journey through Nigeria, Wole Soyinka, and a volume mixing essays on race and nationality with autobiography. *In My Father's Country: A Nigerian Journey* (1987) discusses problems of Nigeria ranging from corruption and polygamy to its excessive number of languages, and the squalor in

what is a wealthy country. *How Many Miles to Babylon?* (1990) began as a British version of the Nigerian journey but became an extended autobiographical essay on race, nationality, and identity. During the late colonial period Maja-Pearce's father went to England in search of a medical degree which would place him among the Nigerian elite. He returned a decade later qualified, with a Scottish wife, and tried to be European although it took Nigerian independence before he was appointed to the hospital position he sought. The marriage eventually failed, as did many mixed marriages of his class in Nigeria, and Adewale at 11 was sent to relatives in England where at school he was called a 'wog' which puzzled him as in Nigeria he was thought 'white'. He saw, however, that the British called others 'Krauts', 'dagoes', and 'dirty Jews'. All classes disparage the ethnicity of others as a way to feel superior. Caryl Phillips is criticized for making too much of being black, a Hull multicultural feminist sees nothing wrong in young Muslim women being forced into arranged marriage, and many people, whether Tory, leftist, or black, are obsessed with racial and cultural stereotypes. *How Many Miles to Babylon?* is, like the writing of Bernardine Evaristo and Ferdinand Dennis, an attempt to mark a position in society as black British without losing the reality, complexity, and history of what both black and British mean.

Maja-Pearce aims to be a truth-teller rather than an apologist. In his two books about Nigerian literature and African politics Wole Soyinka is used as a model unlike those who hide social and political faults by blaming history. *Who's Afraid of Wole Soyinka?* (1991) contrasts the acceptance of tyrannical government, corruption, and cruelty in most of Africa since independence with Soyinka's bravery in defence of democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech. Governments have been little more than a 'legalized thief' as Africans torture and oppress each other for wealth and power. While the West and its wealth contributed towards such corruption, the situation becomes worse with each decade of independence. *A Mask Dancing: Nigerian Novelists of the Eighties* (1992) returns to the intellectual dishonesties that hide behind 'African' thought.

Biyi Bandele-Thomas, also known as Bandele, came to England, like Ben Okri, to be published, found a publisher within two weeks, and stayed. While his fiction is about the corruption rampant in

Nigeria, the stories, characters, and storytelling seem the reason for Bandele's writing. Like others who have followed Soyinka's direction, he blends modernist techniques and a Yoruba tradition with social and political subject matter. *The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond* (1991) has an elaborate introductory frame within which the main story is told—supposedly a history of real events about others contained in an incomplete manuscript. At the conclusion of this main story we are returned to the frame story which we now learn was a lie, as was what we were previously told about the history and authenticity of the main story. Bandele's post-modern hall of changing perspectives with its emphasis on the art of art might be regarded a further stage in Nigerian fabulation in which storytelling is mixed with social comment. Bozo, the hero of the main story, describes Nigeria as 'a faceless society of godfathers, nepotism, tribal chauvinism, ethnocentricism, shady deals, cold-blooded cruelty, mutual distrust and greased palms' (pp. 111–12). While Bozo, who turns into a killer, is not a reliable narrator, Bandele's works often have such tirades along with brutal characters and scenes of violence. Violence may be necessary for reform.

The Sympathetic Undertaker and Other Dreams (1991) cleverly mixes satire on a range of Nigerian topics, especially the police, army, and head of state, with tales about the narrator's brother who, we learn, has recently become insane. At the conclusion the narrator is found to be the same person as the brother and we learn that his mother is taking him to a local medicine man to be cured of such abnormalities as writing fiction. The form cleverly allows a variety of tales and portraits, including an amusing depiction of the tyrannical head of the government. *The Sympathetic Undertaker and Other Dreams* shows Nigeria during a time when people lived in fear of the army's arbitrary brutality.

While Bandele claimed that he was not black British nor British Nigerian and his knowledge was of Africa not England, this changed. *The Street* (1999) follows the lives of several Nigerian families in England and might be thought a later version of Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, a magic realist portrait of black London in the 1990s. Set in Brixton, often on Brixton High Street, the novel alludes to a now trendy community of coffee houses, an art house cinema, where 'the old mean streets had become the playgrounds and night haunts of

Trustafarians and Afro-Saxon literary, media, and artistic types' (pp. 17–18) while house prices skyrocket. Selvon's picture can be found in a black bookshop and the community is still littered with amusing, weird, and fantastic characters such as Fidel Castro, a bearded and bible-wielding street preacher. *The Street* with its many fantastic tales, including Ossie's dreams while in a coma and other dream tales, is post-modern fabulation, self-reflective fiction. It is also a progress report on England, particularly a now fashionable Brixton where Nigerian and mixed couples have replaced West Indians and the lonely Londoners are likely to be self-destructive middle-class blacks in their twenties pretending to trendy counter-culture roles.

Diran Adebayo is a British Nigerian born in England. Unlike Okri and Bandele his subject matter is not Nigerian, but he shares similar tendencies towards blending realism and sociological observations with fable and allegory, especially the mixture of cultural myths found in a modern Yoruba tradition that includes Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka. *Some Kind of Black* (1996), Adebayo's first novel, uses the formula of a recent graduate from Oxford exploring London to examine what it means to be black in contemporary England. Dele's father, who arrived from Nigeria in the 1960s, has two university degrees but is stuck in a low-level administrative position, and hopes his son will bring the family honour and wealth by becoming a lawyer. He keeps reminding Dele that in Africa many people walk barefoot and starve to finance their education. The father regards West Indians as criminals and drug dealers without the same drive to succeed through education as Africans, and the Caribbean youths seem to regard Africans as enemies. Dele, however, is British-African. Whether at Oxford or in London he keeps trying to define himself by difference, usually through his musical tastes, clothes, irony, or other matters of style. Adebayo is interested in the various subcultures of England, especially black England. The novel's survey ranges from the African diplomat's son who flies to Paris and Geneva for weekend parties to the working-class Caribbean women Dele meets in London dance halls whose poor speech and sweaty bodies scare him.

Dele's history of self-deception and mistaking appearances for reality provides a key to his behaviour after his foolish friendship

with Concrete, a West Indian drug dealer, causes the story to take a serious turn. When Concrete gets in trouble with the police, Dapo, Dele's sister, goes to Concrete's defence and is herself arrested, kept from her medicine (the police think she is high), and falls into a deep coma likely to result in death. This leads to the father expelling Dele from the family house. The novel becomes a version of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* when competing black and leftist groups want Dele to join and lead protests. Seduced by similar musical tastes, he comes under the influence of a Black Power hustler who uses Dele to relaunch his gang. The gang kills a naïve follower and blames it on white racists, a death which results in much publicity, increased membership, and money. As the novel moves towards what appears a powerful illustration of how pride, racial anger, drugs, and irresponsibility can destroy even the brightest and in the process ruin a family, the story takes an improbable turn as Dele wises up, is reconciled with his father, Dapo recovers, and Dele regains his white working-class girlfriend who is culturally black and musically hip.

Some Kind of Black has concerns beyond the sociology of black youth, the London club scene, black alienation, and black British speech. Notions of blackness are questioned; blacks can be as exploitative of blacks as the worst whites. Each episode of white racism is paralleled by black racism. Dele is a racist in his treatment of white women. The novel shows the importance of family, the need not to fall into racial sentimentality, and that shared musical tastes do not indicate shared values. Dele indeed is better off socially, in his educational qualifications, and likely future, than most working-class whites, some of whom, like his girlfriend, have lived in black communities and know them better than he does. Yet they are sometimes attacked by angry blacks who hate whites.

A strength of the novel is its curious language. Dele's grammar and lexis whether in narration or conversation is understood as socio-logically black but, except for some of the slang words, seems a private version of English in keeping with his sense of difference. Its strangeness adds to the feeling that while set in contemporary England the novel borders on allegory and fable.

Tendencies towards the hybridity of literary forms from different cultures are even stronger in *My Once Upon a Time* (2000), a

strange, powerful, self-parodying, hard-boiled detective story and allegory with a hip, knowing narrator. Adebayo shifts between literary conventions while once more using allusions to popular music and recent British history. The narrator's language is sharp and inventive. There are many incidents, including a palace of hedonism for the rich, a black ghetto dance party, and a find-a-partner dinner party among middle management, where realism is sacrificed for the symbolic. It is a spiritual quest, while also being a variant on the London black ghetto novel with its main characters coming from the wrong side of river and aspiring to move upward, north, and west. The detective narrator, Boy, seeks a perfect wife for a rich black man. If successful Boy will earn a fortune and retire to the good life of wealth and security. It only takes him two days, halfway through the novel, to waste most of his advance payment and to recognize that he has gone about the search the wrong way; in his desire for quick success he has taken short cuts which fail. Those two days of wealth show that money does not bring happiness.

The more he attempts to distinguish himself from his 'brethren', the more Boy seems similar to what he thinks they are like. He visits Race Man, a mysterious Guru, who tells him that if he completes his mission he can work for him and enjoy the peace of belonging instead of the stresses of being concerned about himself. There is a cricket game of the Rest versus the West, a riot in Babylon during which two women Boy likes are killed, and then at the hospital Boy discovers 'Girl', the first woman he really loves. Instead of informing his client that he has found the woman, Boy tries to run away with her and the novel suddenly shifts to a paradise (filled with Nigerian associations and symbols) where 'Girl' tells Boy that the client had told her of his coming and that she is promised to Him (who turns out to be the angel Eshu). Losing his temper, Boy kills Eshu, thus destroying the future he sought, losing his chances of working for Race Man, and losing 'Girl'.

British Asians, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans

The British Asian equivalent to black British writing developed slowly as most immigrants can write only about a society they know.