Publishing Black British Short Stories:
The Potential and Place of a Marginalised Form

Bethan Evans

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Nottingham Trent University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to thank:

Dr Jenni Ramone, for her consistent support, encouragement, and counsel.

Professor Nahem Yousaf, for his guidance and knowledge.

The Midlands3Cities Doctoral Training Partnership, for funding this project.

The George Padmore Institute, for access to both catalogued and uncatalogued material.

The research community at NTU, notably Hannah Cooper-Smithson, Lauren Harwood, Daniel Bilton, and Tuesday Shannon.

Mick, Sue, Megan, and Emily Evans, for teaching me how to wonder.

Patrick Allen, for his pride and faith in me, and for the stability.

ABSTRACT

Publishing Black British Short Stories: The Potential and Place of a Marginalised Form foregrounds the formal properties and material positioning of postwar black British short fiction. Recent scholarship has considered the potential of black British short stories to encourage community building (Jansen, 2018), to portray thresholds or liminal spaces (Sacido-Romero, 2019; Achilles and Bergmann, 2014), and to provide 'trans-spaces' (Arndt, 2017). This thesis builds upon such studies by considering the form with reference to the metropolitan publishing industry's placement of expectations on black British writing, themes and forms which encourage 'authentic' representations of identity and experience (Kean, 2015; Saha and van Lente, 2020). I ultimately suggest that the black British short story, in the hands of writers such as Irenosen Okojie, Leone Ross, Janice Shinebourne, Pete Kalu, and Jennifer Johnson, subverts such expectations of the publishing industry. In a field where the politics of representation and identity prevail (Mercer, 1994; Hall, 1996; Getachew, 2005; Scafe, 2021), the allographic nature of short story publishing (amongst other works and with amplified presence of the editor and/or publisher) creates tension around authorial intent, agency, and aesthetic properties.

Chapters one and two explore periodical publishing, approaching *Race Today* (1969-1988) as a case study. Chapter one considers the influence of Caribbean periodical publishing on the magazine, arguing that place is prioritised over plot in stories by writers such as Janice Shinebourne and Austin Clarke. Chapter two investigates the expectations surrounding the genres and platforms available to the young (and little-known) black British writer Jennifer Johnson. Chapters three and four explore anthologising. Chapter three considers the short stories of *Don't Ask Me Why* (Black WomanTalk, 1991) in terms of the dynamic between plurality and singularity in the collectivist form of late-twentieth-century black British women's anthologies – the chapter focuses in particular on stories by Joy Russell and Joyoti Grech. Chapter four investigates the role of anthologising for the future of canonising the field, with reference to the stories of Chantal Oakes and Karen Onojaife in *Closure* (Ross, 2015). Chapter five turns to the single-authored collections of the twenty-first century by Bolu Babalola, Zadie Smith, Irenosen Okojie, and Leone Ross. Finding that these texts employ antirealist techniques, the chapter argues that such collections undermine the marketplace's expectation of accurate and immediate mimesis. The General Conclusion considers the extent to which the formal properties of the black British short story as defined in this thesis – aperture, laterality, and indeterminacy – can productively challenge the tendency towards linearity in narrativising and historicising black Britain. To close the thesis, the Coda explores Helen Oyeyemi's collection, *What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours* (2016), in terms of the marketplace positionality of black British texts in the twenty-first century.

CONTENTS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Publishing Black British Short Stories: The Potential and Place of a Marginalised Form is structured around the publishing platforms available to black British short stories. In this way, and in its focus on the formal properties and material positioning of black British short fiction, it is the first study of its kind. The short story, as I explore in this introduction, is reputed as a narrative form of self-reflexivity, plurality, and alterity. The postwar black British short story, I suggest, shares these general characteristics of short fiction. The central argument of this thesis is that the short story evades the thematic and formal expectations and strictures of publishing black British literature. This introduction defines such expectations and begins to explore the place of the black British short story in metropolitan publishing, as well as the form's potential to destabilise the industry's parameters for publishing black British writing.

When planning this introduction, I received advice to begin with an anecdote. The idea is to spark immediate interest in the reader with an amusing tale sourced from reality. Doing so releases the material that follows from the bounds of the academic sphere and grounds it instead in the lived world; an anecdote concentrates the thesis into succinct, digestible form. As a white woman writing about black British short fiction, the notion of beginning my thesis with a factual account of my own experiences seemed to be at odds with the key aims and concerns of *Publishing Black British Short Stories*. Specifically, I cannot make claim to any first-hand experience of black British identity. Any access that I do have is already mediated by the forms occupied by literature, regardless of whether these are fictional or factual

accounts. Furthermore, as recent research reveals, these forms have been acquired by agents, shaped by editors, and promoted by marketing teams with the aim of reaching a target audience that is in keeping with my subject positioning: white, middle-class, female.[1] Therefore, the analysis undertaken in this thesis is done with acute awareness of the placement of black British literature by its publishing circumstances. Such environments of dissemination strive, however unconsciously, to sell black British narratives predominantly to consumers like myself. The placement of black British literature by metropolitan publishing creates tension between the agency of a writer, the cultural responsibilities expected of literature, and the status of literary texts as consumer products in the late-capitalist marketplace of the twenty-first century. Such tension is of primary concern for this thesis, but it is traced through the means most directly available to me for analysis: the literary text.

I therefore open this introduction with a black British short story which mimics the form of an anecdote, Pete Kalu's 'Getting Home: A Black Urban Myth (The Proofreader's Sigh)'. 'Getting Home' recalls the journey of its black, male narrator to his residence in Oldham from London on a Friday night. It depicts his 'navigation of public space' in the face of racism and prejudice from the British public. My introducing this thesis through Kalu's fictional anecdote is intended to have the same effect as beginning with an anecdote of my own. That is, I use the specificities of this particular story to indicate the general concerns and interests of the thesis. The events of the narrator's journey are interpreted in a way that enables discussion of the wider context of form in black British literature, and the potential of the short story to position form as a concern of the field from within.

[1] This is discussed by Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente in *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* (London: Goldsmiths and Spread the Word, 2020). The aim of this academic study is to investigate the quality of experience for writers of colour in publishing, and the main obstacle that the team find facing such writers in metropolitan publishing is a 'core audience for publishers [that] is white and middle-class. The whole industry is essentially set up to cater for this one audience. This affects how writers of colour and their books are treated, which are either *whitewashed* or *exoticised* in order to appeal to this segment' (p. 2) (original emphasis).

What is an anecdote? Anecdotes render teleology and causation from events of or based in reality. While an anecdote is presented as factual as opposed to fictional, it still takes up narrative form; its account of truth delineates a beginning and an ending amongst otherwise unbounded events, in order to construct a cohesive, logical story with a certain design. In short, it tells a truthful story via the familiar structure of narrative fiction. According to Lionel Gossman, an anecdote is a 'highly concentrated miniature narrative'.[2] For Gossman, anecdotes 'reduce complex situations into simple, sharply defined dramatic structures'. At the same time, though, the form of the anecdote can 'prise closed dramatic structures open by perforating them with the holes of novelistic contingency'.[3] An anecdote, therefore, concentrates complexity into comprehensible form, while indicating its own process of narrativising which enables such distillation. Significantly, it is a narrative that 'eschew[s] large-scale "narrativization";[4] it is concerned with touching upon reality without mapping its whole, bearing a sense of the essence of that reality without offering a panoramic view of it. The point here is that anecdote is connected to truth and reality, being a form that tells of real-world events, but the authenticity or accuracy of the recollection of these events is not as significant as their capacity to engender a sense of the grander reality from which they derive. It is not a realist form; the anecdote does not strive to chart the entirety of a reality, but to concentrate the spirit of that reality to a minimal scale – to achieve a sense that the tale told is typical of the bigger picture and is amusing because of its reducing of this picture into something slighter, minor, uncomplicated. This is where the relationship between simple dramatic structures and novelistic contingency becomes operative. In order to achieve its distillation, the anecdote must sustain a simultaneous duality between the general – the identifiability of the events and their unfolding in an already recognisable and familiar dramatic structure – and the individual – the personalisation and

[2] Lionel Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', *History and Theory*, 42.2 (2003), 143-168 (p. 149).
[3] Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', p. 145
[4] Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', p. 150.

characterisation of these events through the voice that delivers them. What is important to take forward here is that the development of the anecdote bridges the separation between the singular and the general. In Gossman's terms, '[e]ach anecdote is a singular instance of a general rule that it exemplifies and points to.'[5] In this way, the anecdote shares certain defining qualities with the short story. As Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell suggest, the short story has developed 'in the Western context as the mirror image to the realist novel'; like the anecdote, the short story similarly 'inverts' the structure of totality.[6]

Awadalla and March-Russell note that the short story is '[s]imultaneously a product of mass and minority culture'; it has an 'ambiguous cultural position' due to its association with orality, alternative publication, mass culture, and avant-gardism.[7] As they explain:

> on the one hand, [the short story is] a visibly commercial product residing in popular magazines and sub-literary genres, and on the other hand, [it is] an artistic medium praised by writers for its technical difficulty and associated with small-press, avant-garde, or counter-cultural titles.[8]

Similarly, the way in which the anecdote has come to be associated with its bridging of singularity and generality involves its methods of distribution and historical lack of formal publication. The official entering of the term anecdote into European languages in the seventeenth century derived from the literal expression, 'unpublished works'. The significance of the unpublished then correlated with the impression of human, emotive reality, in comparison to the impersonal narratives of official history.[9] While, from the eighteenth century onwards, anecdotes have acquired a publishing position, the fundamental formation of the form arose in parallel to its oral circulation. Gossman summarises that the anecdote's dissemination

[5] Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', p. 156.
[6] Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell, 'Introduction: The Short Story and the Postcolonial', in *The Postcolonial Short Story: Contemporary Essays*, eds. Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).
[7] Awadalla and March-Russell, 'Introduction', p. 4.
[8] Awadalla and March-Russell, 'Introduction', p. 4.
[9] Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', p. 151.

involved '[b]eing passed around by word of mouth or borrowed by one writer from another'. In keeping with most oral forms, its potential for reiteration and inherent tentativeness '[leaves] room […] for variations of detail.'[10] Anecdotes are now afforded a breadth of publishing positions, often featuring at the start of an academic study to make its particular arguments appear general in scope. However, the inherent orality of the form is embedded within its conventions. The room for variation in reiteration is a symptom of the oral anecdote that opens itself to the multiple perspectives of its events, bridging this multiplicity and consolidating it back down to a single narrative voice that now bears this generality. Gossman's discussion of this function is interested in the relationship between anecdote and history, in the tension between the part and the whole; the anecdote is both autonomous and exemplary of its wider context, at once a fragment and a paradigm. Again, it is the anecdote's relationship with reality that is key here, and Gossman asserts that this relationship is akin to that of myth to history. The anecdote came to be

> seen as an essentially popular or communal creation, the validity of which resides not so much in the accuracy with which it reports particular positive facts as in its ability to reflect the general reality underlying those facts or the general view of that reality.[11]

The reason I explore Kalu's story on these terms of anecdote is because of this dynamic between the form and reality, and between myth and history. Kalu produces a sense of the 'general reality' of postwar black British literary history through the form of his story. More accurately, 'Getting Home' distils the predominant themes of black British literature into a 'highly concentrated miniature narrative'.

Kalu's narrator achieves a sense of the orality-in-writing that is typical of the anecdotal, securing the story's feeling that it mimics a tale designed to be passed between people rather

[10] Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', p. 159; p. 144.
[11] Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', p. 159.

than read in isolation. Throughout, the narrator can be described as a speaker. The informal, unedited grammar of speech is replicated as the narration slips between the past, present, and perfect tenses. The indicators of spoken as opposed to written word are implicated from the very start of the story, when the narrator explains that his journey took place 'three weeks ago', on 'a Friday'.[12] Because the timeframe of the story is static – always three weeks ago – a scale is drafted which imagines shared, public time and positions a listener within the text by signifying real time between the two figures. This is not 'once upon a time'; it is an agreement that the present, the moment of delivery, is three weeks from the events of the tale and is the same for both interlocuters. Again, the listener is presented as an active part of the text when the narrator corrects himself after suggesting that he is eager to get home to Oldham: 'OK, nobody rushes to get back to Oldham.'[13] In this moment, both participants in the conversation are present in the dialogue; though the figure is silent, the force of the listener is still felt in the way that the narration adapts itself to accommodate their reaction to what is said. This is also an example of how 'Getting Home' engages with a general, shared reality underlying any single anecdote. That is, this moment assumes prior knowledge of the character of Oldham on behalf of the reader/listener, while at the same time it shapes that character through the discourse provided.

The second point for reading 'Getting Home' under the terms of Gossman's anecdote is related to this dual function of shaping and assuming knowledge of the locations and mood of the reality from which the anecdote derives. Geographical markers based in reality are positioned within the story – London, Oldham, Manchester Piccadilly station, the local Spar All Night Kiosk, the King's Head pub, a 'vast, bleak, empty landscape' on the road to Oldham,

[12] Pete Kalu, 'Getting Home: A Black Urban Myth (The Proofreader's Sigh)', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2015), pp. 82-89 (p. 82).
[13] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 82.

'known locally as Miles Platting.'[14] As a whole, these references to real-world locations function to mask the fictionality of the piece, or at least to achieve a sense that it is set in, influenced by, a lived reality that exists beyond the story. Having the narrator pass and reference the small-scale landmarks of his journey from London to Oldham charts a route that is familiar in design. Such familiarity is not only with the locations themselves, but also with their character or quality. The sense of the character of place is delivered as if it is common knowledge to those acquainted with the setting, while of course it is the story itself which shapes this character when it indicates that the interlocutor must already be accustomed to its idiosyncrasies. This is the technique of anecdote in treading the line between stimulating a sense of the general reality of a wider context and a simultaneous singularity particular to the events of the tale. Kalu's story approaches this technique of anecdote by beckoning into the bounds of the story the listener's intimacy with the narrator's unique journey. It is achieved through the characterisation of location, but also through the story's offering of shared recognition of experience between speaker and listener. When the narrator describes the drunken behaviour of the public on his way to the bus stop, he lists a series of incidents that signify the lateness of the journey: '[w]aves of cleaners' clearing out office blocks at the end of the day; security guards outside of McDonalds; intoxicated individuals behaving without the reserve of sobriety and 'dry-heaving' outside local shops. At the end of this list, he indicates its absolute familiarity in a single statement: '[i]t was *that* kind of late.'[15] It is a lateness that the interlocuter has no choice but to recognise as indicative of general reality, even if the particularities of the incidents may be unique to this story.

References to general reality and experience, common history, and mutual states of mind are a major factor in Gossman's definition of anecdote. Such universalities are not

[14] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 85.
[15] Kalu, 'Getting Home', pp. 82-83 (my emphasis).

typically a predominant trait of black British or postcolonial narratives, due to the way in which these fields are generally concerned with problematising the homogenising effect of such traits and their privileging of western norms and tradition. They are, however, are a feature of 'Getting Home' in a broader context than merely the familiarisation of the London to Oldham journey. This is the third point for reading Kalu's story on these terms. The notion of universal human nature is something that is subtly in and of the background of 'Getting Home', through its formal technique of making constant reference to ancient mythology and philosophy. The 'classics' of the western humanities are placed side-by-side with the content and themes of the story, though not necessarily in an attempt to reconcile these elements. The most acute orientation of universal human nature in 'Getting Home' is a moment in which one of these references to ancient philosophy and mythology intersects with the events of the story. The narrator turns to help an injured man on the side of the road, and he feels compelled to help despite his desire to get home as quickly as possible. He stops because he considers it to be the 'duty of every citizen to come to the aid of his brother', a responsibility certified long ago by 'that great Roman thinker, Thucydides.'[16] Thucydides was in fact a Greek historian, but his mistaken identity is a deliberate technique on behalf of Kalu, a matter which I will return to in a moment. For now, the point is that this location of ancient philosophy within the specifics of the narrator's anecdote enacts the dynamic of common history, general conceptions of reality, and mutual states of mind at the concentrated scale of the anecdotal described by Gossman. That is, Kalu's (albeit ironic) reference to Thucydides to stimulate consideration of the broader context of 'the very essence of our civilisation, the foundation stone of citizenship itself'[17] in name only, without actually delineating this history in detail or exactitude, has the same effect as Gossman's fundamental definition of the function of anecdote. That definition is as follows:

[16] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 87.
[17] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 87.

> As a structured form, written or oral, that is passed from hand to hand or mouth to mouth and, transcending the particular circumstances it relates, that pretends to a broader significance, the anecdote depends on, epitomizes, and confirms generally accepted views of the world, human nature, and the human condition.[18]

In referencing Thucydides in order to speak of a human nature that has evolved in line with the historian's foundational philosophy, Kalu invites into the story, via the minimalising, concentrating, tactics of the anecdote, the trajectory and weight of the classics, the evolution of the humanities in the west, the cornerstone of the western canon, and a commentary on the elitism of these matters.

Such commentary is achieved because Kalu's reference to Thucydides is ironic. His mistaken identity and the inaccurate summation of his philosophy are enough to engender the tale with a sense of the classics, as well as with the kind of intertextual practice that engages classical mythology and philosophy as a schema of value, merit, and tradition. However, the mistaken identity and misconstruing of his philosophy are tactics that enable the story to mimic the tradition of the classics on the structure and evolution of the western canon, without being a direct part of this practice. The title of 'Getting Home' – specifically the subtitle, 'A Black Urban Myth' – associates the story with the signature of traditional storytelling. Employing myth as a directive, Kalu necessitates the story's interpretation under the terms of the genre. Summarised by Michael Bell, myth's status as 'a supremely significant foundational story and a falsehood' is related to its existence at the basis of literary practice.[19] Kalu's story literalises the foundational status of myth by incorporating references to Greek and Roman philosophers and mythological figures into its structural framework. Along with the orientation of Thucydides and his philosophy, other references include: the summoning of the significance

[18] Gossman, 'Anecdote and History', p. 167.
[19] Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

of Apollo's arrow and duties as patron of herdsmen and shepherds, as the narrator watches the movement of 'fluffy, cuddly-toyable, cookable rabbits';[20] the positioning of the 'God of Sleep in her spray-gold Chariot' coming to take the narrator to his bed;[21] and the comparison of Oldham to the setting of myth, with 'no flowing cornfields, no marble terrazza leading to sublime waterfalls in which bronze demigods frolic, no sumptuous hot sand beaches up which fisherman haul their boats, land and fry their catch to the praise songs of waiting villagers.'[22] As such, the story generates a sense of foundational storytelling, but it also literalises the idea of falsehood because the positioning of these mythic notions is indirect and imprecise. No god of sleep in western mythology matches the picture captured by Kalu's narrator, but this is unsurprising given that the description purposefully blurs this ancient image with new-age spray paint. The reference to Apollo is slight and obscure. The 'Flighted Arrow' image is offered in line with the human arrogation of the rabbits, but these two facets are not resolved as one; rather, they are obscurely compounded by a different, separate reference, that of dart-player Jockey Wilson. The founding of a mythic atmosphere is assumed without specificity, but to demonstrate what Oldham lacks in comparison to environments that might generally be expected of the title of 'myth' that is assigned to this story. These slight mythical indicators are established only to be ultimately undermined. The reason for this effect, I suggest, is in the significance of myth to anecdote.

According to Gossman, anecdote and myth are connected due to how they render into form a semblance of general reality. Both capture the essence of that reality rather than mapping its entirety: myth, fundamentally fictional fabrication, and anecdote, primarily truthful even in the event of factual inaccuracy in the particulars, are the remains of the concentrated complexity of social phenomena and human behaviour in variant forms. Both are considered

[20] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 87.
[21] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 83.
[22] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 82.

to bear the structure of traditional storytelling, but one foregrounds fiction, while the other, truth. 'Getting Home' signifies association with both forms, via subtle indicators that are built into the structural framework of the story. By doing so, Kalu evokes an irreducible tension between fiction and reality through the form of his story – signifiers of anecdote begetting the veracity of autobiography, and myth, the invention of fabrication. This tension has a particular relevance to the context of black British literature. As Deirdre Osborne describes:

> The lens of identity politics has meant that creative texts have become viewed, in some quarters, as a kind of social document – generally concerning experiences rendered outside white mainstream socio-critical awareness.[23]

Thus, forms depicting reality and fiction are often blurred in the field. According to Suzanne Scafe,

> black British literature and culture has either been used to reflect or interrogate the state of the nation, or as an educational tool, to shine a light on hidden histories and the shadowy margins of the present. As a result, a work's formal structures and particularly writers' experiments with linguistic forms and textual or performative structures is often bypassed in favour of a realist or literalist approach to content.[24]

R. Victoria Arana, in her introduction to *'Black' British Aesthetics Today* (2007), outlines the aesthetic principles undergirding black British texts. She suggests that:

> (1) Artworks must be socially engaged and sympathetically alert to contemporary ways of life. (2) They need to be psychologically rich and plainly representative of real social and moral dilemmas. (3) They should maintain and offer moral compasses that point to wise conduct, even when (fictional) characters may seem to be losing their way. (4) They should devise ways to demonstrate a healthy attitude toward change as well as respect for *valuable traditions*, whatever their provenance. (5) The brightest-lit moments in each work should bring into focus the artist's best thoughts and deepest

[23] Deirdre Osborne, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1-20 (pp. 7-8).
[24] Suzanne Scafe, 'Daring to Tilt Worlds: The Fiction of Irenosen Okojie', in *Women Writers and Experimental Narrative*, eds. Kate Aughterson and Deborah Philips (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 245-264 (p. 245).

> feelings on these matters. (6) One of the best ways to accomplish these artistic ends is through a friendly sort of satire. [25]

Because the arrival of black British authors in metropolitan publishing routes coincided with the urgency of uncovering the history of the colonised overlooked by and neglected from conventional records, the predominant aesthetic of black British writing, realism, was championed for its documentative tendencies, morally progressive narratorial focalisation, and mimetic potential. Arana calls upon these qualities for her black British aesthetic framework. Though Arana does not directly state her reference to realism, the significance of the aesthetic to her framework is established in the 'engagement with ways of life', 'plain' representation, and 'psychological richness'. Such characteristics are central to literary realism, the mimetic, the psychological, and the social being cornerstones of the mode in the western humanities.[26] In a postcolonial context, Nicholas Robinette states that in '[c]ombining documentary immediacy and elaborate formal structure, realism solders together a vision of historical forces unavailable to the fragmented perspective of the individual.'[27] Sara Upstone argues that realism 'must be central to ethnic fictions if they are to posit political interventions'.[28] In his description of the aesthetic in the context of black British stage productions, D. Keith Peacock's comment is paradigmatic of the significance of realism to the field more broadly:

> realism appeared to be an appropriate form with which to explore diasporic experiences, and to interrogate for both black and white audiences the interaction of race, class, culture and identity within a contemporary social milieu.[29]

---

[25] R. Victoria Arana, 'Introduction', in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 1-13 (p. 4).
[26] For a discussion and interrogation of these characteristics, see: Frederic Jameson, 'Introduction: Realism and its Antinomies', in *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), pp. 1-11.
[27] Nicholas Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 2.
[28] Sara Upstone, *Rethinking Race and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 8.
[29] D. Keith Peacock, 'Stages of Representation', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 110-125 (p. 112).

The need to blur the literary and the document is, to some extent, welcomed. For example, James Procter in his seminal anthology *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998,* argues that the literary – 'fictional, imaginative, ambiguous, pluri-signifying' – and the historical and cultural – 'factual, given, stable, unambiguous' – must be foregrounded together and 'need to be encountered "intertextually", as part of a dialogic relationship'.[30] *Publishing Black British Short Stories* is fundamentally concerned with narrative fiction, with the fabrication of story worlds which may appear to mirror or take influence from reality, but are definitively separate from it because they are designed, shaped, and delivered through the tools available to narrative fiction in the current literary climate. Such a climate is regulated by publishing routes which make literatures available to their readerships. Therefore, the texture of fiction is foregrounded here. I do not mean to suggest that I will not also refer to social documents and essays that are grounded in sociopolitical realities; rather, that these will not be used as substitutes for reality, and will be treated as texts as opposed to unmediated testimony to a singular, tangible reality. These forms, though potentially taken to reflect or record reality unproblematically, are telling of how structure, shape, and style play a significant role in securing the kind of authenticity and authority that define documentation as opposed to fiction. In what ways does the form of an essay – documentative in style and indicative in mood – constitute truth? Why does a social realist text, which may replicate this style and mood, not also function in this way?[31] An essay of course is not a representation of reality in the way that realism is, but rather is considered to be a part of that reality: it creates the terms through which reality is discussed because it inscribes it from within. However, when studies of black British literature suggest that narrative form has the capacity to shape reality precisely through its fictional properties, it is because

[30] James Procter, 'General Introduction: "1948"/"1998": Periodising Postwar Black Britain', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998,* ed. James Procter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1-12 (p. 10).
[31] This is based on the features of realism that are highlighted by James Procter: 'immediacy, transparency, authenticity and authority.' James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 94.

fiction enables the same acquisition of terms to discuss reality by inscribing it, though from the outside. This is found, for example, in Mark Stein's argument that the black British bildungsroman is a novel of transformation because it 'superimpose[s]' the map of Britain with the geographical and social identities at once represented in and created by fiction. In Stein's words, writing Britain as fiction is a 'process of superimposition and inscription, seeing London, England, Britain, with other eyes […] and, finally, transforming them'.[32]

Maintaining a commonality, like Procter's, between the fictional and the sociopolitical document is a result of the political urgency of a literature that can re-introduce a marginalised history and (literary) culture into conventional records. The accuracy of representation is of utmost significance to such a task. However, to borrow Darren Chetty's metaphor, the idea that black British literature is a 'window' looking into sociopolitical realities is also a kind of restriction: at what point does the window become a 'barrier', insisting that black authors write 'issue books' and thus limiting the scope of theme and form available to such writers?[33] One of the central arguments of this thesis is that focusing on the short story, and all of the considerations of literariness that such a focus provokes, reveals the subordination of the needs of creativity and artistic freedom to those of sociopolitical realities in the publishing of black British writing. I do not mean to suggest that aesthetic and political concerns cannot be reconciled.[34] Rather, if aesthetics, as Elleke Boehmer suggests, 'lay down structures and protocols to shape and guide our reading',[35] then the principles which undergird aesthetic interpretation can provide frameworks for the interpretation of the political, a sphere inherently

[32] Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2004), p. 34.
[33] Darren Chetty, '"You Can't Say That!": Stories Have to be About White People', in *The Good Immigrant*, ed. Nikesh Shukla (London: Unbound, 2016), pp. 96-107 (pp. 100-101).
[34] I am responding here to Mary Eagleton's assertion that 'aesthetic and political positions can be difficult to reconcile', in 'Moving Between Politics and Aesthetics in Zadie Smith's Shorter Forms', *Journal of the English Association*, efaa013 (2020), 1-21 (p. 7); and also, to Deirdre Osborne's suggestion that literary aesthetic categories and identity politics are 'perhaps irreconcilable', in 'Introduction', p. 7.
[35] Elleke Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st Century Critical Readings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 1.

structural itself. While the positioning of the short story into this dynamic is new, the idea that black British writing is often taken to be historically accurate and representative of the realities of black Britain is not. Rather, numerous studies of black British literature and culture have made similar arguments about the place and politics of representational strategies in black art since the late twentieth century.[36]

Making prominent the assumption and expectation of reality and exhaustive representation in black art is Kobena Mercer's landmark essay 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation.' Mercer does not discuss fiction exclusively; rather, he approaches the field of black arts more broadly. His argument takes as case in point a particular exhibit, *The Other Story*, which, in 1989 and 1990, brought together African, South Asian, and Caribbean artists in postwar Britain – those who would now be categorised as black British. Put simply, '[a]s a moment of "corrective inclusion" to counteract […] historical exclusion of black arts in Britain, the exhibition had to carry an impossible burden of representation in the sense that a single exhibition had to "stand for" the totality of everything that could conceivably fall within the category of black art.[37] As the essay continues, this exhibition and its troubling duties becomes representative of the typical treatment of black art. Mercer's 'burden of representation' articulates the distinction between representation as a creative reimagining of something and as a synecdoche for that thing, 'standing in' for its entirety. Significantly, though, the 'burden of representation' brings to attention the way in which these two branches of representation are

[36] Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Black British Cultural Studies*, eds. Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 163-172; Kobena Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 233-258; Alison Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing', *Wasafiri*, 17.36 (2002), 11-17 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02690050208589781>; Procter, *Dwelling Places*; Mahlete-Tsigè Getachew, 'Marginalia: Black Literature and the Problem of Recognition', in *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib, 2005), pp. 323-345; Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds., *A Black British Canon?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Arana, ed., *"Black" British Aesthetics Today*; and Sarah Ilott, *New Postcolonial British Genres: Shifting the Boundaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[37] Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', p. 234.

blurred and conflated in the black British context. On the one hand, the creativity of representation is overlooked by a 'criticism that comes to be reduced to a system for making value judgments that are ultimately moral, rather than aesthetic, in character.'[38] On the other hand, and this is a detail that must not be undermined, this subordination is in many ways necessary, because

> When black artists become publicly visible only *one at a time*, their work is burdened with a whole range of extra-artistic concerns precisely because […] they are seen as "representatives" who speak on behalf of, and are thus accountable to, their communities. […] In such a political economy of racial representation where the part stands in for the whole, the visibility of a few token black public figures serves to legitimise, and reproduce, the invisibility, and lack of access to public discourse, of the community as a whole.[39]

What Mercer's articulation of the 'burden of representation' demonstrates is the tension between obligation – the needs of an underrepresented community, in history and literature – and artistic freedom. This tension is particular to black arts because, in order to acquire access to public discourse, the artist must use their platform and the art itself to explain his or her own lack of access to such. This lack of access is the result of a pre-existent sociopolitical dynamic where individual agency is subordinate to a hierarchy of class and race; the burden of representation is both a response to and mark in a literary culture that has been – and still is – lacking in black British representation.

What prevails throughout studies of the politics of representational strategies is the fact that this subordination of artistic creativity is a result of the need to make space in literary culture for black British writers whose access to available platforms has been relatively non-existent historically. This is what Mercer means by 'corrective inclusion' – a single piece of art or literature, or an exhibition, must, or is expected to, address the historical exclusion of

[38] Mercer, 'The Burden of Representation', p. 357.
[39] Mercer, 'The Burden of Representation', pp. 358-359.

black British representation. As such, the dynamic between representation and reality is complicated by the very platform of articulation. It is here that Kalu's engendering of the signature of conventional storytelling in his anecdote, and the tension stimulated between reality and fiction, becomes telling. 'Getting Home' takes on the predominant themes and events of a black British literature that is a 'window' looking into the sociopolitical realities of black Britain, and it does so through the minimalising techniques of anecdote.

That is, the journey home from London to Oldham assumes the significance of the migrant journey on a small, local scale. Such a journey of migrancy is typical of black British and postcolonial novels more generally, but this is usually portrayed as a voyage weighted by the postcolonial experience and the neglected history carried by it. Kalu's story echoes this context, but the journey that it relays takes on the phases of black British identity narrativised by texts such as Procter's periodising anthology, making them everyday occurrences rather than eventful moments in the span of a novel structured around causation. The narrator's residence in Oldham recalls the environment of retreat to hostile domestic space amid a housing crisis for the Windrush generation – the 'repetitious referents' in texts by writers such as George Lamming, Andrew Salkey, and Samuel Selvon to slum-like 'basements, bedsits, guest-houses and terraces' are associated with early texts of alienation from the dominant British culture, according to Procter.[40] The narrator's home in Kalu's story, described in minimal terms, subtly echoes these environments, encompassing just a 'lockable door […] and, behind that, a decent mattress.'[41] This era of writing also involved the repeated representation of public transport, detailing the influx of migrants working on London buses, as well as the hostility of white travellers towards black passengers. Again, this is recalled by 'Getting Home', transport on buses, trains, and by foot being both a major factor of the structural framework of the story

[40] Procter, *Writing Black Britain*, p. 16.
[41] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 82.

as well as a recurring theme of its content. The narrator faces obstacles on his journey from delayed trains, antagonist passengers waiting for the night bus, and taxis that will not stop for him. This history and its stilted trajectory into the present are invited into the story when the other passengers waiting at the bus stop mistake the narrator as an employee:

> I'm wearing jeans and a black jacket. I don't have a clip board or walkie-talkie or anything, but everyone seems to think I work for the bus company. Maybe it's my rahtid flight bag. My mouth opens to tells them all to go fuck themselves, then closes again. I shrug off my zeds. The Windrushers arrived in Britain and became bus conductors. Although my roots are African – not West Indian – this subtlety is for another time. I bow to my role. This is honouring our predecessors. We are born to conduct buses.[42]

The way in which the narrator captures this history and its development into the present via the anecdotal style of its delivery is the minimalising technique of the anecdote in effect: the general reality of the Windrush generation experience is incorporated into this individual's day-to-day encounters. The subtlety of his individual identity is 'for another time', because the experience speaks more of a general reality than of this singular event.

Moving chronologically through the recognisable narrative of postwar black British history, the criminalisation of black identity on the streets in the 1970s, as summarised by James Procter in a different text, *Dwelling Places*, is drawn into 'Getting Home' in a few ways. Firstly, the significance of the silhouette of the black body 'propping up walls and lamp-posts, lingering on street corners'[43] is inferred when the narrator encounters a lone white woman walking towards him. Conscious to ensure that she does not believe herself to be in any danger in passing him on the street, the narrator's silhouette nevertheless is enough to cause the woman to run away 'in the direction she has just come'.[44] An injured man sits on the pavement, shouting for help, but when the narrator kneels down to help, 'sweep[ing] [his] dreads off [his]

[42] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 84.
[43] Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 71.
[44] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 86.

face', the man becomes alarmed and shouts: 'Somebody else help me!'[45] In the event of a car crashing into the bus stop, the police arrive only to frisk the narrator in a case of racial profiling. Again, the story charts a history and brings it up to the present day via the techniques of the anecdote, by engaging with the of territorialisation of the streets by the black community and the subsequent criminalisation of black identity. What is significant here once more is the form through which this is delivered. It is not a realist text that maps the entirety of this history through novelistic contingency and causation. Nor is it a social document or testimony to reality. Rather, it is achieved through the narrator's individual anecdote intersecting with this history and imparting the essence of a general reality through minimal reference to a wider context that is not fully developed by the text at hand.

Bringing the story up to the present-day context of black British history and its narrativisation through literature is the narrator's occupation as a poet, his inability to make a comfortable living from this profession in the 'global capitalist system',[46] and the way in which the mediation of publishing forces on the design of the story are present in the text. That is, there is another level to 'Getting Home', and this level relates to the second subtitle of the story, '(The Proofreader's Sigh).' Throughout, the narrator's anecdote is marked by the footnotes of an editor, the proofreader who is responsible for making the story publishable. Such marks are symbols of publishing, a machine that minimalises the reiteration and tentativeness of oral forms. The majority of the comments in the footnotes relate to the proofreader 'fact-checking' the contents of the story. The editor draws attention to moments of fictionality: the fabrication of certain locations that the narrator passes; the correcting of the references to Greek and Roman mythology which reveal that the narrator's allusions to such are inaccurate and at times completely imaginary; and the car crash that turns out to be a moment of artistic license,

[45] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 88.
[46] Kalu, 'Getting Home', p. 86.

because ‘no local newspaper articles cover this accident’.[47] Because the story is otherwise intended to be based in reality, the ‘fact-checking’ bolsters the sense of anecdotal practices. In other words, the narrator’s liberty with factuality in order to speak of a grander reality is exactly what is expected of anecdote, and the editor’s comments can be understood as a metafictional technique that directs the reader’s interpretation of the form of the story. However, the dynamic between the footnotes and the body of the ‘Getting Home’ is more complicated than this, because the incorporation of editorship into the bounds of the story alerts the reader to the processes of publishing that are not usually visible in the text. In the context of black British narratives, the fact-checking of Kalu’s fictional editor again signals tension between fiction and reality, but this time in the context of strictures enforced by the agents of publishing and marketing.

Black British narratives are subject to value-coding by external forces even at the manuscript level. They are, like all literature in our late-capitalist marketplace, dependent upon the activities and patterns of editors, publishers, marketing departments, reviewers, booksellers, and target audiences – the agents of metropolitan publishing. In a market that relies on profit, the literary and symbolic value of a text is often determined in terms of the extent to which it appeals to the ‘mainstream consumer’.[48] As Sarah Brouillette argues, this mainstream consumer is not necessarily distinct from a scholarly or academic audience, because the saturation of marketing in the modern world dictates what kinds of texts are made available to all readers, including those that create university syllabi.[49] As Sarah Ilott observes, for black British literature, the problematic part of this dynamic is the fact that its target audience is

[47] Kalu, ‘Getting Home’, p. 88
[48] For more detail, see: Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[49] Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 21, responding to Graham Huggan’s distinctions between postcolonialism and postcoloniality, in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge: 2001), p. 6.

assumed to be 'largely white, middle-class and mainstream.'[50] The actual identities of such readers are not as significant here as the fact that the dominant industry which makes black British literature available to its audience is at least imagining and targeting such a monolithic notion of the culture of its readers.

The ostensible target audience for black British literature could be the result of a publishing industry that is also largely white, middle-class, and mainstream. Danuta Kean's landmark report, *Writing the Future*, published in 2015 by Spread the Word – a non-profit writer development organisation – unveiled the internalised and systematic cultural hegemony of the British publishing industry.[51] In connection to the lack of diversity in employment at mainstream publishing houses, *Writing the Future* reported that black and Asian writers are 'expected to portray a limited view of their own cultures or risk the accusation of inauthenticity if their characters or settings did not conform to White expectations'[52] – expectations fitting the perception of a black British community through the lens of a largely white staff. Many of the writers interviewed reported that failure to comply with these expectations 'limited their prospects of publication.'[53] Kean's commentary notes that the major expectation placed on black British literature is that it should focus on themes relating to (post)colonialism, race, and assimilation.[54] 'Authenticity', in this context, means exoticism and whitewashing.

Since the publication this report, black British writers, critics, and scholars in agreement with Kean's findings have taken to public platforms to speak of the barriers to employment and publication in the industry.[55] For these writers, it is not just a question of thematic restraints,

[50] Ilott, *New Postcolonial British Genres*, p. 95.
[51] Danuta Kean, 'Introduction', *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the UK Marketplace*, ed. Danuta Kean (London: Spread the Word, 2015), pp. 1-2 (p. 2).
[52] Kean, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[53] Kean, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[54] Danuta Kean, 'Written Off', in *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the UK Marketplace*, ed. Danuta Kean (London: Spread the Word, 2015), pp. 8-11 (p. 8).
[55] See also: Bernadine Evaristo, quoted in 'Report Finds UK Books World Has Marginalised and Pigeonholed Ethnic Minorities', *Guardian* (2015) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/15/report-books-world-ethnic-minorities-london-book-fair> [accessed 13 July 2018]; and Irenosen Okojie, 'When Music Reflects the

but restrictions on genre, form, aesthetics, and individuality. Shola von Reinhold, for example, discusses the erasure of black modernists concerned with literary experimentalism from the history of black British literature. Reinhold finds fault with the agents responsible for making such literature available to its potential readers: they conclude that there is 'something about *fiction* that publishers and critics genuinely struggle to correlate with black British people.'[56] Reinhold is referring to the blurred lines between author, text, fiction, and reality that surround black British writing and its authors. From the context of the burden of celebrity authorship, Zadie Smith speaks of the expectation that writers should maintain an objective perspective and political consistency during their 'personal development' as authors as well as human beings, a growth which is 'polic[ed]' by the media.[57] In retaliation to the identity politics surrounding the marketing and reception of *White Teeth* (2000), Smith argues that as a writer and reader there should be a 'responsibility [on you] to be as open as you possibly can to the world as an aesthetic object.'[58] Viewing narrative texts as aesthetic objects requires a movement away from the arguably objective or neutral tendencies of literary realism, or, in Reinhold's terms, of the 'historically bourgeois' novel.[59] Instead, Smith invites consideration of the aspects of realism that are in the realm of the subjective; she welcomes the personal interpretation that occurs in both writing and reading the world. In her words, 'people are changing all the time' and should not be subjected to the assumption of a 'total knowledge of

Truth of Black Life, We Should Celebrate, Not Condemn', *Guardian*, (2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/13/when-music-reflects-the-truth-of-black-life-we-should-celebrate-not-condemn> [accessed 21 June 2018].

[56]Shola von Reinhold, 'What happened to Britain's black avant-garde fiction writers?', *Guardian* (2019) <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/black-writers-books-publishing-diversity-bame-racism-margaret-busby-jacaranda-a8909461.html?fbclid=IwAR3FU3wN6Fm9rSf0kwLP4aT8Mhr8LAen2CfdId3GAAoWCo3T7KrVeuy0JvE> [accessed 01 Feb 2020] (my emphasis).

[57] Zadie Smith, quoted in '"Identity is a pain in the arse": Zadie Smith on Political Correctness', *Guardian* (2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/02/zadie-smith-political-correctness-hay-cartagena> [accessed 01 Feb 2020].

[58] Smith, 'Zadie Smith on Political Correctness'.

[59] Reinhold, 'Britain's black avant-garde fiction writers'.

humans.'[60] Both Smith and Reinhold highlight the ways in which, through metropolitan publishing, black British writers are categorised in ways that other writers are not. As they both report, the effect of this categorisation is not just felt by the writers themselves, but is also embedded into the forms, modes, and genres that are available to black British writing in the commercial sphere.

In 2020, a follow up to the *Writing the Future* report was published by Spread the Word, funded by the AHRC in partnership with Goldsmiths and the University of London. *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* is the first academic study on the topic, and it focuses on the quality of experience for writers of colour in publishing, as opposed to the concentration in *Writing the Future* on the quantity of ethnic minorities working in publishing. The new report is interested in researching the stages of production: the acquisition of manuscripts, the promotion of books and their authors, and the processes of sale and environments of retail. The study finds that the strictures of publishing begin at the manuscript level, and this is why beginning my thesis with analysis of Kalu's story is an apt place to start. 'Getting Home' offers a commentary on those processes of acquiring literature that are now beginning to be discussed, and it does so through form. It is not merely its associations with anecdote and myth, its concentration or distillation of the predominant black British narrative, or the presence of the editor in the text that enables this commentary to be achieved. Rather, it is all of these things within a single text, a short story, that allows such elements to be brought together in proximity and creates friction and tension around their connections to one another. Nothing in the story is reconciled or guided through, and much is left open for further consideration – there is no final draft that incorporates the editor's corrections, and neither myth nor anecdote takes precedence over the other. The reality of the tale is not surpassed by the revelations of artistic license, and its fictionality does not give way to the demands of the editor to 'fact-check'. The evasion of

[60] Smith, 'Zadie Smith on Political Correctness'.

conclusion and reconciliation in this way is something that I argue in the body of this thesis is particular to the short story. The analysis of Kalu's story here is intended to open this effect up for further discussion in each chapter.

The formal properties and material positioning of black British short stories are yet to be fully explored in the academy. Studies of short narratives include Jorge Sacido-Romero's 'Stranded in a Border Zone: Traumatic Liminality in Black British Short Stories' (2019) and Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann's edited collection of essays *Liminality and the Short Story: Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Writing* (2014). Both texts approach the short form as a liminal or threshold space, able to engender a sense of bordering due to its brevity.[61] Similarly, Susan Arndt positions the short stories of Guyanese British writer Pauline Melville as 'trans-spaces', able to write of the transculturalism of the Caribbean in the context of critical Occidentalism and critical whiteness studies.[62] Bettina Jansen's *Narratives of Community in the Black British Short Story* (2018) is the first full-length monograph on black British short fiction. The text strives to provide an overview of the emergence and development of the black British short story from the 1950s into the twenty-first century. The overview is timely and crucial in its uncovering of the sociopolitical impact of this marginalised form. Jansen traces the relationship between the short story and the broader spectrum of 'black British literature and culture [that] have partaken in the struggle for a polycultural British society.'[63] It is a narrative element that is highlighted by Jansen's suggestion that the short story can have

[61] Jorge Sacido-Romero, 'Stranded in a Border Zone: Traumatic Liminality in Black British Short Stories', in *Borders and Border Crossings in the Contemporary British Short Story*, eds. Barbara Korte and Laura Ma Lojo-Rodríguez (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 115-131; and Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann, eds., *Liminality and the Short Story: Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).
[62] Susan Arndt, 'Migration, Rhizomatic Identities, and the Black Atlantic in Postcolonial Literary Studies: The Trans-Space as Home in Paula Melville's Short Story "Eat Labba and Drink Creek Water"', in *Contested Communities: Communication, Narration, and Imagination*, ed. Susanne Mühleisen (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 219-235.
[63] Bettina Jansen, *Narratives of Community in the Black British Short Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 5; p. 10.

the effect of building a communal dialogue across different cultures: she argues that its fragmentary nature means that the form 'is not required to present a conclusive or comprehensive vision of community but is free to experiment with various, even provisional notions of human coexistence.'[64] This stance towards the form has its origins in a body of story criticism that surveys its capacity – in comparison to longer narrative structures – to interrogate monolithic and dominant notions of nation and community, with a pluralising effect.[65] Jansen uncovers a significant literary element here that is possibly unique to the short story, being its potential evasion of expected narrative resolution. However, the text does not explore this aspect as much as it assumes its truth in order to support the underlining aim of *Narratives of Community:* to document 'the emergence of a postethnic and arguably humanist stance in the black British short story.'[66] The text pays crucial attention to a thus far marginalised form, and makes a compelling sociopolitical argument about the communicative possibilities of the short story for community building across various ethnicities, cultures, and races in Britain. However, Jansen's hypothesis that the short story is able to elude the resolution expected of narrative because of its potentially lateral as opposed to linear structure implicates the modernist history of the form,[67] but does not explore fully the unique literary, textual, material, and sociocultural aspects that derive from this tradition.

The structural experimentalism of narrative associated with the modern short story exists in direct connection to its cultural environment and publishing circumstances. For Paul

[64] Jansen, *Narratives of Community*, p. 16.
[65] Reference here is to texts such as Frank O'Connor's which view the short story as a form for the figure of the outsider, in *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2004); as well as the various suggestions made popular by Nadine Gordimer's 'The Flash of Fireflies', that the form possesses a fragmentary quality that cuts through dominant ideological narratives, in *Short Story Theories,* ed. Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 263-267.
[66] Jansen, *Narratives of Community*, p. 14.
[67] Directly, in fact: the conclusion features two paragraphs on the connections between Jansen's overall arguments and the debt they owe to the modernist short story; 'black British short stories after 1980 refer to the short story tradition shaped by writers like Anton Chekov, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Katherine Mansfield […]', p. 320.

March-Russell, the 'image of the short story as culturally marginal relates to its economic position' in England.[68] With no direct route for the form into the established circuits of the metropolitan publishing scene at the turn of the twentieth century, editors, writers, and critics of the short story assumed the magazine market for an avant-garde movement. The movement centred on the anti-convention possibilities of the short story, entwining the literary with the social. A small, high-brow market for the form was established, based on cultural marginality and narrative alterity, as well as artistic difficulty. This market has had a lasting impact on the study of literary modernism and the short story.[69] According to March-Russell, the story is *the* modern form because its chief quality is 'the need to grasp the meaninglessness of existence through a heightened, self-conscious use of artistic form.'[70] For Valerie Shaw, the 'rise of the short story in England is closely linked with the emergence of the characteristic figure of the modern artist, and with anti-Victorianism in its widest sense'. Such anti-Victorianism includes a rejection of the novelistic standards developed in this era.[71] Furthermore, because of the shape of its historic and current economic and literary infrastructure, the short story most often appears in the public eye *amongst* other works, and so plurality and anti-convention converge to challenge the resolution expected of longform narrative when it is positioned against the short story.

Published amongst other works, the short form also circulates with a heightened presence of the figure of the editor, critic, or publisher responsible for bringing the works together for their dissemination and reception. As this thesis argues, publishing black British short stories is no exception, and the question of the allographic nature of the editor, of speaking for or in place of a writer and their works, is of amplified significance for a field in which the

[68] Paul March-Russell, *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 43.
[69] See, for a summary: Paul March-Russell, 'Economies of Scale: The Short Story in England', in *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 43-52.
[70] March-Russell, *The Short Story*, p. 88.
[71] Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London, New York: Longman, 1983), p. 20.

politics of representation and identity prevail. Two twenty-first century volumes of collected essays on black British literature demonstrate increasing awareness in the field of the need to consider the placement and positioning of writing. Such a focus on positionality potentially reveals the impact of publishing circumstances upon the text. Deirdre Osborne notes that:

> Given what is published, anthologised, taught and critically revisited, it is clear that […] the issue of ethnicity-linked specialisation continues to be defined via tensions between agency and appropriation in a context of cultural legitimation where […] Britain's political, educational, commercial, and arts institutions continue to display little ethnic and racial diversity.[72]

Similarly, in the introduction to their edited collection, Susheila Nasta and Mark Stein argue that:

> The material conditions of book publishing and reviewing, of literary networks and prizes, of organisations and conferences, all critical to the evolution of this field, are […] still in need of systematic archival exploration.[73]

The academic field of study is thus becoming alert to the activities, conditions, and networks of publishing and marketing, which texts such as these suggest will be of significance for the future of the field. Nevertheless, even with awareness of the need to engage with the unique concerns of 'prizes, commissioning, publishing, reviewing', Osborne's edited collection gives way to 'the limitations of space' and contributors are 'constrain[ed]' in this area.[74] This means that such concerns, while signalled, are not at the forefront of the essays which comprise the *Companion*. In comparison, publishing contexts are consistently foregrounded in critical analysis of the short story. The form is circulated either between other works, in order to meet the economic and material requirements of the established circuits of commercial metropolitan publishing, or through routes alternative to this dominant publishing environment – such as in

[72] Osborne, 'Introduction', pp. 14-15.
[73] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 13.
[74] Osborne, 'Introduction', p. 3.

magazines or competition anthologies.[75] Its sociocultural and publishing contexts, therefore, still largely define the short story. As such, exploring black British short stories allows for publishing and marketing concerns such as the placement and positioning of the literary text to be centred.

The term 'black British' is defined in this thesis according to the placement of literature by a publishing industry whose requirements, as Deirdre Osborne notes, 'can dictate [the] interweaving [of] Black and Asian Anglophone literary categories'.[76] While I am alert to the history of the term and its shifting significance, to its potential problematic, homogenising nature when used to broadly designate peoples and cultures of non-white heritage,[77] forces of publishing and marketing continue to demarcate black Britishness without, necessarily, the careful consideration with which the term is approached in the academy. Thus, the material that I consider in this thesis variously defines black Britishness: some texts include Chinese, Irish, and Canadian writers and works in their definitions; others do not attempt to delimit, but are open to any writer who self-defines as black British; and some texts apply critical borders. Locating publishing environments at the forefront, I follow the definitions of black Britishness offered by the texts under analysis, instead of proposing a definition of my own. In this way, my approach to black Britishness is similar to Susheila Nasta and Mark Stein's in their introduction to *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (2020). They suggest that 'the not unproblematic categories' of as 'black' and Asian' can 'gestur[e] broadly to a field of reference rather than implying narrowly imposed racial or ethnic affiliations across

[75] March-Russell, *The Short Story*, pp. 49-52.
[76] Osborne, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[77] The categorisation of black British literature has been discussed in: Hall, 'New Ethnicities'; Mike Phillips, 'Foreword: Migration, Modernity and English Writing – Reflections on Migrant Identity and Canon Formation', in *A Black British Canon?*, eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 13-31; Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*; and Fred D'Aguiar, 'Against Black British Literature', in *Tibisiri: Caribbean Writers and Critics*, ed. Maggie Butcher (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1988), pp. 106-114.

what are diverse forms of expression and complexly formed cultural identities.'[78] I find agreement with their proposal of 'gesturing' in my exploration of black British short stories. However, Nasta and Stein maintain 'black' and 'Asian' as separate categories, which I do not, based on my alertness to publishing environments and the cultural marketplace. As Mike Phillips discusses, the marketplace employed the term 'black British' to a variety of texts in order to 'command attention', thus 'repackag[ing] a host of texts under this label.[79] On the other hand, as Sara Upstone notes, the way in which the cultural marketplace has commanded attention for a diverse range of authors and their works under the term black British can be approached in a productive manner: 'the continued use of black British writing as a frame of reference creates a space for sustained attention on racial politics which might otherwise be occluded.'[80] Furthermore, Nasta and Stein wish to indicate the multiplicity beckoned by such categories, which can encompass identifications such as: 'British, Scottish, Irish, Caribbean, African, Sinhalese, Trinidadian, Ethiopian, "Negro", Asiatic, African Briton, woman, queer, with mixed and multiple identifications such as BAME – or simply […] writer.'[81] It is this mutating, self-reflexive, and fluid sense of black Britishness which I explore here.

According to March-Russell, the short story is often accompanied by an enduring ideology that, as a 'self-reflexive narrative mode', it can 'successfully address wider social issues' through 'literary dissidence' and 'formal innovation'.[82] A text's self-conscious relationship with its own materiality in this way is also a topic of increasing discussion for the field of black British literature, as well as postcolonial writing more broadly.[83] The short story,

[78] Susheila Nasta and Mark U. Stein, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing*, eds. Susheila Nasta and Mark U. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 1-22 (p. 6).
[79] Phillips, 'Foreword', p. 14.
[80] Sara Upstone, 'Black British Fiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, eds. Daniel O'Gorman and Robert Eaglestone (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 125-135 (p. 126).
[81] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 7.
[82] March-Russell, *The Short Story*, pp. 68-76.
[83] Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*; Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989); Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*; Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 2002); Corinne Fowler, 'A Tale of Two Novels: Developing a

with its alternative routes to publication, is a productive form to analyse through the lens of black British literature and its publishing circumstances. Bettina Jansen's arguments about the black British short story and its 'postethnic' stance rely on her assumption that 'the short story differs significantly from black British writing in other genres' because of its evasion of the 'exclusively black British themes' that she finds in novels.[84] If Jansen finds a divisionary tendency in black British novels which is absent from short stories, how far could this be explained by the nuances of a publishing network for novels which solicits themes relating to race, social exile, and assimilation from black British writers, as Danuta Kean reports? Is the short story more able to explore themes, genres, and modes beyond those expected of the black British novel because of its alternative platforms for publication? These are some of the questions with which *Publishing Black British Short Stories* is concerned. Finding a meeting point between Jansen's overview of the sociopolitical development of the black British short form and the expectations of the commercial publishing industry, my aims are threefold: (i) to outline and explore the changed relationship between a literary work and its author due to the economic and material strictures of short story publication; (ii) to focus on the nuances of publishing environments and how they shape form – form being the means by which art is encapsulated for exchange with its consumer; and (iii) to concentrate primarily on form over author identity in order to trace connections between the textual, the literary, and the material. The thesis therefore comprises three sections which relate to the publishing platforms for short fiction: periodicals, anthologies, and single-authored collections. The general conclusion and coda close the thesis by considering the impact that the lateral, heterodox, and indeterminate form of the short story could have on the formalisation and narrativisation of a black British history and canon.

Devolved Approach to Black British Writing', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43 (2008), 79-94; and Squires, *Marketing Literature*.

[84] Jansen, *Narratives of Community*, p. 318.

Because the primary organising principle of this thesis is formal rather than thematic, the chapters are organised around platform and format. I am concerned with uncovering the ways in which publishing circumstances – a topic with a particular relationship with form, given how both involve the textualising and materiality of the abstract – shape representation. In analysing Kalu's anecdote, I discussed the subjects of representation that prevail in black British literature. These subjects relate to social identity and political realities and, overall, to the transformation of Britain as a postcolonial location. Thus far in this introduction it is the development of theme in black British literature that I have outlined, but how these subjects have been represented has experienced its own arc since the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, I return to this trajectory of development with attentiveness to style, structure, and genre, illustrating the formal landscape of black British narrative fiction in order to locate the place of the short story within it.

Writing of the 1950s through to the early 1970s largely employed realist form. Formal approaches involved autobiographic techniques, social commentary, and indicative description in order to render in fiction the realities of being black in Britain. At this stage, the narrative depicted alienation and exile from the British population and culture. For the 1950s, texts such as George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) are characteristic of the techniques that generated a black British realism, significantly reimagining Britain through literary methods while engaging with reality. This era, according to Susheila Nasta, 'marks a vital but often hidden element of what might be read as a collective multicultural autobiography of the post-war nation.'[85] In Nasta's terms, these texts were unique in 'attempting to represent the major social, cultural, ethnic and linguistic changes that were

[85] Susheila Nasta, '1940s-1970s', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 23-39 (p. 28).

occurring following the arrival of Britain's new colonial citizens'.[86] To explore such texts as autobiographic, though, should not undermine their literariness. As Nasta explores elsewhere, Selvon's realist mode of narration in *The Lonely Londoners* can be described as '[c]losing the difficult gap between the teller of the tale and the tale itself'. Nasta continues, 'Selvon thus finds a means to not only reinvent London but to reshape its spaces, giving his previously voiceless characters a place to live in it.'[87] Realism facilitated Selvon's 'alternative modern vision' in literary technique.[88] By the 1970s, though, the documentary surpassed the literary in realist narratives that were, according to Alison Donnell, 'strongly informed by sociological and auto/biographical observations'.[89] The texts that Donnell discusses, including Farrukh Dhondy's *Siege of Babylon* (1975) and Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* (1976), are 'transparently political' in form, attempting to mirror reality in order to represent the 'agency and identity of black people within the nation state', whilst also 'script[ing] the personal dimensions of racism in Britain.'[90] In the 1970s, then, an aesthetic of documentary-like social realism evolved from the realist-cum-modernist tendencies of the earlier texts, but with a focus on national identity inclusive of the black population as opposed to the earlier concentration on alienation from it.

Literature of the 1980s and 1990s, however, turned to articulate diverse black British identities, (re)claiming Britain, and interrogating the monolithic narrative of the nation. Following an age of collective identity in the 1970s, the usefulness of such inclusivity began to be questioned. It had the unintended effect of homogenising multiple identities; once a necessary assemblage to battle the racism of the majority population, black Britishness soon

[86] Susheila Nasta, 'An Unexpected Encounter with Sam Selvon at the National Portrait Gallery', *Wasafiri* (2013), 28.2, 33-35 (p. 34).
[87] Susheila Nasta, 'Introduction', in Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. v-xvii (p. vi).
[88] For more detail on the modernism of Selvon's text that challenges the idea of the novel as a 'dogged narrative of virtuous social realism', see Nasta, 'Introduction', pp. xii-xvii.
[89] Alison Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing', *Wasafiri*, 17.36 (2002), 11-17 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02690050208589781> (p. 14).
[90] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 14.

faced internal fracture and, in some ways, rejection. What is significant here is that such fracture was represented, scripted, through form and technique. In Alison Donnell's terms, '[c]ultural forms', and I would add specifically literary forms, 'began to reflect the need to articulate the multiple imbrications of identity.'[91] Literary anthologies, a form of multiplicity, proliferated. In terms of novel output, documentary or social realism was replaced by metafictional, magical realist, and postmodernist aesthetics which were able to garner a sense of internal fracture through literary style. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) demonstrate this shift towards postmodernism, whereby the effect of literary style took precedence in criticism over, or at least in parallel with, the subjects of representation. In other words, this period witnessed the turn away from the politicisation of black identity in the 1970s and towards the politics of representation. As James Procter notes, the term 'black' was 'not abandoned', but 'called upon to draw attention to its own constructedness', meaning that the principles of construction, of *how* blackness is represented, were centred.[92]

At the turn of the twenty-first century, as the nation celebrated the fifty-year anniversary of the Windrush docking, attention was directed towards the future of multicultural Britain, and a mood of millennial optimism prevailed.[93] New Labour's promise of a new, inclusive Britain meant that the public was alert to the multiplicity of identity, and a narrative was embraced which celebrated the diversity of the new British nation. Black British literature, now welcoming fracture, returned to realism, but this time with comedy, satire, and wit. To laugh at Britain's racist past was to establish it as just that – the past – and to welcome a more promising, progressive, and open-minded future. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) has been

[91] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 14.
[92] James Procter, 'Introduction: mid-1980s to late 1990s', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998*, ed. James Procter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 193-196 (p. 194).
[93] Procter, 'General Introduction', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998*, ed. James Procter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 1.

discussed at length as *the* text of New Labour's multicultural Britain – taking up in a single novel black, South Asian, Jewish, and white British identities. Other examples include Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1997), Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1997), and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). What is significant about the form of these texts is how they write twentieth century Britain as inclusive of its racist realities, but in a way that positions the present and the future as a time for progressive change. In this vein, Sara Upstone has argued that such texts 'pla[y] an important part in gesturing towards the possible future of a transformed social landscape' through 'utopian realisms'. Such realisms are 'strategic formal choices' that shape a '*possible future* and *not a present reality*'.[94] Similarly, R. Victoria Arana's formulation of a black British aesthetic outlined above is illustrative of this period. The text as wiser and more mature than the characters, a friendliness that inscribes a progressive, optimistic attitude, and a satire that undermines racist ideologies and seeks to position them as bygones: Arana's proposed aesthetic is typical of the millennial mood for black British writing.

Given the reactionary values still manifest in British ideology and culture, embodied by the Brexit vote in 2016 which was won based on an anti-immigration narrative in the media, it is unsurprising that literature of the twenty-first century has problematised the celebration, humour, and optimism of the turn of the century. Media and marketing had a significant impact on the premature marking of a progressive future for multicultural Britain and designated a sort of endpoint to twentieth-century racism. The result of such a narrative in the media is the assumption of closure for black Britain. That closure was anticipated by James Procter when the Windrush celebrations of 1998 drew focus towards endings rather than the 'messy, unsettled politics of the "here-and-now"'.[95] Closure is reflected in the forms of the texts – being 'novels of transformation' and 'utopian realisms', they end in a state of resolution for the

[94] Upstone, *Rethinking Race and Diversity*, pp. 3-4 (original emphasis).
[95] Procter, 'General Introduction', p. 2.

sociopolitical landscape of multicultural Britain. However, the idea of closure for black Britain is more a feature of the public discourse around such texts, one that celebrates an end to racism in Britain and the beginning of a new, progressive, multicultural state. Black British literature has since battled the impact of this narrative of closure by embracing literary forms that frustrate conclusion and beckon uncertainty past the end of a narrative. Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), which follows the novelist's lengthy career of formal innovation, brings together in proximity but not reconciliation the narratives of twelve characters, mostly black British women. These culminate in the celebration of a theatre performance, ending the novel on another medium of representation rather than tying up the loose ends of the text. Within the narrative, connections are made between the characters, but these connections beget difficult sociopolitical questions that do not have neat or explicit answers and are instead dealt with through the anti-linear structure of the novel. Unconventional literary form in this instance offers a means of rendering understanding where the intersections of identity are too complex, chaotic, and combative to be reasoned through conventional narrative. In another example, Shola von Reinhold's *Lote* (2020) problematises chronological progress when twenty-first-century protagonist Mathilda finds her representation and recognition only through black modernism of the 1920s. The more engrossed Mathilda becomes in the art and life of Hermia Druitt, a fictional Scottish modernist poet, the more disconnected she is from her reality in the twenty-first century, and the more the texture of the novel inhabits the avant-gardism of a black modernism that has been neglected in the field of black British literature in the present. Texts such as Salena Godden's *Mrs Death Misses Death* (2021) and Leone Ross's *This One Sky Day* (2021) similarly approach narrative through anti-conventional means.

The major development of black British literature into the present moment, then, is the way in which it positions concerns regarding narrative structure, aesthetics, and form at the forefront, alongside the sociopolitical rather than in opposition to it. Such a focus is reflected

in several studies in the field over the last decade.[96] I suggest that there is an increasing awareness in black British literature of the difficulty of channelling complex sociopolitical realities into the structure of traditional narrative form. The relationship between the subjects of representation and *how* they are represented is more significant than ever in the field. It could be the case that this is because the groundwork of establishing black experience and representation has already been done. I suggest that it is rather because discourse around black British literature has become attentive to the ways in which narrative structure can be appropriated by forces outside of the text for purposes that do not align with authorial intent. Perhaps it is both of these factors that have led to more innovative and experimental forms of black British literature, placing responsibility back onto the reader to read across and interpret the text, as well as the world. Formal experimentation demands lateral, indeterminate interpretation where social realism imagines such interpretation to have already taken place.[97]

The trajectory that I have outlined here largely comprises novels, plays, film – longform representations which, even with the historic lack of access to mainstream platforms for black creatives, are still the dominant modes of literary and artistic expression. It cannot be said that there is a 'mainstream' for black British writing, but the nearest to one available would resemble something akin to the above summary. The short story, on the other hand, is a form of narrative alterity, which is consistently outside of the mainstream because of economic as well as cultural forces. I have already discussed the short story's history of marginality in British literature and the western canon. To recap, the now customary tools of the short story

[96] Eva Ulrike Pirker, *Narrative Projections of a Black British History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Jenni Ramone, 'Strange Metaphors: Contemporary Black Writing in Britain', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Literature*, eds. Richard Bradford, Madelena Gonzalez, Stephen Butler, James Ward, and Kevin De Ornellas (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), pp. 793-805; Kate Aughterson and Deborah Philips, eds., *Women Writers and Experimental Narratives: Early Modern to Contemporary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Jean Wyatt and Sheldon George, eds., *Reading Contemporary Black British and African American Women Writers: Race, Ethics, Narrative Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); Ilott, *New Postcolonial British Genres*.

[97] Such an impact of realism is at the basis of Sara Upstone's 'realist utopias' as a 'mode of political intervention […] not of the present, but of the "future-possible"', in *Rethinking Race and Identity*, pp. 5-14.

– with their roots in the innovation of modernism – position the short form as a self-reflexive medium which interrogates from within the conventions of narrative prose. What is important to take forward here, though, is that the marginality of the short story has meant that a trajectory of black British literature has taken place via the short story that is separate from the one usually taken up by the academy and public discourse. Such discourses can take for granted the availability and visibility of novels without consideration of how this form may have a shaping force over the narrative of black Britain as a whole. Short story theory usually necessitates consideration of narrative form, because the defining feature of the short story is believed to be found in its difference to and comparison with the novel as the dominant form of prose.[98] If the development of longform narratives of black Britain since the mid-twentieth century has progressed from axiomatic realist representation through to its interrogation through narrative form, then where does the short story – a form that engenders self-reflexivity – fit into this arc? What is the position of the short story in the narrative of black British literature and culture? Has it always performed the kind of formal self-reflexivity that is now beginning to take place in the novel? Does tracing the history of the postwar black British short story find in it the same type of narrative alterity that is typical of the short form in its wider context? What could such alterity mean for the narrative of black Britain, its past and its future?

These are the questions with which *Publishing Black British Short Stories* is concerned. Because the alterity of the short story is directly related to the form's lack of access to dominant publishing routes, the chapters are structured around platform. Arguably too brief and fleeting to demand standalone publication, too prone to experimentation and avant-gardism for the average consumer, and, in contradiction, also too far associated with 'middle-brow' literature to acquire the reputation and merit of the novel, the short story does not share the same access

[98] For more information on this dichotomy, see: Viorica Patea, 'The Short Story: An Overview of the History and Evolution of the Genre', in *Short Story Theories: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective*, ed. Viorica Patea (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 1-24.

to mainstream metropolitan publishing as the novel. Where a novel will be taken on as a complete unit for sale, the short story is generally published amongst other works, and usually as a means to the fulfilment of some broader objective. Anthologies of short fiction mark trends and patterns in a literary culture by providing the semblance of commonality between discrete texts – though these texts are usually not merely organised by an editor, but curated also. Single-authored collections can display the multifaceted talents of both up-and-coming and long-established writers. Countless magazines incorporate short fiction to bolster the manifesto or political intent of the editing team, or merely to provide supplementary entertainment. Literary journals find the short story to be an ideal medium for sampling new ideas and writers, and experimenting with against-the-grain or controversial material that might not be on the mainstream publishing radar. It is the manifold positioning of the short story that defines its alterity. In some ways, freedom of expression from the strictures of metropolitan publishing is facilitated by a medium that can assume many diverse platforms. In other ways, short story publishing burdens the text with strictures and agendas of its own kind.

Given that this thesis is concerned with mapping the differential narratives of black Britain offered by the short story, the diversity of publishing positions is something that I strive to place at the forefront of analysis. The first section considers stories published in periodicals, and is made up of two chapters which both explore *Race Today* (1969-1988) as a case study of black British periodical publishing. The first chapter considers the development of a collective black British identity in *Race Today*, a Marxist-orientated, socialist-campaigning, political magazine that intends to foster a community of readers against the social and racial injustices and policies of the nation state. *Race Today* was not only a journalistic establishment; the Collective was active in the fight against racism, organising strikes, protests, campaigns, and movements in order to effect real change, including the Black People's Day of Action and Free George Lindo. What is significant about this outlet is that it sits between two stages of

community orientation. Earlier media, such as the *West Indian Gazette* (1958-1964), establish a community of migrants from the former colonies within Britain, building initial ties between Afro-Caribbean and South Asian groups and forming a collective identity through political interpellation.[99] Later outlets, such as *The Voice* (1982-present), build a resolutely black community *of* Britain, not merely within it, though this community is more exclusive than the former to those residents with African or Caribbean heritage.[100] *Race Today*, though, is between these two 'stages', if they can be neatly categorised as such, and its intended audience is not limited to black residents (in either the inclusive or exclusive context). Bridging differences between British, Caribbean, Asian, Cuban, Canadian, North and South American, and Irish populations, the short stories of *Race Today* reflect the magazine's garnering of community by rendering shared experience in fictional form. This process of harbouring a single, unified nation via periodical publishing is parallel to the development of regional Anglo-Caribbean identity across the islands in the late-nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries. Collectivity was achieved in literature, specifically the short story, via journals, magazines, and the BBC's Caribbean Voices (1943-1958). Chapter one considers the influence of this Caribbean tradition on *Race Today*'s endeavour of community-building with political agenda.

Chapter two turns away from the transnational focus of the first, and towards a writer firmly rooted in Britain, Jennifer Johnson, whose stories were published by *Race Today* in 1978. Johnson did not have a literary career beyond the magazine, and she has not been the focus of any studies on black British literature, meaning that her stories offer a hitherto unseen perspective in the field. Published under the penname Frontline Jennie, the style and tone of

[99] Gail Low, '"Shaping Connections": From West Indian to Black British', in *A Black British Canon?*, eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 168-188.
[100] Marina Prentoulis, 'The Construction of the Black British Community in *The Voice* and the *New Nation*', *Journalism*, 13.6 (2011), 731-749.

the stories mimic the appeal to insider knowledge and the sensationalist and rumour-driven atmosphere typical of a gossip column. While her stories are presented by the magazine as the candid narration of a group of black youths, the style and craft of Johnson's prose reveal contradictions and fabrications. The effect is almost an exclusion of the reader from the 'truth' of a given story, which conflicts with the gossip column design of the collection. Johnson's stories are marketed as an invitation to view the reality of the black presence in British schools, but in fact undermine their association with gossip. Johnson approaches the short form with skilful manipulation of the expectations of genre, form, and platform, as well as with significant political awareness. Her stories contradict much of what is known about black British women's writing in the 1970s. The orientation towards the 'frontline' and the streets associates this fiction with what James Procter suggests is a 'specifically *masculine* site of self-fashioning in this period.'[101] Johnson's stories, whose main character and narrator can be categorised as a 'second-generation' black British woman, takes women's writing outside of the 'politics of familial and domestic space'.[102] Instead, they relate to the zones of confrontation usually associated with black British men's writing of the 1970s, such as the street, carnival riots, and the body as a site of criminalisation. Significantly, these sites are refashioned and rescaled to complement the focalization of youth: the street is reshaped into the school hall where young men are policed by the teaching staff; carnival is modelled in a local park where the group celebrate their shared roots and differences, only for the event to be terminated by the authorities, their parents; and the criminalisation of the black male body is recreated with illuminating, subversive effect when the group dress up a white student. In this chapter, I suggest that the 'low-culture' expectations of gossip are ultimately undermined by Johnson's adroit manipulation of the expectations of the platform bestowed upon her stories.

[101] James Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 72.
[102] Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 118.

The second section explores anthologies of black British short fiction. Chapter three investigates the proliferation of anthologies of black women's writing in the 1980s and 1990s. In this period, male-centred texts of black Britain were addressed, uncovering the place and operations of women in the now well-established arc from initial migration, to the criminalisation of black identity, to the reclamation of belonging within the nation. It was also a period of establishing resolutely *literary* spaces for black women writers amongst and outside of the longform realism of the 1950s-1970s, and, later, the urban realism of the dub poetry of figures such as Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah. Chapter three argues that it is not just the content of these realisms that faced interrogation through black British women's anthologies of this period, but also their shape, style, and structure. Because it is the collective encounters of sexism and oppression in a patriarchal society that are narrativised in this period, the form of the literary anthology is apt for unifying difference but from a centred locus. Alison Donnell discusses the influx of black women's anthologies in terms of 'a conscious sense of the need to articulate difference'.[103] This etching of difference within the form of the anthology is traced by this chapter, but particular attention is paid to Black WomanTalk's *Don't Ask Me Why* (1991). I suggest that this anthology employs the short story in order to challenge the narrativising of black British identity from within. Tracing the generic and formal experimentation of the short stories within the text, I consider the ways in which novelistic conventions are part of an oppressive narrative structure. *Don't Ask Me Why*, I suggest, undermines such structure, by allotting textual space to the silence created by an androcentric narrative. This subversion takes place through attention to the freedom of creativity and imagination in childhood, through the antirealist potential of supernatural and otherworldly themes, and through the positioning of silence within and between narratives, mirroring

[103] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 14.

through literary form the repression of black women's experiences in a narrative of black Britain that sustains patriarchal conventions.

Chapter four considers the form of the anthology itself, and the dynamic between this literary form and the short fiction it contains. The anthology as an object depends upon its parts, and in some ways its claim to reflect a trend or pattern is illusory, because its existence is reliant upon curating the works it collects, rather than the uncovering something already existent. A 'collectivist and interventionist' form, the anthology is, in Jeremy Braddock's terms, a 'mode of public engagement [that] model[s] future […] relationships between audience and artwork.'[104] Such mediation and intervention between text and reader is potentially problematic in a field in which identity politics prevail. To mediate the dialogue between a text and its reader is analogous to speaking for those who otherwise would not have access to publishing platforms. Furthermore, to shape the future of the field is to run the risk of fabricating a trend that may not otherwise develop. In this chapter, I analyse *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories* (2015), edited by Jacob Ross, on these terms of anthologising. Ross's editorial stance is alert to the shaping and interventionist forces of anthologising, and his text is unique in the ways in which it represses the allographic nature of anthologising. By minimising the authority of his own participation in the anthology, Ross enables the works to defy the closure of the title and instead refute any suggestion that the text offers 'a neatly tied-up ending.'[105] The resistance to closure performed by *Closure* has a particular significance for the canonising and narrativising of black Britain.

Chapter five explores single-authored collections published in the twenty-first century. The choice to concentrate on fiction of the present moment is deliberate here, in order to close

[104] Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 4.
[105] Jacob Ross, 'A Note From the Editor', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2015), pp. 9-12 (p. 11).

the thesis on a contemporary note which is directed towards the future of the field. With a dialogue currently taking place in the public sphere which problematises the white culture of metropolitan publishing, a good deal of the potential for alterity through the short form has taken place in the twenty-first century. It is essential to undertake this study of twenty-first century collections because of the recent changes in published work in the field outlined above. Thus, chapter five takes a broad look at the single-authored collections by contemporary writers Irenosen Okojie, Leone Ross, Bolu Babalola, and Zadie Smith, as well as reference to the collections of Merle Collins and Jackie Kay. I read across these collections in order to trace patterns between them, finding that they share in their tendency to at once recall and undermine the characteristics of realism. The chapter argues that these texts employ antirealist techniques with the effect of challenging the limits of the realism for narrating the realities of black Britain. Where realism is often believed to minimise awareness of the construction of text, contemporary black British short story collections instead celebrate the principles of storytelling, creative properties, and the manufacture of worlds distinct from reality. Chapter five demonstrates the future orientation of black British short stories published in single-authored collections. Resultingly, the General Conclusion and Coda take the place of a second chapter in this section. This is because these sections extend the exploration undertaken in chapter five of future orientation and the potential for narrative alterity in black British literature stimulated by the activities of short story writing and publishing. To close the thesis, therefore, I suggest that the narrative principles of the short story offer a means of productively interrupting and challenging the linear nature of narrativising and historicising black Britain.

CHAPTER ONE

Periodical Publishing: Anglophone Caribbean Influences on the Black British Short Story

Short fiction has long been published in periodicals in various locations around the world. I found that black British short stories are no exception, during my archival research at the George Padmore Institute (GPI). The GPI is an organisation set up in 1991 in connection with Britain's first black publisher and bookshop, New Beacon Books. Beginning my research in the archive was a deliberate methodological choice, the material housed in this space being a potential exploratory avenue into alternative publishing circuits for the black British short story. The GPI is an invaluable educational and cultural resource, housing various materials and documents relating to the black communities of postwar Britain. This material is ordered into boxes and available for access via an online catalogue, but the GPI also has a room of yet-to-be catalogued material. This room, to which the archivist kindly allowed me full access, is filled with magazines, journals, newspapers, pamphlets, chapbooks, manuscripts – a host of texts which may contain short stories by forgotten writers or unpublished works by now-established authors. Standing in this room amongst such a volume of textual matter, able to pick up and handle a diversity of material from so many different times and places, I was struck by two overwhelming thoughts.

Firstly, the lack of arrangement or organisation of this material felt almost anarchic in contrast to the boxed-up, orderly material of the archive proper. This was a glimpse into black

British history as it presents itself in the contemporary moment to someone like me, who was not a part of that history, before its narrative has been mediated by the historiographer: a series of unordered, disconnected moments, access to which is facilitated only by the textual remnants of something otherwise intangible. I became highly alert to the significance of the role of the archivist in organising the material, and that of the researcher in making connections between (un)catalogued and (un)categorised material for retracing historical events through textual matter. Part of my role in searching for black British short stories in this room, I realised, was to organise what I found in a way that would enable me to trace linearity with as much accuracy as possible, while finding connections and patterns. My task was to review the development of a black British community through the short story in texts largely lost to the broader task of historicising black Britain. I became profoundly aware of my responsibilities as a researcher of black British writing and culture, of my ability to respond to and redirect, even if marginally, a black British canon whose parameters have been determined by a host of writers, cultural figures, researchers, and academics before me. My experience in this room at the archive encouraged me to consider the authority of the academy in shaping the field, while retracing its history through mediation between text and topic. It further encouraged me to approach this with respect for the sociopolitical realities and peoples that may be impacted by my research. This is a matter that has influenced the whole of this thesis and its arguments.

Secondly, I was struck by the ephemerality of the material before me. While a black British canon continues to be traced, contested, and reshaped, the material here spoke of a history of writing and a culture that is yet to be fully explored. Due to the networks and circuits of dissemination, research into this field and its associated canonisation is moulded by the availability of literature in accordance with the workings of the publishing industry. This cultural institution is able to make certain texts accessible and enduring. But the literature stored in this room, which circulated outside of the networks of metropolitan publishing, has

been neglected by the processes of black British canonisation because of its ephemerality. Periodicals do not acquire the same kind of endurance and are not necessarily bestowed with the same level of cultural and symbolic value as texts disseminated via the metropolitan publishing industry. At least, this is the case for black British periodicals, but less so for those of the Anglophone Caribbean region with which the development of a tradition of black British writing is closely linked.

Caribbean writers who travelled to London during the mid-twentieth century to access the metropolitan centre of publishing and its infrastructure of literary culture, such as George Lamming, Andrew Salkey, and Samuel Selvon, have come to be associated with black British writing in its postwar years. Gail Low explores the extent to which the publishing of texts by these writers and other Anglophone Caribbean authors through British presses involved a value-coding system based in exoticism. She finds that:

> The presence of a literary circle of exiled writers in London creates, ironically, a sense of a metropolitan identity that helped establish common ground between exiled Caribbean writers and the London literary establishment. The content of the Anglophone Caribbean writers was distinctive, aesthetically innovative and – significantly – also anti-colonial, yet their connections with a London literary elite, their commitment to literary excellence, and their modernist outlook made them seem different but, crucially, not *too* different […].[1]

These writers and their novels, published through British presses, came to represent the Caribbean experience in London in a specific way, one that relates to social exile. Such representation is typified as migration from the place of belonging, the Caribbean region, and into the unknown, unfamiliar territory of the metropole. This sense of exile was encouraged by the British publishers of these works and came to mark a metropolitan-Caribbean identity rather

[1] Gail Low, 'The Pleasures of Exile: Publishing Anglophone Caribbean Writing in Postwar Britain', in *Publishing the Postcolonial: Anglophone West African and Caribbean Writing in the UK 1948-1968* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 93-120 (p. 106) (original emphasis).

than one resolutely of the islands – what we would today likely classify as black British. Therefore, a creolised or hybridised identity of both text (European modernist technique met with themes of social exile) and author (Caribbean migrant marking their place in the literary culture of London) is representative of the Caribbean texts circulating via the metropolitan publishing industry during the late 1940s and 1950s. However, as is also explored by Low, a different representation of the identity of Caribbean writers and their work was created through the BBC's radio programme, 'Caribbean Voices', which ran between 1943 and 1958 and was aimed at a regional Caribbean audience,[2] rather than the metropolitan audience of British publishing.

Low offers a valuable, in-depth examination of how this programme attempted to shape a united regional Anglophone Caribbean literary culture, but via a structure that, being based in London and for much of its lifespan edited by Anglo-Irish Henry Swanzy, potentially imposed colonial interference upon the development of a Caribbean literary tradition. Hyacinth Simpson notes that 'Caribbean Voices' established critical standards and narrative conventions for short Anglophone Caribbean writing which 'conform[ed] to the familiar strictures of English literary criticism [and] influences.'[3] As Low highlights, programme editor Swanzy encouraged the representation of a 'specific West Indian weltanschauung'[4] in and through the short literatures he scouted and commissioned for broadcast. Resultingly, the metropolitan-Caribbean writers were associated with exile, but from within the bounds of the literary culture of London. Low concludes that between this and Swanzy's gatekeeping practices which favoured and fostered a portrayal of the 'local colour' of the region, 'difference and exoticism

[2] The programme did reach audiences beyond the Caribbean, in Australia, India, South and West Africa, and Canada, as Low notes (p. 97), but its aim was to create a distinct and unified Caribbean literary culture in and for the region.
[3] Hyacinth M. Simpson, 'Patterns and Periods: Oral Aesthetics and a Century of Jamaican Short Story Writing', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 12.1 (2004), 1-30 (p. 20).
[4] Henry Swanzy, quoted in Low, 'The Pleasures of Exile', p. 102.

can […] be glimpsed in the reception of West Indian writers as regional [as well as in] writers whose works were thought so special that they transcended geographical location.'[5] Most significantly for my own context of short stories in black British periodicals, though, is Low's finding that 'what signifies as "metropolitan" and "periphery" or "similar" and "different" mutated as these texts moved […] between one communication circuit and another.'[6] Metropolitan-Caribbean writers and their work were associated with social exile in Britain and to British presses and audiences, yet were connected to a European modernist aesthetic – such figures were still representative in Britain of social, cultural, and racial difference. But, through 'Caribbean Voices', Anglophone Caribbean writers were associated in the region with the development of a united West Indian identity, similarity rather than difference being traced across the archipelago. The writers and their material disseminated via these circuits overlapped with that of the Caribbean literary periodicals which circulated independently of both the British presses and 'Caribbean Voices', and sometimes in contention with the latter because of its housing in London. Due to the nature of periodical publishing, short fiction and essays by the same authors whose longer works circulated in Britain representing social exile were, across the islands, illustrative of local and regional belonging and a united political stance. Again, it is the shifting between communication circuits and publishing circumstances that determines the cultural and symbolic value of these authors and their literatures. As these periodicals have been retrospectively researched in Britain, in for example the edited volume by Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt, and Emma Smith, *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives* (2011), they have again mutated in significance in terms of how Anglophone Caribbean identity is understood in the UK.

[5] Low, 'The Pleasures of Exile', p. 120.
[6] Low, 'The Pleasures of Exile', p. 120.

What I particularly want to draw attention to, though, is how literary form in this context is connected to publishing circumstances and to the cultural and symbolic value of a text. The social exile found in the postwar longform writings of Anglophone Caribbean authors published in the metropole has come to be associated with the black British novel. Specifically, with how this form assumes the tendencies of the bildungsroman and a narrative structure that encourages a social and political growth or transformation of Britain's attitude towards its commonwealth citizens.[7] The publishing infrastructure of London meant that novels could be produced by these writers and guaranteed dissemination to a receptive, paying audience. Their circulation in Britain as longform, standalone texts, along with themes relating to and settings depicting life in Britain, shaped their association with black British writing. The short stories of Anglophone Caribbean writers, however, have frequently been explored in terms of their relationship with the periodicals that published them, in terms of the meeting of grassroots, local platforms with both colonial literary formal influence and the concurrent desire to form post- and anticolonial national identities through local and regional literatures. I am interested in where black British periodicals and their publication of short stories sit in relation to these two influences. On the one hand, their position of publication from the metropole implies some sort of connection to the interests of the British presses and the growth of a creolised black British identity and literary culture. On the other hand, they infrastructurally resemble the circuits of dissemination for Anglophone Caribbean periodicals. Furthermore, given the waves of migration of Caribbean residents to the UK in the postwar years, black British culture was influenced by the means of shaping a united regional identity offered by these platforms. Again, Low's comments on the mutation of the signifiers 'difference', 'similarity', 'metropolitan', and 'periphery' dependent on communication circuit are in effect here; what is defined as local and

[7] This is the argument of Mark Stein in *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004).

regional for black British periodicals involves the effort to shift perceptions of British identity to make it inclusive of its commonwealth citizens. To explore black British periodicals and the place of the short story in this context, I will first consider in more depth the position, role, and formal approaches of short fiction in Anglophone Caribbean periodicals. A counterpart in terms of publishing circumstances and cultural influence, the Anglophone Caribbean context provides a useful and potentially fruitful avenue for comparison which illuminates the shape and function of the short story in black British periodicals.

The Anglophone Caribbean's twentieth century literary history involves different eras of short story production and dissemination via periodicals. In the nineteenth century and into the 1920s, short fiction began to appear in newspapers, eventually culminating in the formation of influential literary magazines in the 1930s and 1940s. These periodicals founded the beginnings of an anticolonial regional narrative, which relied upon short fiction to create West Indian unity across the archipelago.[8] While local magazines such as *Bim* and *Kyk-Over-Al* continued to publish short fiction, it was, as Hyacinth Simpson explains, 'the literary anthologies of the 1960s and 1970s (published by British and American presses) that kept short fiction in the public [metropolitan] eye.'[9] However, while Caribbean short fiction was supported by publishing networks through anthologised collections for the metropolitan reader, publication through literary magazines endured with new iterations of a national narrative. Outlets such as Jamaica's *Focus* and CAM's *Savacou* continued to engage the short story's formal properties with the region's political realities, this time with a focus on diasporic as well as regional unity. Together, the publication of multiple stories through various outlets and across differing temporal and national contexts establishes a tradition of literary dissemination which enhances regional unity and identity formation. A collectivity is traceable even while

[8] Reinhard W. Sander, 'The Thirties and Forties', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 38-49.
[9] Simpson, 'Patterns and Periods', p. 21.

each articulation of the concept 'nation' may have maintained differing local sociopolitical objectives or inferences. As such, a sense of unity *across* difference rather than an attempt to reconcile such difference is significant to Anglophone Caribbean periodicals.

In terms of the significance of form that I want to stress in this chapter, the building of unity across difference has come to be conceived of as a formal device of Anglophone Caribbean short fiction published in periodicals. In 'Cross-Cultural Readings of the Caribbean Short Story', Sandra Courtman argues that 'the genre of the Caribbean short story has consistently engendered aesthetic experimentation as a form of resistance.'[10] The aesthetic qualities of the Caribbean short story as a genre involve the persistent tracing of themes such as fragmentation, migration, settlement, and internal representations of external tension between 'colonial inheritance' and 'nationalist agendas'.[11] Courtman's contention here implies that the genre is intimately connected to the form's ability to 'induce the reader to question notions of "truth" and "reality" generated by patriarchy, successive colonisers and political regimes.'[12] For Courtman, the Caribbean story's formal properties result from a focus on the delivery of 'a type of transcultural narrative pleasure (to readers from very different constituencies) [via] reworking the specific content of a colonial past and a creolised present in a very compact way.'[13] Here, Courtman relates the 'compact' form of the short story with a capacity to bear witness to a shared colonial past and, at the same time, to write a new, local and anticolonial identity into existence. Through the short story in periodicals, Caribbean writers were able to 'exploit the accessibility and immediate pleasure of the short story to

[10] Sandra Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural Readings of the Caribbean Short Story', in *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt, and Emma Smith (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2011), pp. 251-266 (p. 264).
[11] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural', pp. 252-253.
[12] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural', p. 264.
[13] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural', pp. 251-252.

enable a transnational readership to understand the history and politics that have shaped their modern societies.'[14]

Such a suggestion connects the literary properties of Caribbean short fiction, its very form and the themes occupied by it, with the external sociopolitical realities of the (post)colonised region from which the form is produced. Lucy Evans, in her introduction to *The Caribbean Short Story,* offers a similar assessment of the unification of the poetics of the genre and its local/regional publishing environment. She suggests that its formal properties emerged from a 'socioeconomic background [in which] communal experiences are emphasised despite the region's geographical and political fracture,' meaning that 'the question of community is often a central issue, examined alongside themes of alienation and cultural dislocation.'[15] The means of distribution and circulation for Caribbean short fiction and its socioeconomic environment(s) of production are crucial for the meeting of form and context. This is because the brevity of the short story enables its appearance within regionally-based periodicals beyond metropolitan literary publishing networks. Similarly, Courtman suggests that mid-century magazine dissemination encouraged the genre's 'cultural crossings', enabling the form to both respond to and re-enact 'the process and experience of creolisation to bridge cultural boundaries for a wide readership', a readership within and beyond the Caribbean.[16]

The concentration on a compact form concurrently able to facilitate communal unity for the Caribbean region and accessibility for wider reaching (metropolitan) demographics is also suggestive of the genre's creolisation of established, or western, literary forms with new matter. Periodical literary and publishing networks also emerged at a significant moment in Caribbean history. As Courtman notes, 'on the cusp of independence,' writers oscillated

[14] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural', p. 252.
[15] Lucy Evans, 'Introduction', in *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt, and Emma Smith (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2011), pp. 11-25 (p. 19).
[16] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural', p. 252.

between the influence of the western canon and the establishment of 'emerging indigenous formations'; such formations were to be 'judged by traditional critical standards.'[17] During this period, the establishment of a cross-regional literary tradition did not only respond to the circulation of short fiction between Caribbean islands, but was also dependent upon a shared colonial past and history of western education and imperial/colonial ideology within the region (particularly in terms of a newly available secondary education for a small middle class).[18] Leah Rosenberg perceives that while the short story became intertwined with the politics of the region, 'writers felt obliged to fashion a distinctly Caribbean literature', but 'depended in their efforts on European intellectual traditions that defined the Caribbean as uncivilized and primitive, the antithesis of a modern nation.'[19] Employing the local press as an avenue for the dissemination of literature and sociopolitical rhetoric, these efforts to establish nationalism 'explicitly took sides in the social, political, and cultural debates that shaped the transition from colonial rule to self-government and independence.'[20] This means that shared history of colonisation, particularly through English education, is built into the form and shape of Caribbean short stories. Here, it is evident that the mutation of concepts such as 'metropolitan' and 'periphery' is not only prevalent in the interpretation of these texts, but is also influential for how they were formed.

The brief overview offered here of the position and formal properties of Caribbean writing in both local/regional periodicals and metropolitan publishing networks demonstrates the ways in which this writing has been studied in terms of its specific publishing routes. Postwar black British writing is closely connected to these Caribbean contexts, especially

[17] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural', p. 254.
[18] Raymond Ramcharitar, 'The *Beacon* Short Story and the Colonial Imaginary', in *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt, and Emma Smith (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2011), pp. 59-76 (p. 61).
[19] Leah Reade Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 5.
[20] Rosenberg, *Nationalism*, p. 7.

considering the way that English education and colonisation undergirds the formation of the Anglophone Caribbean short story. The form itself echoes the kind of hybrid nature of 'black British'. However, the locality of the publishing circumstances of black periodicals in Britain is yet to be fully explored. Research into the black press and its potential to shape and form a black British identity has been undertaken by Gail Low in '"Shaping Connections": From West Indian to Black British' (2006), for example, and Ionie Benjamin in *The Black Press in Britain* (1995). However, the place of the short story in black British periodicals, and whether or not the black British equivalent of the Anglophone Caribbean context shares or echoes the qualities and characteristics of this model, is still to be surveyed and requires investigation. Therefore, my own work here begins the task of drawing academic attention to such literature, exploring the periodical black British short story in the context of black British canonisation and identity formation.

The majority of the periodicals containing short fiction housed at the GPI range somewhere between the immediate postwar years and into the 1990s. This timeframe encapsulates the progression of community building from a diversity of racial and cultural groupings in Britain, to the establishment of a united black community firmly of Britain. Very few of the periodicals available at the GPI continue into the twenty-first century, meaning that the material only minimally overlaps with the introduction of black British studies in the academy and of black Britain in public discourse. Correspondingly, the problematising and breaking down of the collective, political 'black' that occurred in this era is not a prevalent feature of these texts. This means that what takes place in these periodicals – the transformation 'from West Indian [and African and South Asian] to black British', to borrow Low's phrasing – echoes the building of a united regional community across the islands through Anglophone Caribbean periodicals. Such texts transformed multiple specificities and localities into a distinct regional identity that traverses cultural difference and similarity. Something similar

occurred in the black British periodicals of the second half of the twentieth century. Where 'regional' in the former context signifies the archipelago, in the latter, the building of community across difference refers to Britain and its diasporic connections. Significantly, short fiction is likewise utilised by black British periodicals to shape national identity through literary culture; it is bestowed a cultural power that relates to the socioeconomic circumstances of publication.

In *Staunch,* for example, which ran in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the editor divides the magazine's material into two sections: 'the community' and 'the arts'. The magazine encourages the two topics, while separated by format, to be read in reference to one another, so that the 'guidance', 'leadership', and 'organisation' of a community of 'every black person […] however outrageous your views may be' is directed by the 'black [art] 'scene' which is currently 'empty except for dance and song!'[21] In the first volume of *Staunch* , the editor writes in the 'community' section of how the 'black community has no mass produced newspapers'. Resultingly, the black writer in Britain must submit their work to publishing houses in which 'Whitefolk set the standard'.[22] Black British newspapers and periodicals which circumvent this standard of 'Whitefolk' through the grassroots publication of creative writing are, according to the writer of the article, the means by which black writers may begin to set their own standards. It is through 'creative writing [that artists] can imagine the anguish of the earlier black writers before they saw their books in print',[23] a remark that recalls the publishing circumstances of Anglophone Caribbean writers between local periodicals and British presses. In fact, this remark goes beyond recalling this context, and sees a direct connection between the socioeconomic positioning of publication (grassroots in opposition to 'books in print'), setting

[21] Don Kinch, 'Staunch Talking', in *Staunch,* July 1978, uncatalogued material at the GPI, p. 3.
[22] Joe Blackmann, 'The Black Writer in the UK', in *Staunch,* July 1978, uncatalogued material at the GPI, p. 5&9.
[23] Blackmann, 'The Black Writer in the UK', p. 9.

the standards of community (this article being newsworthy for the 'community' section), and the capacity of creative writing to engage with and reflect (upon) the conditions of both matters.

A short story by the author of the article, Joe Blackmann, is also included in this volume of the magazine. The story echoes the way that the periodical Anglophone Caribbean short story strives to overturn convention in order to develop an anticolonial political stance, whilst bearing the weight of a traumatic colonial past. Blackmann's story, 'The Lady's Man', occupies the short form in a way that writes the stereotypes of black men's sexual behaviour and supposed promiscuity as a metaphor for prejudices which need to be overturned to make way for a radical, anticapitalist, anticolonial future. This metaphor involves the possible double meaning of 'Race Relations', both in the sense of social and political institutional interactions between black and white communities in Britain at the time, and as sexual intercourse between members of different racial or ethnic groupings. The story embodies convention in order to subvert assumptions and expectations at the last moment, by blurring these two meanings of race relations so they appear to be indistinguishable from one another. The sexual act which closes the story, between the man and a woman whose partner is 'President of […] the society on which capitalism revolves', is then realised as a radicalising moment. The woman is freed from the capitalist ties of her partner and becomes a 'receptive body' who understands the colonial legacy held by Britain's 'Race Relations'.[24] The meeting of sociopolitical rhetoric and the formal approaches of the short fiction chosen for inclusion in the magazine is demonstrated by reading between Blackmann's two texts in *Staunch*. In turn, this is indicative of how the Anglophone Caribbean model of periodical publishing influenced the black British counterpart.

[24] Joe Blackmann, 'The Lady's Man', in *Staunch,* July 1978, uncatalogued material at the GPI, p. 13.

Other examples of black British periodicals from the uncatalogued material at the archive include *Shakti*. The magazine ran in the 1980s and shed light on the 'bookish discrimination' faced by black communities in metropolitan publishing and library environments.[25] *Third World Women's News*, which also circulated in the 1980s, published short fiction by black and South Asian women writers such as Alice Walker and Budi Rusindah. This magazine also featured essays by writers such as Buchi Emecheta, who started her writing career via the publication of her short fiction in the *New Statesman*. The short stories published here later became her first novel, *In the Ditch* (1972). From the 1980s and towards the end of the twentieth century, *Artrage*, an 'inter-cultural art magazine', published short fiction by little-known writers including Ganeswar Mishra, Ryhaan Shah, Gene Alcantara, Fenwick J. Francis, and Aamer Hussein, as well as now established writers such as Jacob Ross, Fred D'Aguiar, Derek Walcott, Edward Kamau Braithwaite, Olive Senior, Saadat Hasan Manto, and editor, E. A. Markham. Unlike the other periodicals, *Artrage* was particularly interested in engaging black British youth in literary culture, its inclusion of black art a means of involving this youth in the sociopolitical realities of the metropole.

This chapter, however, is selective in its approach to black British periodicals and short story publishing, choosing to explore a single case study which can be understood as indicative of the broader context of periodical publishing, while remaining alert to the singularity and specificity of this example. Such a methodological choice involves the space restraints of a thesis that strives to consider multiple avenues of publication for black British short stories; in a project of this size with its scope and aim, there is not space to do justice to the full range of black British periodicals housed at the GPI. A case study of one magazine allows deep and close analysis to be achieved through careful exploration, providing a specific example that

[25] Amarjit Chandan, 'Editorial', in *Shakti*, October-November 1982, uncatalogued material at the GPI, p. 3.

can be used as a starting point into this realm of periodical publishing for black British short stories. However, the choice of example, which is *Race Today* (1969-1988), is also deliberate, because of where the magazine sits between two stages of black British community orientation. *Race Today*, with its concern for how the (post)colonised nations of imperial legacy shape the future of postwar Britain, interrogates the concept of the nation and encourages unity between a revolutionised Britain and its transnational, transcultural connections beyond its geographical borders. This moulding of cross-'regional' unity through the magazine, assisted by the incorporation and publication of short stories, draws upon traditions of literary production and distribution from the Anglophone Caribbean, ultimately incorporating these traditions into the spaces of black British writing. Furthermore, *Race Today* can be considered as an illustrative example of this broader context because of its interstitial position between two stages of community building. The magazine addresses both the diasporic communities in Britain and a black community of Britain, as I explore in more detail below. *Race Today* is overt in its depiction of the central role literature and textual matter have in identity and community formation:

> It is impossible to over-estimate the influence that books have on the lives of us all. They inform us when we learn at school, as they inform the teachers who teach us and the lecturers who taught them. They inform the journalists who prepare the television programmes we watch at night, or the newspaper we read in the morning. They are the reference source for politicians and pundits, for leaders and those who would overthrow. Between their covers are stored much of our knowledge, our culture and our very ways of thinking.[26]

Principally, *Race Today*'s attitude towards literature's role in politics enables fruitful connections to be traced between the formal approaches of the short stories published by the magazine and the frame's political agenda. I am particularly interested in how the short stories

[26] Race Today Collective, 'Books, Libraries, and Racism', in *Race Today*, October-November 1973 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/53), pp. 301-308 (p. 301).

distributed by *Race Today* demonstrate similar formal approaches to those in Anglophone Caribbean periodicals – both engage the 'compact' short form to emphasise place over plot.

Race Today began as the mouthpiece of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) in Britain in 1969. Under the IRR, it largely reported on news relating to communities of migrants in Britain for the attention of the public sphere, though selectively. It was published from London and, for its first four years, with the intention of informing the capital's residents about local, national, and international news relating to 'race relations' within (post)colonial nations and in Britain. In *Dwelling Places* (2003), James Procter discusses the liberal stance of the magazine under its 'white-run' editorial team. Procter offers an example of its attitudes by exploring the proposed 'village in the sky' housing plans for the black community in Golborne in 1971.[27] For Procter,

> The pastoral, "village" rhetoric of this redevelopment plan hides an architecture of containment in which the local black community is in effect removed from the streets. With its own internal economy of shops and services and its walkway, vertically segregated from the pavements below, there is an advocation of enclosure, confinement and ghettoisation in this "village in the sky".[28]

While Procter views the housing plan to be an indication of the 'liberal desire to "improve" locality [which] conceals a dangerous racial politics [through] the worrying tactics of erasure, distillation and purification', he also determines that the plan was 'praised' by *Race Today*'s coverage.[29] Procter's assessment here summarises the magazine's political leaning under the IRR, whereby the state-supported authority of its exposure is distanced from the subjects of its news.

[27] James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 84.
[28] Procter, *Dwelling Places,* p. 84.
[29] Procter, *Dwelling Places,* p. 84.

The Ealing and Reading edition of the 'Regional Reports' series which opens its second issue (May 1969), for example, creates unity between 'West Indian' and 'Asian' communities in Ealing, while maintaining a sense of 'well-meaning paternalism'[30] through its remote perspective. These communities are centralised through the article as the reporter describes the similar hostility of the police force towards the two groups under the subtitle 'Immigrants and the Police.' As such, the report assumes the task of 'discuss[ing] important undercurrents of feeling among immigrants in the area' by aligning the harassment of the police towards Ealing's West Indian residents with the interests of its 'several thousand Asian immigrants.'[31] The perceived social and representational needs of these two groupings are therefore established through the report and are united under the wider alliance of 'immigrant communities.' Significantly, though, this alliance is established on the basis that these groups collectively are somewhat unfamiliar to and distanced from both the reader and writer; the report attempts to inform and educate on the social environments of such communities from a dissociated viewpoint.

For example, when discussing some of Ealing's West Indian residents and their interactions with the police, the reporter informs readers that '*they* felt that justice had probably not been done […]; *they* protested strongly against the practice whereby the police themselves investigate complaints made about them.'[32] While the use of the pronoun 'they' can be understood as suited to the tone of news-reporting, it undercuts the report's previously established aim of outlining the 'undercurrents of feeling among immigrants', due to the fact any first-hand accounts responding to the incident are omitted in favour of an observant and

[30] Alexander Kirby, 'Editorial', in *Race Today*, March 1973 (GPI GB 2904 JOU/1/1/46), p. 67.
[31] Anonymous, 'Britain Regional Reports: Ealing and Reading', in *Race Today*, May 1969 (GPI GB 2904 JOU/1/1/1), pp. 54-59.
[32] 'Ealing and Reading', p. 54 (my emphasis).

distanced perspective. Instead, at its close, the report offers the response of a Southall and Hanwell MP, stating that:

> I am always protecting coloured people against generalisations. I think it is equally important that you do not generalise as far as the police are concerned. I would suggest that some are worse than others in this regard, in the same way as some are worse than others in all sections of the community.[33]

While the reporter does not state their reason for offering this quote here, they name the MP and situate him within the sociopolitical framework of the nation by illuminating his positioning in terms of Britain's political system. The voice(s) of the 'immigrant communities' under discussion, however, are not included in the report and are only described as 'representatives'.[34] They therefore remain, in the context of the article, anonymous and detached from the geographical space of Britain and its sociopolitical structures. The textual space given to a voice supporting the police force compared with the absence of such a space provided for members of the West Indian community – or South Asian citizens – illuminates the liberalism of the IRR's *Race Today*. The regional reports series displays consistency with Procter's reading of the magazine. The IRR's *Race Today* arguably assisted the establishment of what Procter describes as 'the black community's sense of invisibility and unbelonging within the wider national community' during the early 1970s.[35] When the reporter presents a sense of anonymity for these groups and portrays a perceived detachment of them from Britain's sociopolitical frameworks, the report assumes a narrative for Britain's black communities which resembles the kind of the 'architecture of containment'[36] that Procter describes. In terms of media representation, the IRR's *Race Today* demonstrates a kind of removal of migrant news reportage to a separate outlet away from the mainstream press. It

[33] Syd Bidwell, quoted in 'Ealing and Reading', pp. 54- 56.
[34] 'Ealing and Reading', p. 55.
[35] Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 79.
[36] Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 84.

provides a space for such reportage and representation which is distanced from the needs of the wider populace of the nation. Like Procter's image of the 'village in the sky', *Race Today* here could be described as separated from the public symbolism of the nation provided by news media, similarly 'refin[ing]' the local landscape.'[37] The textual politics of public spaces such as the street highlighted by Procter, therefore, can be transferred across to the more abstract public space of newsmedia representation and the sociopolitical role afforded to it.

The report itself does recognise its own liberalism through the mediatory role that it assumes, stating that 'both parties need to be aware that strong feelings exist and there must be a readiness to work through these to greater understanding.'[38] The liberal stance of the IRR's *Race Today* which this report embodies caused internal conflicts within the magazine's production team. In 1973, editorship was taken over by the Race Today Collective (initially named Towards Racial Justice). Under its new editorship, the magazine became a self-funded grassroots platform for the discussion of radical politics and the representation and visibility of black arts and literature in Britain. With the Collective as its editorial team, the magazine was run and influenced by several of Britain's radical writers, activists, and cultural figures, including Darcus Howe, Farrukh Dhondy, Leila Hassan, and Linton Kwesi Johnson. Its social engagement and political leaning were established and reiterated throughout its editorials and reportage. These were reinforced through the magazine's inclusion of stories to imagine a new anticolonial national narrative. The reclamation of this newsmedia platform for the articulation of radical politics echoes the way in which early twentieth century Caribbean stories began to permeate marginal avenues of the local press.

In the editorial for the February 1978 issue, for example, the remote and liberal perspective of the magazine previously set forth is replaced by an active and applied approach.

[37] Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 85.
[38] 'Ealing and Reading', p. 55.

The editorial, entitled 'The Police and Carnival '78' can be read as an indication of the magazine's changing perspective; it echoes themes highlighted by the earlier reports series. Similarly, it documents interactions between the police and Britain's black communities, this time reporting on the 'hostility to *our* festival, displayed by British authorities.'[39] The change of pronoun to 'our' immediately connects the voice of the editorial with the communities it speaks for and to. This sense of community is continued throughout the editorial, which closes with:

> It is now time for the home secretary to give a loud and clear reply to the National Front – that, come what may, Carnival will be established as a permanent, artistic and cultural institution in Britain. *That reply is certainly ours.*[40]

The editorial's strong assertion of the magazine's sociopolitical stance here (and throughout the Collective's editorials) demonstrates a rejection of the expository platform for black communities offered by the IRR's *Race Today*. The platform is productively appropriated in order to achieve the networks of production, dissemination, and rotation already acquired by the magazine.

The assertion of *Race Today* as 'our' representational space functions in two ways in terms of the materiality of the magazine and its circulation. The first function relates to the effect of collective representation provided by the black press in Britain during the latter half of the twentieth century. The black press was able to inform and shape the identity of a black British community due to the relationship between the individual reader and the 'voice' of the community offered through newspapers and magazines. This is described by Gail Low and Marina Prentoulis. Investigating the formation of a united West Indian community in Britain over the 1950s and 1960s, Low argues that Claudia Jones's *West Indian Gazette* assisted the

[39] Race Today Collective, 'Editorial: The Police and Carnival '78', in *Race Today* February 1978 (GPI GB 2904 JOU/1/1/98), p. 2 (my emphasis).
[40] Race Today Collective, 'Editorial: The Police and Carnival '78', p. 2 (my emphasis).

'cultivation of a personal voice'[41] for this community, as it took on both a constitutive and representational role. She explains that:

> Through a combination of Jones's editorials, the paper's cultivation of a personal relationship with its readers and its personal voice, one can examine the discursive process by which the paper created an audience and readership that was predicated on the recognition of a specific West Indian identity. The cultivation of a personal voice is deliberate stylistically, the readers are addressed directly, using either third-person inclusive "we", or the second-person interpellative, "you".[42]

Applied to the context of *Race Today*, the magazine's switch from the distanced 'they' to the inclusive and personal 'our' can be conceived of as a similar formal choice of representation to encourage such recognition of shared identity – for a black British rather than West Indian space of identity formation. Furthermore, the transformation of perspective for the magazine from distanced reportage to active and personal engagement also creates unity between *Race Today* itself, its disparate subjects of news, and its readership. In this way, its abstract representation is connected to a more paratextually grounded (albeit still implied rather than tangible) readership.

Low further suggests that the *Gazette*'s personal engagement with its readership 'reflected an increasing communal solidarity,' affording the magazine the role of 'the progressive voice of its readers.'[43] Significantly, though, Low also notes that through this process, readers themselves 'are constructed as signifiers of political representation.'[44] The same can be said of *Race Today*'s readers, as the editorial's use of the inclusive 'our' does not just signify the magazine's own active involvement, but also embraces the reader and influences (with intended effect or not) conceptions of identity beyond the magazine. This resonates with Prentoulis's investigation into the relationship between the black press and its

[41] Gail Low, 'Shaping Connections: From West Indian to Black British', in *A Black British Canon?*, eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 168-188 (p. 176).
[42] Low, 'Shaping Connections', p. 176.
[43] Low, 'Shaping Connections', p. 174; p. 177.
[44] Low, Shaping Connections', p. 177.

readers, and her suggestion that 'media representations produce the framework of social cognition regarding black identities.'[45] Prentoulis explores the impact of *The Voice* and *New Nation* on the assertion of a black British identity during the 1990s. The study traces the ways in which the black press's social and discursive positioning, in relation to the mainstream media, pre-empts its symbolic function as a representative vehicle of a united black community. The black press is able to claim a space for this community within the wider context of British sociopolitical frameworks:

> As the key site for creating, negotiating and redefining identities, media representations construct who "we" are and who "we" are not, thus enabling the political and cultural hegemony of the dominant groups and the counter-hegemonic inspirations of the dominated ones.[46]

Prentoulis also suggests that because of this, ethnic minority media 'do not simply reflect an already constituted, homogenous and fixed community. Instead, in their representational claims, they construct the "black community" and rearticulate black British identities, albeit in different ways.'[47] This positioning is cognitive, as it responds to social realities resulting from the lack of representation for the black community from the mainstream. Yet, it is also constitutive as it encourages a unification of this community by acting as its representative voice.[48] As such, the reader's assumed social position moulds and directs what is incorporated into the space of the ethnic minority press, while the press itself also directs the interests of its implied reader.

Race Today occupies the position of what Prentoulis calls 'ethnic minority media'; its primary function of delivering expository prose and a news-based, Marxist-leaning rhetoric for the 'black communities of Britain' associates the magazine with the ways in which 'the diverse,

[45]Marina Prentoulis, 'The Construction of the Black British Community in *The Voice* and the *New Nation*', *Journalism*, 13.6 (2011), 731-749 (p. 734).
[46] Prentoulis, 'Construction of Community', p. 732.
[47] Prentoulis, 'Construction of Community', p. 732.
[48] Prentoulis, 'The Construction of Community', pp. 734-736.

multiple and fluid positions around British black[49] identities are negotiated and constructed within the minority media.'[50] Prentoulis differentiates ethnic minority from 'diasporic' media based on the notion that the latter implies 'the special dispersion involving both the old "homeland" and the new home/host culture, if not multiple global locations in which diasporic groups find themselves'. The former, comparatively, constitutes the process of 'identity re-formation within the new national cultural space.'[51] Prentoulis's investigation is based on the black press during the 1990s; *Race Today* sits interstitially between these two periods of black British community building – a West Indian community in Britain as represented by the *Gazette* and a black community of Britain as signalled by *The Voice* and *New Nation*. *Race Today* is concerned both with news from (post)colonised nations and the metropole. Its consistent focus on the formation and development of Britain's young, second-generation black communities under the editorship of the Collective, and its reclamation of national belonging within the metropole, associates the platform with the kind of shaping of national cultural space highlighted by Prentoulis. Ethnic minority media seems more suitable for the magazine based on its undercurrent development of national belonging, but *Race Today* is also diasporic in the ties it traces between Britain and the postcolonies to shape British ideology.

Prentoulis, therefore, establishes the network of connections involved in the black press between reacting to sociopolitical realities within the public sphere and the effect of representing these realities in response to and/or contestation against them. While Prentoulis discusses black newspapers from the 1990s, the connections she makes between the marginalised black press and the formation and iteration of community within the terms of British sociopolitical frameworks is useful for understanding the context of *Race Today*'s

[49] Note that Prentoulis is referring to African-Caribbean communities under the label 'black' in agreement with later usages of the term. However, her depiction of the role of the ethnic minority media in Britain is not restricted to these communities.
[50] Prentoulis, 'The Construction of Community', p. 732.
[51] Prentoulis, 'The Construction of Community', p. 732.

materiality, and more specifically, for conceiving of the presence of its readers in the magazine, as well as the involvement of its literary and fictional representations. Discussing the relationship between the press and its reader, Prentoulis argues that:

> this discursive positioning [of a marginal newsmedia platform] is important in understanding the place from which we advance claims, demands and so on. Effectively, we are dealing with the dialectics between texts, production/consumption processes and wider socio-political debate. [52]

As such, Prentoulis connects the content of the black press – in terms of the perspective, stance, and representation of its community – with the context of the sociopolitical and economic frameworks which exist beyond the material frame of the magazine. The black press is able to provide a voice for its readership because of its marginal or minority position and immediate connection to contexts beyond its discursive frame. This relates to the second point of significance in *Race Today*'s statement – '*That reply is certainly ours*'. The circulation, the dialectic and dialogic nature of the magazine in terms of the back and forth from text to reader on a monthly basis, shapes the position of the receptive interlocutor in the communication embodied by the magazine.

'That reply is certainly ours' connects *Race Today* with its reader on a material level. The barrier between 'us' (magazine) and 'you' (reader) is broken down via the construction of a responsive and enduring dialogue between editor, reportage and readers, provided by the magazine's patterns of circulation. When the Collective was established as the editorial team in 1973, *Race Today*'s first issue under this new leadership declared a request for readers to 'tell us of needs which you think should be met', ensuring that the magazine would be 'responsive' to its readers.[53] It then began publishing retorts and opinions from its readers in both a 'Letters' section on the inverse of its cover(s), and through a 'Backlash' section.

[52] Prentoulis, 'The Construction of Community', p. 734.
[53] Race Today Collective, 'Editorial', in *Race Today* March 1973 (GPI GB 2904 JOU/1/1/46), p. 67.

'Backlash' 'invites our readers to participate in discussion on the feature article of each issue'.[54] The input was often returned by the magazine itself, usually in published form below the reader comment, but also in terms of the direction and perspective of the magazine's content. The short stories included in the *Review* can be understood as one of the means by which *Race Today* attempted to engage its reader in an intimate dialogue, due to the emotional significance the magazine bestows upon the activities of creativity.

Race Today is concerned with reporting on the worth and accessibility of black art, particularly with the aim of creating and fostering a literary culture and publishing network for black writers in Britain. 'We have merely skimmed the surface of [a] creative depth, which spans generations of the black experience', the Collective states of its own reportage. The editor continues,

> [w]ithout publishers and distributors, all these [creative productions] remain the personal property of the artist, and the whole community is deprived of those moods and moments of the past and present, captured by our artists.
>
> There is more to it. We are given a sense of self with increasing revelations from our past and from reflections of our present, which connect generations. […] All these are formidable constituents in consolidating and generating the political power we have at hand here in Britain.[55]

In the *Race Today Review*, the special edition journal published yearly towards the end of *Race Today*'s lifespan, the collective takes this fostering of an artistic and literary culture for black artists and writers in Britain a step further. *The Review* offers a space for the publication and distribution for such creativity. The *Review* seeks to directly connect creative art with politics, text with context, by incorporating such art into its own pages. In his introduction to its first edition, Darcus Howe positions the *Review* as a platform for the dissemination of the 'creative

[54] Race Today January 1974 (GPI GB 2904 JOU/1/1/55).
[55] Race Today Collective, 'Editorial: Support the Bookshop Joint Action', in *Race Today*, January 1978 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/97), p. 3.

activities which flow from the terrain on which we do political battle.'[56] He indicates that creativity is a means to actively engage the reader with sociopolitical realities. Rather than allowing them to passively read of these realities, the art included in the magazine induces in the reader the 'grief we di people dem a feel', in such diverse contexts as: the Northern Ireland Conflict; a 'Guyanese bureaucracy which steamrolls its weary way over the mass of Guyanese workers and peasants'; the lives of black American women and workers in Jamaica and Trinidad; the 'debilitating poverty of Asian workers and peasants'; and the 'pains of exile' in Britain. For Howe, and *Race Today*'s rhetoric, all of these situations stem from the same 'suffocating and increasingly murderous' condition of capitalism and (neo)colonialism. Subsequently, all must be brought to the attention of the 'new society in the making' which will radicalise Britain through raising awareness of these political realities of colonial legacy.[57] In this way, *Race Today* creates a relationship with its reader based on the emotional response creativity can induce for the interpretation of sociopolitical realities.

Race Today finds that a community must be fostered and united against the continuing oppressive forces of British colonialism and its imperial ideology. Across difference, a commonality is embraced through a shared history of colonisation – from Ireland to the Americas. The realities of such colonisation must be pressed home to the public of Britain, a nation which is deeply, violently involved in this history and its legacy, whether or not this reality is at the forefront of the national ideology in the late twentieth century. *Race Today*, then, encourages the formation of a radical, anticolonial community in Britain influenced by the lives of black, colonised, or oppressed peoples both in the (post)colonies and in the metropole – a community united through a shared colonial past and political stance, but inclusive of difference. At the heart of this community building is the belief that the creative

[56] Darcus Howe, 'Introduction', in *Race Today Review*, December 1980/January 1981 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/111), p. 51.
[57] Howe, 'Introduction', p. 51.

arts can and will make this political stance a matter of personal concern, because of how they invoke in the reader deeply emotional responses. Stories evoke empathy for the 'grief we di people dem a feel' – or for the oppression of the working-classes at home and overseas. The meeting of political content with personal engagement through literature and artistic form echoes the infrastructure and intent of the periodical publishing of short stories in the Anglophone Caribbean. Likewise, *Race Today* intends to create a new, anticolonial national narrative that fosters unity between diverse, localised peoples and locations through the inclusion of literatures which can bestow upon what may otherwise be unfamiliar or complicated political matters a sense of accessibility and understanding. *Race Today* fosters a new national narrative for the metropole as a postcolonial nation and an ideology alert to knowledge of Britain's continuing involvement in (post)colonial realities. As outlined above, Sandra Courtman argues that the Caribbean periodical short story was able to 'exploit the accessibility and immediate pleasure of the short story to enable a transnational readership to understand the history and politics that have shaped their modern societies.' This ability is enhanced by the 'creative response to a fight over form, language and culture' aroused by the personal experience of political realities.[58] The 'fight', an emotional response to the sociopolitical, plays out in creative work through its capacity to invoke pathos, 'love', and 'longing'.[59] In the periodical Caribbean context, the nurturing of a regional literary culture made the anticolonial rhetoric of the periodicals a personal matter, a means of bridging difference. In *Race Today*'s appeal for creative work to engage readers in a more intimate dialogue with the magazine, it can be described as echoing the Caribbean context.

In terms of the specific role of the short story in *Race Today*, of how the form in its periodical publishing circumstances can uniquely bridge the political and the personal with the

[58] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural Readings', p. 254.
[59] Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural Readings', p. 254; p. 264.

effect of also bridging difference for the establishment of a united community, it is useful to consider an example from the *Review*. Particular attention is paid here to the ways in which this story interacts with its publishing circumstances, compared with the author's experiences in the networks of metropolitan publishing. Correspondingly, it is also useful to consider the ways in which the signifiers 'difference', 'similarity', 'metropolitan', and 'periphery' function in this communication circuit. Janice Shinebourne's, 'Chuni', published in the same edition of the *Race Today Review* as the introduction by Darcus Howe which I have quoted above, is described by the editor as:

> written by the little known Guyanese writer, Janice Shinebourne. Chuni is a worker on the campus of the University of Guyana who is driven to the most cruel and destructive acts against his comrades. It is a destructive urge which is encouraged and fostered by a Guyanese bureaucracy which steamrolls its weary way over the mass of Guyanese workers and peasants.[60]

Here, Howe draws attention to the main themes of 'Chuni'. He later connects these political themes of this story with the magazine's framing desire to use its creative fiction to show a commonality between this context and those of other 'ordinary working people to their suffocating and murderous opposites.'[61] The themes of 'Chuni' mainly revolve around the bureaucracy of the university in Guyana, a symbol of the new, postcolonial nation as well as of the location's lasting, structural colonial inheritance. This institution is focalised through the perspective of the mass population of the location, the Guyanese workers and 'peasants' for whom, the story implies, the university's educational programme will have little impact beyond ensuring that they are exiled from the interests of the new middle-class occupying the university. But Shinebourne's formal approach to short story writing is the means by which these Guyanese-specific themes transcend their locality.

[60] Howe, 'Introduction', p. 51.
[61] Howe, 'Introduction', p. 51.

'Chuni' sustains a tension between the university and the workers through narrating the 'destructive acts' of the central character upon the institution. Such tension creates a profound sense of anger and injustice at the potential neocolonial interference of the university for the class-structure of Guyana, an injustice which reaches beyond the confines of this particular story and echoes throughout the magazine. Chuni is a cleaner at the university who is dubbed the 'campus crank'.[62] As focaliser, Chuni's position as worker enables the structure of the university to be centred by the story – structure both in terms of the architecture and landscape of the building as well as its structural socioracial, class-based network that operates inside the university – through its labouring workers, students, and academic staff. The opening establishes the importance of this setting to the story through a lengthy description of the physicality of the architecture from alternating angles – the architecture is emblematic of the class-structure of the university:

> The empty, flat stretches of land between the four main buildings were spread out generously across several acres. The buildings were modestly tall, glass and concrete oblongs lying on their sides. Viewed from East Coast road, they shrank to minute proportions, sandwiched beneath the sky and table of land. […] The hope was that a university town would bloom, spawn new suburbs along the East Coast, and that these would suck in the city suburbs. New roads would connect the city with the university.[63]

In this description, the campus, from a local perspective, is insignificant compared with the land surrounding it. With this perspective in mind, the university building is associated with the small new middle-class it brings with it. Furthermore, that community is shown to be potentially inconsequential compared with the mass working-class which is, in turn, represented in the focalisation of this description. However, when the future of the university is imagined, its physicality transforms into something imposing, solid, spreading out to connect to the rest of the location through new roads. In this single description of the university from

[62] Janice Shinebourne, 'Chuni', in *Race Today Review,* December 1980/January 1981 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/111), pp. 52-57 (p. 52).
[63] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 52.

differing perspectives, the centring of setting in 'Chuni' performs the concurrent illustration of a colonial past and creolised present through the 'compact' form of the short story, as described by Courtman. It does so by protracting a single metaphor – the university as a site of neocolonial interference and colonial inheritance for the working-class – so that it undergirds the full length of the narrative. The newness and youth reflected in the architecture and landscape of the university is revealed to retain something of the colonial past; the university was founded in direct reference to scholars of the UK and US, with an educational programme mirroring those of the universities of these locations. Such a past is metaphorically positioned as potentially able to shape the nation's future: 'Young trees, just a few feet high now, will grow tall later.'[64]

The tension between what this institution represents and the working-class of Guyana is encapsulated by Chuni's interactions with the other characters in the story, who in turn represent something of the socioracial hierarchy of the institution. The character June Perry is illustrative of colonial interference, championing the rights of the working-class for personal gain while shunning Chuni and the other workers. In conversation with her, Chuni is agreeable on the surface - but 'When the woman turned the corner, Chuni laughed; a mocking, strangled laughter, then he switched his expression from mirth to hostility'.[65] Chuni is not painted as a heroic figure positioned on the correct side of justice against this ongoing legacy of colonialism, but a subject existing in the complicated structures of this legacy. He holds prejudices of his own that signify his humanity and his anger at the political systems of the nation. Chuni, a working-class man who, due to his social positioning, has not had the kind of opportunity to explore the nuances of race and class politics of colonial inheritance in the university, directs his anger towards something more direct in his experience. That is, Chuni

[64] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 53.
[65] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 52.

sees ‘the people’ of the university, the middle-class, as the enemy, taking discomfort from the way they ‘do nothing’ to work towards radical politics in action, despite their ‘talk’ and teaching of these politics in lectures.[66]

The University of Guyana was founded in 1963, and the story states that fictional Chuni has worked as a cleaner there since its founding. The university’s mission statement is ‘to discover, generate, disseminate, and apply knowledge of the highest standard for the service of the community, the nation, and of all mankind within an atmosphere of academic freedom that allows for free and critical enquiry’. This, along with the institution’s interest in recruiting socialist scholars, should imply a connection between the interests of the university and those of the political stance of *Race Today*. Both lean towards the kind of radical, revolutionary politics which strive to make visible and interrupt the colonial and capitalist legacy of empire. But for Chuni, this mission statement is at odds with the workings of the university, which merely ‘buy[s] an’ sell[s] other people ideas as if ideas is something you can buy an’ sell like soap’.[67] While the university fails Chuni and the working-class in effecting change, Chuni himself is shown to be capable and interested in the kind of questioning of truth and reality that the university could bring about: ‘Religious and political subjects took extra hold of his imagination. […] He was easily seized by fits of eloquence. His voice would rise like a miracle of nature above the machines as he proffered views on various subjects.’[68] But his positioning in the working-class, in the functioning of such ‘machines’, means that this world of knowledge which he is close to in proximity is inaccessible to him:

> “Chuni, nex’ thing we know, you going to enroll as student in the History Department and want to give us real lessons…” Chuni pounced, “An’ what so strange about that? The university was put here for people like me: the working class, the ordinary people. All kind ah scrawly skin people does come he’ an’ t’ink degree make them important

[66] Shinebourne, ‘Chuni’, p. 52.
[67] Shinebourne, ‘Chuni’, p. 53.
[68] Shinebourne, ‘Chuni’, p. 53.

> overnight. Them running the university does come he' only to backstab an' cut throat like Morgan pirates. This university 'in make no progress."[69]

Chuni is revealed to have the kind of inquisitive understanding of his sociopolitical realities that the humanities foster, but the university is shown to be bureaucratic, capitalist and neocolonial, a hindrance to Chuni's 'freedom'.[70] Chuni's political discourse disrupts the university's 'smoot[h]' operation. His talk gets in the way of him fulfilling his 'work', despite the fact that this work involves keeping the university in order so that it can harbour such political discussion in the students.[71]

The way in which Chuni's own political knowledge and beliefs at once agree yet conflict with the interests of the university at the centre of the story enable 'Chuni' to explore the complicated dynamic between the working-class of Guyana and its new independent state – showing how colonial ideology and class regimes still function in a nation that is postcolonial in name but potentially neocolonial in structure. Chuni's relationships with those that work for the university add depth to the story's illustration of these complex sociopolitical realities. On the one hand, his subordination to the researchers and professionals, such as June Perry, administrator Mrs Taylor, and Professor Ambrose, sustain a sense that the postcolonial working-class occupies a sociopolitical position in need of revolution that the university cannot provide. The only means by which Chuni can effect this change, he concludes, is to write a thesis. He believes, based on his experience, that the university values research and knowledge over the lived experiences and realities of the working-class. On the other hand, though, Chuni's interactions with his fellow workers suggest that the present and future of this class is stifled and in danger of suffocation. Where Chuni has worked for the university since its founding, his co-worker, Bronson, has been employed for only a few months, and Chuni takes

[69] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 53.
[70] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 54.
[71] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 54.

it upon himself to guide the young man. The way that Chuni offers a model of behaviour for Bronson implies a generational significance for their relationship, with Chuni being wise to the realities of the university, a wisdom he can impart upon the naïve Bronson. He 'cautioned Bronson not to believe that people cared about men like them; it was talk, a bandwagon'.[72] Bronson, being of the new generation of workers, believes that he can balance his subordinate place in the university with his own ambition, and create a path for his life in which the university will value his work. As a result, to Bronson, 'Chuni's criticisms were soon made to sound hollow'.[73]

As the narrative progresses, however, and the divide between the thinkers and the workers becomes deeper, Bronson eventually falls victim to the same frustration that Chuni experiences. Chuni's expression of this frustration takes shape in the story through an overt display of power over his wife and birds that he keeps caged, in response to the lack of power and agency he faces in his position at the university. Upon both, Chuni expresses his anger in the form of violence: 'when Chuni was angry he maltreated his birds, pelting their cages with anything not too large or heavy. Chuni also mistreated his wife.'[74] When Bronson is eventually forced to confront the fact that he, like Chuni, is a 'small man' in the eyes of the university and the socioracial hierarchy it represents, he 'be[gins] to understand Chuni's bitterness.'[75] The resemblance between these two generations of workers – one symbolic of a colonial past and the other of a postcolonial future – reaches a climax. Bronson, at the end of the story, mirrors the violent impulses experienced by Chuni in response to his subordination, and the young worker attacks the older one. They engage in a fight and Bronson forces Chuni to the ground. This narrative close does not symbolise a triumph of the new working-class over the strictures

[72] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 55.
[73] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 56.
[74] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 54.
[75] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 56.

imposed on the old one by its sociopolitical positioning. Rather, it illustrates a lack of resolution, with Bronson appearing to have less agency now than Chuni did at the opening of the story. This is symbolised when Bronson cannot respond to his name: '"Bronson?" He could find no voice. His head was a shell, his feet and hands were sticks, his tongue gone, brain blank.'[76] In this closing scene, all that remains of the new working-class is this sense of anger and frustration, emotions that carry over beyond the end of the story: Bronson's feet and hands are no longer able to do the labouring work required of his class, his communicative skills and place in society are compromised by the loss of his voice or 'tongue', and his ability to think is likewise hindered by his succumbing to impulsive anger at his situation.

The overriding symbolic significance achieved by 'Chuni' is a sense that the working-class of Guyana is in danger of neglect and further oppression by the post-independence government, if colonial legacy continues to function in the hands of this body and its cultural institution. The shape of the short form in 'Chuni' allows the story to revolve around setting rather than character development. The characters and their growth branch from the focal point of the story, the university. This setting – its structure and the way in which this structure becomes paradigmatic for the sociopolitical hierarchy and interrelations of Guyana – is the nexus of the story's character development and plot. As such, the setting enables 'the devasting impact of colonial and postcolonial politics of Guyana on its people'[77] to be at the forefront of Shinebourne's creative fiction, in this edition of *Race Today*. This is in comparison to how Shinebourne describes the reception of her novels in more formal publishing networks, or the 'grapevine' as she calls it. Shinebourne explains that her debut novel, *Timepiece,* published six years after the appearance of 'Chuni' in *Race Today*, in 1986, 'was generally treated as a

[76] Shinebourne, 'Chuni', p. 57.
[77] Janice Shinebourne, 'Rose Hall', in *Re-Imagining the Guyanas*, eds. Lawrence Aje, Thomas Lacroix, and Judith Mirashi-Barak (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2019), pp. 53-60.

Guyanese feminist *bildungsroman*'.[78] Shinebourne agrees that this novel as well as her later novels indeed deal in some way with 'young [women] coming into maturity', but she feels that 'place […] exert[s] the most profound influence' on her books.[79] People are certainly trying to 'stabilise their lives' in her works, but this is less about the growth from youth to maturity that defines the bildungsroman, and more about the 'political upheavals in [Guyana in] the 60s'. She intends to indicate the way that such complex colonial inheritance necessitates some sort of personal response, a change of personal circumstances in line with the shifting political landscape of the home location.[80]

Shinebourne's novels were potentially received by critics as *bildungsroman* because of the association of this genre with the novel form – there is an expectation that characters, subjectivity, will take centre stage in longform narrative fiction, and place and community are to be handled in terms of how characters interact with these social and geographical aspects of their positioning.[81] 'Chuni', by comparison, is chosen for inclusion in *Race Today* because of how it positions place at the centre of its narrative. The sociopolitical realities of its location and its colonial inheritance are the means by which the story meets the political agenda of *Race Today*. The magazine's building of community across personal, cultural, and social difference through a shared colonial past and postcolonial present is dependent on a creativity that consistently records or represents similar political realities across different locations, even while the personal or cultural may shift or be unfamiliar to the reader between stories, contexts, and volumes of the magazine. As stated above, in the context of Anglophone Caribbean

[78] Shinebourne, 'Rose Hall', pp. 53-60.
[79] Shinebourne, 'Rose Hall', pp. 53-60.
[80] Shinebourne, 'Rose Hall', pp. 53-60.
[81] Paul Goring discusses the relationship between the development of the form of the novel, its publishing circumstances, and its association with longform character development in 'Literature in the Eighteenth Century', in *Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), pp. 58-110. He defines the novel, loosely, as 'a fictious prose narrative or tale of considerable length (now usually one long enough to fill one or more volumes) in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times in a plot of more of less complexity.' Character is central, specifically the psychological development of character through the requirements of a lengthy plot (pp. 91-94).

periodical publishing, the short story encouraged the formation of a regional community across local and national difference, in comparison to theme of social exile in novels published through British presses. I suggest that reading Shinebourne's 'Chuni' in its specific publishing circumstances and against those of her novels makes evident the way that *Race Today*'s development of a black British literary culture echoes that of the Caribbean context. In the same way that signifiers shift and mutate between different communication circuits for the Caribbean context, the reception of Shinebourne's writing is also dependent on its publishing circumstances. Rather than just 'periphery' and 'metropolitan' which mutate alongside 'similarity' and 'difference', it is also aspects such as 'place' and 'community' that shift in cultural and symbolic significance. Bound by the rhetoric of *Race Today*, 'Chuni' is approached as emblematic of the kind of anticolonial attitude and political knowledge that *Race Today* wishes to foster for a radicalised British national ideology – an ideology which is inclusive of diasporic and commonwealth peoples and realities. But, in comparison, Shinebourne's novels as they circulated through the networks of official publishing, were discussed in terms of the extent to which they represent a very specific and local Chinese-Guyanese identity.[82]

Due to the fact that black British periodical short story publishing is yet to be addressed in the academy, the shifting cultural and symbolic significance of the writing of authors such as Shinebourne, between one publishing circuit and another, is also yet to be explored. However, 'Chuni' is just one example of how *Race Today* employed creative fiction by writers from the Caribbean and beyond to inform its British readership about the lasting impact of

[82] Shinebourne discusses this in 'Rose Hall': 'I know from the grapevine that this made quite an impact and the Caribbean literary grapevine was asking questions about me. Who is she? What is she? Is she Amerindian or Chinese? She looks like Amerindian or Chinese. Where in Guyana does she come from? Does anybody know anything about her? What is she writing about? Where does she get the name Shinebourne from? Is that a Guyanese name? […] [T]hese three novels made me look like a writer who was only interested in writing about an East-Indian community, so much so, people thought I was an East-Indian writer. There were a few occasions when I was confronted about my failure to write about the Chinese of Guyana, since I was part Chinese, and looked Chinese and was taken for Chinese. Twice I was rebuked for this publicly.'

colonial inheritance and interference. Other examples include the republication of Bobby Sands's 'The Captain and the Cowards' in the 1981/1982 edition of the *Review*, a story which reimagines the experiences of the author, imprisoned in a politically turbulent Ireland. The *Review*'s introduction of the story explains that Sands was an Irish Republican political prisoner and ex-MP for Fermanagh South. Sands died during his hunger strike while imprisoned in May 1981, months before the original publication of this story in September of the same year by *AnPhoblacht/Republican News*.[83] The story's position in *Race Today* bolsters the platform's overall intent to unite a community against British rule; it is written from a political perspective that positions the governance and interference of the British state as a restriction on the freedom of the people of Ireland. [84] While the contents of the story are troubling in their illustration of the violence of imprisonment and the outwardly racist depiction of a Japanese guard, 'The Captain and the Cowards' creates a similar overall effect as that produced by Shinebourne's story. That is, 'Chuni' enables the anger and injustice over the neglect of the interests of the postcolonial working-class in the formation of a new, anticolonial national ideology to be felt past the end of the story, resonating with the other contexts explored by the magazine. Similarly, 'The Captain and the Cowards' also creates a sense of anger and injustice, but towards the British state, that resounds throughout the magazine, beyond the pages of the story.

The relevance of Irish politics to *Race Today*'s political stance and agenda is continued in the next volume of the *Review*, which features the short works of Gerry Adams. The intended function of including literature in the magazine is more deliberately drawn into focus in this

[83] Darcus Howe and Linton Kwesi Johnson, eds., *Race Today Review*, December 1981/January 1982 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/112), p. 21.
[84] My description of the politics of Ireland here are intended to address the attitude of *Race Today* towards these realities, not to present a bias of my own.

volume, when the editors underscore their appeal to the working-classes through the inclusion of such literature:

> Adams, in these stories and accounts, evokes the lore of a working class community, vividly weaving portraits of personalities and historical events created by a vibrant, active and resolute population. Though the tracts are particular to the Falls Road area in Belfast, though the author's aim may be to strengthen the nationalist movement, he has, perhaps, unwittingly made a contribution to the international peoplehood of working folk. […] The inclusion of the extract from 'Falls Memories' is our way of extending solidarity to Adams and his comrades, to the working people of Falls Roads and the six counties. In embracing Adams, we embrace our own reflections.[85]

Here, Howe expresses overtly the aim of *Race Today* that I have been exploring throughout this chapter: his remarks on how 'our own reflections' are visible in the particularities of diverse contexts of the oppression of working-class people under British and/or colonial influence and interference demonstrates exactly the building of a united community across, yet inclusive of, difference that I have traced here. But the short fiction published by the magazine also reveals this intent of the *Race Today* is a less direct way.

In Austin Clarke's 'The Funeral of a Political Yard-Fowl', published in the 1984 edition of the *Review*, it is the formal approaches of the short story that enable Clarke to explore of the potentially arbitrary differences between colonial rule and postcolonial governance for the working-classes of Barbados. Resembling the techniques of 'Chuni', this story's setting is also central to its overall effect. Occupying the span of a funeral for a grave-digger, Lionel, 'The Funeral of a Political Yard-Fowl' assumes the notion of the death of a worker as symbolic of the broader context of the nation's transition from colonial rule to independence. Death in this context is weighted by the significance of what an 'end' to colonisation truly means for the working-class of a postcolonial nation. Such symbolism is indicated by the story's declaration

[85] Darcus Howe, 'Introduction', in *Race Today Review*, 1983 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/116), p. 149.

that it narrates 'a political funeral. Lionel will be buried politically.'[86] Depth is added to how exactly this funeral takes place with political intent:

> The Government had decided that all the people at the funeral, especially the officials, were to get out of their cars about a mile from the Main Gate of the cemetery and walk through the streets. "That way", the Prime Minister had told them at the executive meeting that morning, "we will be killing two birds with one stone. We will be showing our grief and our concern for the small man." They all laughed when he said this.[87]

Throughout, there is a focus on falsity, pretence, arbitrariness, and a political system functioning through the appearance and promise of change rather than its actuality. For example, the Government orders the cemetery to close its entrance gates once the last person looking like a 'real mourner' has entered; the narrator implies that the Government works like 'slot-machines',[88] by favourable odds as opposed to planned action; the Prime Minister hopes that his rehearsed mourning will be captured on camera; and, after appropriating his funeral for political gain, Lionel is remembered by the Government as 'a common, half-ig'rant yard-fowl' – an insincere supporter of the Government's policies.[89] Furthermore, certain imagery distils this impression of the Government's falsity: the grave-digger is described by the Prime Minister as a 'stupid bitch who couldn't do nothing better than slam a domino',[90] and, later, the story picks up this image of a domino – 'white dots on black silk'[91] – to obliquely emphasise the undergirding suggestion that the Prime Minister, with his Cambridge University education, represents neocolonial governance in Barbados.

Where 'Chuni' and 'The Captain and the Cowards' produce narrative effects that transcend their singularity and respond to the interests of *Race Today* more broadly, 'The

[86] Austin Clarke, 'The Funeral of a Political Yard-Fowl', in *Race Today Review*, 1984 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/121), pp. 14-20 (p. 15).
[87] Clarke, 'The Funeral' p. 15.
[88] Clarke, 'The Funeral', p. 16.
[89] Clarke, 'The Funeral', p. 20.
[90] Clarke, 'The Funeral', p. 15.
[91] Clarke, 'The Funeral', p. 18.

Funeral of a Political Yard-Fowl' similarly appeals to the shared interests of 'the international peoplehood of working-folk' through its formal approaches to short story writing. It particularly resembles Shinebourne's story in the way that setting and metaphor come together to emphasise sociopolitical fracture alongside the efforts of community building in spite of these realities. From reading between these two stories, a pattern begins to emerge in *Race Today*'s inclusion of short fiction to bolster its community building agenda. Specifically, the characteristics of short story writing for Anglophone Caribbean periodical publishing and the shaping of regional unity outlined by Evans and Courtman can be traced between the two stories. Shinebourne and Clarke both approach the 'compact' form of the short story in order to at once address matters of 'colonial inheritance' and a 'creolised present'. Furthermore, they do so in a way that transcends the specificities of locality. Both also use the short form and its association with anti-conventional narrative – allowing matters of community, setting, and fracture to prevail over plot and characterisation – as a means of alerting their reader to and resisting colonial legacy.

These effects and techniques of short story writing are further demonstrated in the other short fiction chosen for inclusion in *Race Today*. Amelia House's 'The Awakening', published in the *Review* in 1986, occupies the short form as a means of exploring memory. Specifically, the story explores the way in which a single moment can be recalled in retrospect with weighted, broader, and sometimes disillusioned or despairing, significance. Or, in other words, the story recalls the epiphanic moment associated with the short form.[92] 'The Awakening' explores the complex political realities of South Africa under apartheid. This exploration takes place through 'Coloured' protagonist Eric's memory of a conversation that he had with a white

[92] I am referring here to James Joyce's theorising on and practice of short story writing, in which epiphany interacts with place, plotlessness, and memory, particularly expressed through his character Stephen Hero: epiphany is a 'sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or gesture or in a *memorable phase of the mind itself*'. James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (London: Cape, 1950), p. 188 (my emphasis).

bus driver about the rioting of black protestors and the violent response of the police. The encounter led Eric to fear confrontation with the police in case of being mistaken for a rioting 'Kaffir' and associating himself with those below him in the socioracial hierarchy.[93] The bus driver believes Eric to be above the behaviour of the 'Natives', because of his position as a 'Coloured', but Eric is conflicted about his feelings towards the treatment of the police towards the black protesters. He remembers that he 'did not care to comment' when the driver condemned the behaviour of the protestors but condoned the response of the police.[94] But now, as Eric remembers this moment in a nightclub sometime later, he is facing a confrontation of his own with the police and reflecting upon his earlier silence. Again, and with silent resentment, Eric decides not to react to the police, exposing the personal epiphany he experienced to be ephemeral and fallacious in the context of the ongoing sociopolitical fracture in South Africa. Eric is ultimately still in danger of violence in the hands of the police.

By addressing the socioracial hierarchy and political realities of South Africa through the shape of dialogue, memory, and epiphany, House transforms complex matters into the compact structure associated with the short form. Eric's past and the history of apartheid are invoked due to the nature of memory and epiphany, and characterisation – individuality – is equally suggested by the intersubjectivity of dialogue. The two are intertwined; the conversation in which the bus driver accuses Eric of being one of the 'Coloureds at Varsity [who] always side[s] with the Natives' is what eventually leads him to picture himself now as a 'little man', who can only 'wish' to have 'the courage to land a few on those policeman' once again creating trouble for the 'Natives'.[95] Again, it is the use of tense – the movement between past and present – through the 'compact' form of the short story and a centring of place over

[93] Amelia House, 'The Awakening', in *Race Today Review*, 1986 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/129), pp. 26-29 (p. 27).
[94] House, 'The Awakening', p. 27.
[95] House, 'The Awakening', pp. 26-29.

plot that allow 'The Awakening' to produce a commentary on socioracial hierarchising that can transcend its locality.

The use of the short form to address memory rather than plot is also employed by Ben Okri in his contribution to the 1987 edition of the *Review*, in a short story titled 'A Hidden History'. As the title suggests, Okri is interested in drawing attention to the ways in which, while the violent realities of slavery and colonisation may be suppressed by conventional records of British history, 'nothing can be hidden from memory'.[96] The legacy of such violence is carried by the descendants of the enslaved as they live their lives in the postcolonies. 'A Hidden History' uses the short story's formal characteristics of suggestion and implication over causality[97] to create the impression that suppression and revelation are happening concurrently, to accentuate through creativity the notion that independence movements and new governments are moving nations forward while the colonial past still looms over and influences present realities.

While Okri's story demonstrates similar techniques to those I have discussed above, what I principally want to draw attention to is *Race Today*'s terminology in introducing Okri's creative fiction in the *Review*. In this edition, the editorial team describe Okri as a short story writer of 'black Britain'.[98] The magazine also includes writers such as E.A. Markham and Farrukh Dhondy as short story writers of black Britain. The editions I have thus far discussed have been interested in shaping a British community with a particular political stance, and informing this community of the realities and experiences of (post)colonial locations, diasporic peoples, and the black population of Britain. However, it is here that the terminology 'black British' is introduced as an inclusive term for these multiple and varied contexts and identities.

[96] Ben Okri, 'A Hidden History', in *Race Today Review*, 1978 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/133), pp. 10-14 (p. 10).
[97] Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 2.
[98] Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Introduction', in *Race Today Review*, 1987 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/133), p. 1.

The usage of the term corresponds with the inclusive political 'black' of Britain which, as Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies explore, gained currency in the 1960s. Correspondingly, '[b]y the late 1980s critics favoured an anti-essentialist critique of identity that provided a conceptual and philosophical underpinning for a collectivity of black peoples with shared histories and experiences of racism.'[99] However, what distinguishes *Race Today's* 'black British' from this broader context is how its communication circuit fosters a sense of difference as well as similarity or 'shared histories and experiences' in its shaping of collectivity.

The Caribbean short story in periodicals emerged within a context of anticolonial nationalism, which functioned as a catalyst for the representation and formation of communal unity for the region, engaging multiple and differing communities of writers and readers over the twentieth century. Significantly, the narratives which embraced anticolonial nationalism and the means by which such narratives circulated among the islands were not lost; they were reshaped as sociopolitical movements such as Black Power and pan-Africanism were embraced through the short story, in order to explore how such a national narrative could function for an era of independence. This created multiple spheres of production and dissemination that in turn enabled the form's subsequent interrogations and reformations of a national narrative. It is this trajectory of rebuilding conceptions of nationhood and community via the short story that I suggest is continued in *Race Today*.

What is particularly significant to my tracing of the influence of Caribbean periodicals on their black British counterparts is how the 'compact' and creolised form of the short story functions alongside and in conversation with the surrounding rhetoric in both. As Raymond Ramcharitar notes, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, short fiction appeared intermittently in the local press, and 'was comprised of a large number of publications lasting

[99] Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies, 'Introduction', in *A Black British Canon?*, eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1-12 (p. 3).

only a few years, and usually operated by individuals.'[100] This was not a directly literary avenue, but rather a political effort for which the 'main media were the newspapers and the calypso.'[101] The dissemination of narrative fiction in the nineteenth-century press was initially an entertainment-based, idealistic 'colonial imaginary' narrative in serialised form. This form and its outlets were later appropriated for political power by revolutionary forces. From this platform, the inclusion of fiction functioned to interrogate the 'invention' of nations which took place via 'authorised narratives describing and analysing the colonial endeavour'. Associated with these were 'interpellations of tradition, politics, and myth into the discourse of the socio-geographic entity that is evolving into a nation.'[102] If a focus on material positioning and form is followed in relation to class- and race-focused themes, then my case study of *Race Today* demonstrates a similar environment for the distribution of short fiction, with the intention of 'writing the newly autonomous nation into existence.'[103]

Significantly, though, the idea of a 'newly autonomous nation' in terms of *Race Today* is more of a battle for agency in the structural workings of the (post)colonising nation and its dominant ideology. Like *The Beacon, Trinidad* and 'other literary movements appear[ing] in all the [Caribbean] islands by the 30s,' *Race Today* is similarly resistant to the ideologies and oppression of imperial legacy,[104] but from within a postwar, politically turbulent Britain. It is here that the trajectory of *Race Today* and its status as ethnic minority media within the larger network of the British press becomes significant for establishing a framework of community across difference. The inclusive 'black' has faced persuasive apprehension regarding the extent to which it encourages homogenisation alongside political alliance. However, what *Race Today*'s shaping of black Britishness can elucidate above all else is that alternative

[100] Ramcharitar, 'The *Beacon*', p. 62.
[101] Ramcharitar, 'The *Beacon*', p. 63.
[102] Ramcharitar, 'The *Beacon*', p. 60.
[103] Ramcharitar, 'The *Beacon*, p. 64.
[104] Ramcharitar, 'The *Beacon*', p. 64.

communication circuits for black writing can 'mutate' the cultural and symbolic weight of the signifiers 'similarity', 'difference', 'metropolitan', and 'periphery'. This means that difference can be sustained and respected even while shared experiences are traced and a new community is formed. In *Race Today*, difference can reveal similarity, and the 'peripheries' are not in fact marginal at all, but central to the new metropolitan or British ideology that the magazine wishes to harbour.

The short story, its shape and structure as well as its place in the magazine, is central to this building of community across difference, because of its ability to both distil and transcend place. It is a form that can write of locations in which, as Lucy Evans explores, 'the question of community is often a central issue, […] alongside and in tension with themes of alienation and cultural dislocation'.[105] The short story – its compactness and ability to avert the needs of plot to capture something of a shared colonial past and creolised present in various and different locations – encourages conceptions of black Britishness based in diverse contexts. Diversity in this way encourages unity, without the label 'black' becoming a dominant force which homogenises distinct, sometimes conflicting, identities, experiences, and localities. I suggest that the form of the short story in this communication circuit can be described as black British itself, in the way that it can oscillate between, creolise or hybridise, the British context of its dissemination and community-building aims and the influence on its content of the traditions and literary cultures of overseas or postcolonial locations. I wish to emphasise both the communication circuit of periodical publishing and the place of the short story in this, to underscore the way that these alternative means of distributing black British writing can shift perceptions of the cultural significance of the inclusive, political 'black' in Britain.

[105] Evans, 'Introduction', p. 19.

CHAPTER TWO

Periodical Publishing: Jennifer Johnson and the Case of the Black British Short Story as Gossip Column

In this chapter, I explore the short stories of Jennifer Johnson, published in *Race Today* in 1978. Johnson's short fiction is marketed by the magazine as gossip, but ultimately complicates such positioning. The chapter begins by considering the extent to which Johnson's gossip-style stories can be described as straightforwardly informing the reader of *Race Today* of the activities of black British youth in schools and on the street. With her narrator on the 'frontline',[1] Johnson assumes the responsibility of providing the unfamiliar reader with a personable, humorous, and accurate account of the lifestyle and everyday realities of young black women. In this way, her stories are aligned with the functions of the gossip column as it developed during the interwar period in Britain, described by Sarah Newman (2014). Newman suggests that humour, personability, exclusivity, and immediacy in gossip are indicative of a sales technique of the press for addressing a wide audience through a focus on the private rather than the political sphere.[2] However, the 'frontline' position of Johnson's narrator generates symbolism of political battle, challenging this characteristic of the genre. Furthermore, the

[1] As is explored in more depth below, the persona of Johnson's narrator is given the name 'Frontline Jennie'.
[2] Newman suggests that some of the principal characteristics of gossip are a personable and humorous style of writing, exclusive and intimate knowledge of a desirable lifestyle, and a focus on the everyday and leisure activities of local groups over politics and world news. Sarah Newman, *The Celebrity Gossip Column and Newspaper Journalism in Britain, 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Research Archive, 2014), pp. 1-4.

political undercurrent of the stories also challenges the frequent writing of black women in the period within the bounds of the domestic sphere, as well as the limited political agency and cultural output of black youth in the 1970s and 1980s.[3] As the chapter continues, I turn to question the willingness of Johnson's stories to accurately report on the lives of her community, for the sake of educating an unfamiliar reader whose perception of this community has hitherto been shaped by the oppressive ideology of the dominant culture. Guided by reading between these stories, their positioning in the magazine, and the potential function of gossip to emphasise the everyday over the political, I suggest that Johnson undertakes an adroit and subversive play with the expectations of the genres and (plat)forms that her stories reference and replicate. Such play recalls the associations of gossip later in the twentieth century with that which is repressed by the societal structures of law, regulation, and morality. I explore that changing function of gossip in reference to Jack Levin and Arnold Duke's *Gossip: The Inside Scoop* (1987). Such unveiling of the underside of these structures is also associated, by a racist and classist state, with the reputation and behaviour of black youth in the 1970s. But when Johnson's stories engage with these characteristics as formal tropes of short story writing, the effect, I suggest, is a challenge to the reader rather than an invitation. The stories fundamentally invite reflection upon how black British literature is positioned and marketed, and what effect this might have on the disseminated text.

In the January 1974 issue of *Race Today*, reader Priscilla Allen requests that the magazine report on the activities of black British youth. More specifically, Allen asks to be informed of the endeavours of young black British women in the political as well as the domestic sphere.[4] Allen is responding to editor Darcus Howe's article, 'Black People and the Police', in the previous issue. In the feature article, Howe reports that 'the young unemployeds,

[3] Both of these factors are discussed by James Procter in 'The Street', in *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) pp. 69-124.
[4] Priscilla Allen, 'Backlash', in *Race Today* January 1974 (GPI GB 2904 JOU/1/1/55), pp. 16-17.

in refusing to do capital's shit work, have added power to those at work.'[5] The reader, Priscilla Allen, suggests that Howe's article

> permits some connections that may not be obvious on the surface. […] The question that arises […] is how the resistance of West Indian youth affects or is expressed by the young West Indian woman. Like all women, she has even greater pressures to resist than the male; even more shitwork is offered to her; she has less power, less money; she has more work and responsibility in the family […] for which she gets no wage. […] At least half of West Indian youth are female. I, for one, would like to hear about the role they are playing in the family, in the community, as Blacks and as women in the struggle to resist capital's greed for our muscles and our brains; for our lives. How are they "fighting back"?[6]

The connections that the reader draws between women's roles and youth indicates the intersections of domestic and public space, as well as the fragility of the binary which positions these in opposition to one another. She implies that black women's everyday domesticity is a political matter, because it is shaped by the structures of power and economy. Work is emphasised as a responsibility for young black British women, but it is not separated from familial and domestic spaces. Rather, the two are positioned as interwoven: childcare and the responsibilities of family are identified as capital work but without pay; and 'capital's greed' is not designated as a matter strictly of politics, economy, or labour, but something that impacts the domain of the private sphere, the home and the family. As such, the reader destabilises the border between the domestic and the political and stresses the involvement of black British women in the struggle for anticolonialism and anticapitalism. She also proposes that such involvement 'may not be obvious on the surface.' The reader responds to the lack of media representation for the activities of black women in and between the domestic and the political spheres, suggesting that such a lack is potentially the result of the how the intersections of class,

[5] Darcus Howe, quoted in 'Backlash', in *Race Today* January 1974 (GPI GB 2904 JOU/1/1/55), pp. 16-17 (p. 16).
[6] Allen, 'Backlash', p. 16.

gender, and race are obscured by capitalist and patriarchal ideologies. *Race Today* subsequently supplies a platform for this topic to be addressed.

The January 1974 issue is subtitled 'Power to the Sisters and Therefore to the Class', a heading which overtly connects women with the interests of anticapitalism. In this issue, a special feature article, 'Sex, Race and Working Class', illuminates the ways in which *Race Today*'s rhetoric finds domestic duties to be intimately connected to political realities, but 'in a hidden, mystified form.' The 'mystification', the author suggests, 'is not unique to women', but is most often encountered by women because of the gendered association with the domestic sphere in a capitalist, patriarchal society. Both children and women 'appear to be outside of the capitalist wage labour relation because they are themselves wageless. *In reality*, they are facets of capitalist production and its division of labour.' This is because women 'are involved in the production and […] reproduction of workers'; and children 'are those who from birth are the objects of this care and discipline, who are trained in homes, in school, and in front of the telly to be future workers.'[7] In the article, Selma James, its author, understands the realm of the everyday and the domestic to be fundamentally linked to rather than separate from the production of labour. Thus, the domestic sphere is positioned within the political one, with the former functioning as a quasi-maternal influence for the latter. Resultingly, James describes the position of women in political realities as 'hidden', because domesticity fosters political education and action but may not immediately be associated with the public spaces of political battle. As the Collective's activities grew alongside the Black Parents Movement and the Workers Movement, articles interested in discussing the involvement of women in both domestic and political terms became more regularly featured. However, the short stories by Johnson written for publication in *Race Today* can be offered as the magazine's most overt

[7] Selma James, 'Sex, Race, and Working Class', in *Race Today*, January 1974 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/55), pp. 12-15 (all p. 12) (original emphasis).

response to reader Priscilla Allen's request for the provision of a platform for young black British women.

Johnson does not depict this community strictly within the domestic sphere. She does, however, align the educating and raising of youth with the growth of a politically alert generation of black women in a way that echoes James's focus on 'hidden' or 'mystified' form. That is, she reframes the spaces of political battle associated with masculinity in the period to the perspectives and places occupied by young black British women. James Procter discusses the ways in which, between the late 1960s and 1980s, the street, the black male body and fashion, the city, and carnival events became sites of territorialisation, political battle, and confrontation with the police, as well as with the dominant culture of the state.[8] In the immediate postwar years, representations of black life in Britain were centred around illustrations of and symbolism involving the home, the state of homelessness, and the private sphere. Comparatively, the cultural production of the following decades illustrates the emergence of black 'pedestrian culture'.[9] In the terms of Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, by the 1970s, '[t]he race issue had entered the street.'[10] While ultimately the movement of black culture onto the streets was, according to Procter, a 'positive and political assertion' of black presence and belonging in Britain, 'black Britons found themselves increasingly criminalised on and policed off the street. To "loiter" or hang about in this context became a subversive mode of occupying pedestrian space.'[11] Procter notes that it 'is overwhelming the black *male* that comes to embody anxieties and fears surrounding racialised street venues in this period, whether in the form of the hedonistic

[8] Procter, 'The Street', pp. 69-124.
[9] Procter, 'The Street', p. 72.
[10] Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 333.
[11] Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 4.

Rastaman, the militarised machismo of the black power movement, or the sexualised threat of the mugger.'[12]

In comparison, as Susan Yearwood notes, the representation of black women in the period was largely bound to the domestic sphere, rather than the street space associated with political battle.[13] However, this does not mean that the domestic experiences of black women were not subject to sociopolitical structures outside of the home. Discussing Buchi Emecheta's novels of the 1970s, Yearwood finds that the author occupies a symbolic 'feminized space' in her fiction which both responds to and challenges the 'social trajectories of West African women on the continent and in Britain': Emecheta's work 'reveals the political nature of the mores and communities that shape a woman's destiny wherever she may live.'[14] Yearwood finds Emecheta's fiction to be unique in the context of black British women's writing of the period because of its overt politicising of domestic space. That is, her protagonist strives to root the second-class-citizenship she faces at home in the hands of her husband within the broader structural workings of the state. However, the husband, 'finding [his] masculinity challenged by the state' and its 'racial determinants in British society', continues to confine the protagonist to the home by enforcing his 'genderized [sic] dominance'. Yearwood continues, 'he finds recompense in the notion of male-gendered didacticism and ruthless hegemony in his own household.'[15] As such, even while Emecheta's fiction endeavours to politicise the domestic sphere or 'feminized space', neither her protagonist nor her representational capacity enter the public sites of political battle. Such restriction to the home for black women and their fiction of the period is suggested, by Yearwood's conclusion, to have had a profound and stifling impact into the twenty-first century:

---

[12] Procter, 'The Street', p. 74 (original emphasis).
[13] Susan Yearwood, 'The Sociopolitics of Black Britain in the Work of Buchi Emecheta', in *Black British Writing*, eds. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 137-143.
[14] Yearwood, 'The Sociopolitics of Black Britain', p. 138.
[15] Yearwood, 'The Sociopolitics of Black Britain', p. 142.

> The sociopolitical problems in [the protagonist's] life – including the hazards of patriarchy, poverty, motherhood, and self-determinism – continue to be central to the lives of the black female migrant from Africa and the Caribbean living in London and throughout Britain.[16]

In Johnson's stories, however, young black women straddle the domestic and public spheres, so that this subsection of the community is represented in the 'territorialising' of pedestrian culture outlined by Procter. Significantly, though, this takes place in spaces occupied by black British youth, such as the school, the park, the youth club, and the maturing, impressionable body. These spaces become realms of political battle in which a sense of belonging is asserted yet met with confrontation from the oppressive dominant culture, echoing the tensions of masculinist street occupation in the 1970s. Such positioning more overtly engages black women with political dynamics than James's bridging of the domestic and the labouring spheres indicates. However, Johnson's narrative style retains something of what James terms the 'hidden' form of young women's expression in experiencing and representing such political engagement.

In 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope', for example, the politics of the street are rendered through the focalisation of youth in the school corridor. In this space, young black women protest for the recognition of their belonging and rights in an oppressive environment dominated by a hostile and racist culture. The story centres on the response of a group of black students to the xenophobic remarks of fellow student Penny, who claims that 'Jamaican gal […] come cheap.' Thinking that the young women of the class are unaware of his prejudicial statement, Penny 'fi days an' days […] run-up him mout', but 'di bwoy dem naw seh not'n'' to challenge him. But when they are made aware of Penny's conduct, the women realise their agency together in the situation and devise a plan to trick him. They arrange a date between Penny and a Jamaican woman, but use this event to force Penny to confront the people affected

[16] Yearwood, 'The Sociopolitics of Black Britain', p. 143.

by his circulating of xenophobic assumptions and stereotypes. When Penny's date reveals herself to be Jamaican, he realises the ruse, and runs through the corridors of the school while the women follow chanting 'Jamaican girl is a nice, nice girl'. Eventually, he 'disappear roun' di carnah a di college gate.'[17] With Penny successfully forced from the school, the corridor is stripped of its former liminality and instead becomes a space in which the women assert their agency, identity, and belonging. The corridor is transformed into a place, to borrow Procter's term, of 'dwelling'.[18]

According to Procter, the territorialisation of pedestrian spaces in the 1970s occurred at 'that moment when black was being remobilised in Britain as a political category, detached from its earlier, negative connotations and rearticulated as a positive signifier: "black is beautiful".'[19] In the young women's assertion of their 'niceness' in the story, they are able to reject Penny's prejudice and force him and his xenophobia to exit the space of the school. As such, 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope' achieves the transformation of liminal spaces from 'site[s] of transit' to sites of territorialisation. Similarly, the corridor becomes a space for the 'loitering', 'revelling', and 'demonstrating' which defines street occupation in the period.[20] Like the protests for black rights and recognition on the streets, the women in the story similarly assert pride in their identity and claim the school corridor as a space in which to celebrate their shared culture in spite of Penny's hostility. The school corridor is no longer 'a place to pass through' for the young women, but 'a place to stay'.[21] Such an assertion of belonging in local spaces, the 'expression of a community denied access to *national* discourses of representation',[22] is emphasised by the story's closing line and its title: the suggestion that time

[17] Jennifer Johnson, 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope', in *Race Today*, May/June 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/100), p. 95 (all subsequent page references are p. 95).
[18] This term is taken from the title of Procter's monograph which I reference throughout the chapter, *Dwelling Places*.
[19] Procter, 'The Street', p. 71.
[20] Procter, 'The Street', p. 76.
[21] Procter, 'The Street', p. 77.
[22] Procter, 'The Street', p. 79 (original emphasis).

is longer than rope. This Jamaican proverb suggests that patience should be sustained throughout the lengthy process of change. Bookended by the repetition of the proverb, the single example of the young black British women coming together to reject xenophobic and patriarchal attitudes in the story becomes a parable; it is imprinted with the impression of continuity, of the repetition of claiming such local spaces until dominat ideology is forced to respond.

The school corridor transforms into a space for negotiating black British identity, at a time when black youths experienced 'alienation from the institutions of the family, education, and employment'.[23] Thus, the corridor can be read as a politicised local place of dwelling in the same way that Procter reads the street. However, the positioning of the story in the magazine particularly associates 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope' with the realm of the domestic, of raising a politically alert and active, anticapitalist, and anticolonial black youth in Britain. It therefore complicates Procter's outlining of such spaces as predominantly masculine sites of political agency and confrontation with the dominant culture. In the issue of *Race Today* in which 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope' is published, an article focusing on the education of black youth is featured, titled 'Teaching Young Blacks'. In this article, its author Farrukh Dhondy considers the extent to which the domestic responsibility of raising children is also an issue of schooling, thus impacted by the sociopolitical structures and ideologies of capitalism and imperialism. Dhondy writes that in his early experiences of teaching in Britain,

> it was as though [black] pupils didn't exist […]. In the late sixties and early seventies, blacks began to complain that schools weren't fair to them. [Groups] protested and fought the education authority to do away with the system of 'banding' which appeared to them to put blacks in a second class position in the school. […] There was a black movement in education in this country from the time that our children began to be schooled here. Its spokesman were the parents of young blacks who were born here or brought here […]. In the classrooms […], in the playgrounds […], in the neighbourhoods and ghettoes from which the school drew its population, another

[23] Procter, 'The Street', p. 79.

> movement was in progress. To the classroom teacher it was merely a nuisance at first. It grew into something else. It forced recognition for itself.[24]

Dhondy continues to describe the political action – strikes, demonstrations, and collective movements – of parents and students in attempting to demand change for not only the curriculum, but for the very structure of schooling and its design in the hands of a capitalist, classist, and racist government. In Dhondy's article, the domestic duties of education, nurture, and discipline are blurred with the responsibilities of the state in providing schooling for black youth. Both are subject to the racial and sociopolitical injustices of the state. Dhondy illustrates this via his depiction of the way that classism and racism saturate the school system, so that 'corridors of privilege' from primary to university level education shape the realities for black people in a capitalist and neocolonial society. Such 'corridors of privilege' obstruct the access of the black working class to power and wealth; the protests of teachers and students at the level of the school therefore reach beyond the confines of this space and influence the realities of the labouring sphere.

In the context of its position(ing) in the magazine, the way that the young women of Johnson's story transform the school corridor from a transitional space and into a space of belonging is weighted by Dhondy's reference to 'corridors of privilege' in the same issue. The character Penny is given little development or description by the text – his history, psychology, race, ethnicity, country of birth or heritage, appearance, and mannerisms are omitted from the narrative, meaning that his name assumes heightened significance. The term 'penny' connotes symbolism of British capital, but without attributing much value to it. In the context of *Race Today*'s political rhetoric, the term infers the wealth of a nation built on the violent colonisation of lands and peoples for workers, product, and commerce. Penny can therefore be described as

[24] Farrukh Dhondy, 'Teaching Young Blacks', in *Race Today*, May/June 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/100), pp. 80-86 (p. 82).

not only signifying the prejudices and xenophobia of a dominant hostile culture in Britain, but the very capitalism and colonialism on which the state is built. Penny's name evokes a sense of the history that shapes the current sociopolitical and racial hierarchies in Britain. Through implication, a fiscal power can be understood as providing the story with its action, personified through a deracialised character. The significance of Penny's name as a symbol is supported by the fact that elsewhere in Johnson's stories, other characters assume names which depict something of their function in the story. For example, the women in the first story published by the magazine, 'Ballad For You', are referred to by nicknames which illustrate the narrator's characterisation of them: 'Granny Roach' is 'no bigger dan a cockroach [and] she have many people walking in fear' and 'Chalice' is a vessel always carrying a story, 'she better dan any newspaper or radio.'[25] 'Poet' and 'Country', characters from another of Johnson's stories, are similarly denied names in favour of a representation of another facet of their respective identities.[26] Because of the positioning of 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope' alongside Dhondy's article, the two texts can be read in reference to one another. Therefore, when the group of young women come together in the story to claim the space of the corridor, to force Penny from this space and assert their own belonging, the local setting of the school takes on broader national significance. The corridor in the story conflates with the 'corridors of privilege' interrogated by Dhondy. In the women's retrieval of this space from Penny, the narrative events specific to the story become symbolic of a state-wide context of black communities creating pathways to increased wealth and power via revolutionised education. In short, the space of the school corridor becomes a site of political battle for black youth against the capitalism and colonialism that the term 'penny' signifies.

[25] Jennifer Johnson, 'Ballad For You', in *Race Today*, January 1978 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/97), pp. 10-11 (p. 10).
[26] Jennifer Johnson, 'Prize Giving At The Youth Club', in *Race Today* February 1978 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/98), p. 45.

In its refusal to characterise Penny beyond his name, 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope' denies textual space for the representation of the oppressive and dominant white culture. Instead, the significance of capitalist and colonial structures to the lived realities of the group of young black women is assumed through symbolism and implication. By negating a panoramic view or longform depiction of the oppression faced by the group, the story is able to centre on the actions of the women, their defensive strategies, and their building of a community. As such, Johnson's story performs the shifting of perspective which Dhondy suggests is needed to effect lasting change. Rather than incorporating black studies into the curriculum in a way that would enable the school system to largely retain its oppressive structure,

> I would rather represent in my teaching material the strengths of the black population and try and inculcate in the white pupils of my multi-ethnic classroom, a respect of those strengths. Rather than say how we were once strong and once defeated, I would try and say how we are strong today and how we are proceeding today to inflict defeats.[27]

In another of Johnson's stories, 'Park Bench Blues', a similar interest is demonstrated in illustrating sites of conflict, but also represses representations of the white community in order to allow the internal actions and experiences of the black community to be centred.

In 'Park Bench Blues', as in 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope', arenas of political battle associated with masculinity are scaled to the perspective of young black British women. In 'Park Bench Blues', the policing of black youth in a local park is reminiscent of the violent interactions between the police force and the black community during carnival events. According to Nicole Ferdinand and Nigel L. Williams, carnival events, such as the longstanding Notting Hill Carnival (hereafter Carnival), are 'central to the articulation of cultures'.[28] As Angela Burrs states, 'Carnival focuses around participation, celebration,

[27] Dhondy, 'Teaching Young Blacks', p. 86.
[28] Nicole Ferdinand and Nigel L. Williams, 'The Making of the London Notting Hill Carnival Festivalscape: Politics and Power and the Notting Hill Carnival', *TMP*, 27 (2018), 33-46 (p. 33).

spontaneity, revelry and bacchanal'; it fosters at once the freedom of expression and movement for discrete cultures as well as the solidarity of community.[29] In 'Park Bench Blues', such celebration of both unique identity and communal gathering with spontaneous and bacchanalian spirit typical of Carnival is relocated to a local park. In the story, a group of young women skip school and take to the park, equipped with 'Embassy an' a pile a records.'[30] Throughout the day, other people come and go as the young women dance and celebrate their time together and with the newcomers, embracing the others because 'all dem care about is blues dance', and it 'feel right' to share this experience 'wid dem'.[31] The significance of music to the celebration of identity in Carnival is emphasised in the editorial which introduces the May/June 1978 issue of *Race Today*. The way that the story centres on the group dancing in 'broad daylight' as 'every two minutes, a new man come on an' join in' resonates with the Collective's comment in the editorial, that the event is a 'form of dramatic spectacle of song and dance.'[32] The celebration of both community and the individuality of culture is therefore stressed by the narrative, and revelry and bacchanal are signalled by the events of the story: responsibilities and duties – school attendance – are forgotten for the day; freedom of movement is embodied in the fluidity of dance; and activities such as heavy drinking and gambling indicate the carefree mood of the event.

By the end of 'Park Bench Blues', though, the 'carnival' is interrupted by an authoritative figure, the mother of one of the young women who organised the event. The mother becomes violent, and while the event continues, the mood is changed: the narrator cannot maintain her usual humour because it was 'so serious' and the park transforms from a

[29] Angela Burrs, '"The Freedom of the Slaves to Walk the Streets": Celebration, Spontaneity and Revelry versus Logistics at the Notting Hill Carnival', in *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds*, eds. David Picard and Mike Robinson, (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2006), pp. 84-98 (p. 85).
[30] Jennifer Johnson, 'Park Bench Blues', in *Race Today*, January 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/97, pp. 11-12 (p. 11).
[31] Johnson, 'Park Bench Blues', p. 12.
[32] Johnson, 'Park Bench Blues', pp. 11-12; Race Today Collective, 'Editorial: Carnival '78', in *Race Today*, May/June 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/100), p. 75.

place of Carnival-like celebration into one of 'blues.'[33] Such violent managing of the event by an interfering authority echoes the conflict between Carnival and the dominant white culture in the 1970s. According to the editorial in *Race Today*, the national belonging for black Britons that Carnival represents and celebrates is in constant tension with the state, and faces capitalist and neocolonial interference from the government. The Collective states that Carnival's:

> presentation is a matter of artistic organisation and production. […] [T]he organisers and producers of the event have had to combat attempts by senior police officers […] to alter the artistic production of the festival into a form and shape most convenient to the head of police riot […]. There can be no entrance fee to the festival by the very nature of its structural and philosophical approach. […] [T]he established practice, in the United Kingdom, that the arts be subsided from state funds must be the major source from which the Carnival movement is to be funded. […] [T]he major opposition comes from the institutions of the state and is supplemented by internal forces which are no less subversive in their attempts to disrupt and demoralise. [34]

Such emphasis on the state's attempt to monetise, control, disrupt, and demoralise Carnival indicates the magazine's perception of capitalist and neocolonial interference, which finds violent means of manifestation when delivered by the Metropolitan police.

Attested to by the editorial of the January 1978 issue, *Race Today* largely represents Carnival through the lens it has often come to be seen through: the violence and conflict between Carnival goers and the police. According to Ferdinand and Williams, carnival events 'can become a source of conflict since public and private actors may apply differing claims to a given space'.[35] Such a struggle over the uses to which public spaces could be put is riddled in this context with structural racism and the uneven distribution of power, with the police force ultimately governing Carnival and the broader area of Notting Hill.[36] The celebration, revelry, and spontaneity of Carnival was, in the 1970s, less the subject of its representation in the media

[33] Johnson, 'Park Bench Blues', p. 12.
[34] Race Today Collective, 'Editorial', p. 75.
[35] Ferdinand and Williams, 'The Making of the Notting Hill Carnival Festivalscape', p. 34.
[36] Procter, 'The Street', p. 86.

than the policing of this event. As one magazine has emphasised, 'law and order became the main Press angle' to report on Carnival activities.[37] Law and order imposed upon Carnival contradict the kind of spontaneity of the event that is reflected in Johnson's echoing of its nature of open celebration in 'Park Bench Blues'. Nevertheless, as Burrs notes, Carnival has, even in more recent years, 'been beset by problems, or, at least, it has been seen as such by the media who have conveyed to the public a negative image of it.'[38] The representational image to which Burrs refers is the controversy surrounding its organisation and management, the consistent clashing between the grassroots design of Carnival and the policing of it performed in the name of the state. Procter illuminates the violent policing of Carnival in this period. He states that in the 1970s:

> tensions between the carnival's participants and those policing it fully emerged. In 1974 members of the crowd wore prison uniforms in order to signal the increasingly intrusive policing of Notting Hill. […] The restrictive 'containment' strategies adopted by the police worked to control and hinder movement though the streets across which the carnival normally progressed. […] Policing the carnival expresses as its ultimate goal, the containment or confinement of the black pedestrian body.[39]

It is again the adult black male body to which Procter refers here, and Johnson's depiction of familial violence and conflict offers a domesticised perspective through which to consider the political arena of Carnival. However, 'Park Bench Blues' is more subversive in how it illustrates violent conflict internal to the black communities of Britain, rather than between these communities and the dominant culture of the state. It is a generational conflict that imposes management and policing upon the park bench 'carnival'. Furthermore, the choice to omit representation of the oppression imposed by the white community compels the story to

[37] Touch Magazine, 'Mas Movement', *Touch in Association with Time Out Magazine: Guide to Carnival* (1996), pp. 4-10 (p. 6).
[38] Burrs, 'Celebration, Spontaneity, and Revelry versus Logistics', p. 84.
[39] Procter, 'The Street', pp. 84-85.

be read in the particular context of the black youth of Britain, rather than the conflicts between cultures which typify their parents' experiences of Carnival.

In 'Park Bench Blues', conflict between black Britons who migrated to the metropole and those born and/or raised in the UK structures the plot. The change in mood from celebration to blues recalls the controversy surrounding Carnival proper. Conceiving of an environment of conflict within black communities, Johnson's story exemplifies a generational tension which is more commonly associated with black writing at the turn of the twenty-first century. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey discuss how the agency of black British youth to represent experiences of cultural hybridity and belonging in and to Britain is usually associated with a 'young and dynamic' community of writers at the beginning of the new millennium. These writers are typified as distinct from 'those of the preceding ("postcolonial") generation'; the new community is 'very explicit about differentiating their neo-millennial aspirations from the old (colonialist and imperialist) ethos of Great Britain'.[40] The generation of migrants to Britain, according to Kadija Sesay, 'more clearly fall into that category of […] "post colonial"' than their children, 'born in Britain, educated in Britain'. She continues, 'because of heritage and parentage, their "take" on Britain is viewed through different glasses than those born elsewhere'.[41] Sesay, Ramey, and Arana find that the writings of the two loosely categorised generations not only reflect differing priorities, interests, and experiences of being black in Britain, but are often in a state of friction with one another. Usually, this is due to a change in the assertion of belonging in and to Britain over the late twentieth century. The earlier 'postcolonial' generation's writing frequently illustrates the black community steering between the demands of respectability and acceptability in a new, hostile homeland. For the generation

[40] R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, 'Introduction', in, *Black British Writing*, eds. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 1-7 (p. 2).
[41] Kadija Sesay, 'Introduction', in *Write Black, Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib, 2005), pp. 15-19 (pp. 15-16).

of black British writers, comparatively, a degree of belonging is already supposed and concerned with Britain's refusal to accept its cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity. The burden of asserting belonging is transferred, between the two generations, from the black community to the nation itself. Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips explore the tension between the generations in relation to the context of schooling:

> the teacher was part of a hierarchy which wielded benevolent and unquestioned authority. Most Caribbean parents, pre-occupied with working long, hard hours, assumed the same attitudes towards education in Britain […]. On the other hand, the entire generation of migrant schoolchildren […], in later decades, began recreating the identity of the migrants as part of the British population […] and their dreams of the future would come to merge with those of their compatriots. In the short term the experience opened up a gap between the generations […].[42]

In 'Park Bench Blues', such friction between generations is demonstrated by the specificities of the conflict between mother and daughter: Sheila's mother takes issue not necessarily with the fact that her daughter has missed school, but with how this looks to outsiders when Sheila's truancy takes place 'right ina di school mout'.'[43] It is an issue of respectability, her daughter flaunting her rebellion in sight of the authority of the school. Sheila, on the other hand, rejects her mother's need to abide by the rules of the white culture in order to belong in Britain. On the contrary, if her mother cannot come to terms with her behaviour, then Sheila will 'turn orphan now', with the public space of Britain, Norwood Park, becoming her new home: '1st person: "Is whey y'u live, gal?" / Sheila: "Norwood Park, man: di bench pan top a di hill."'[44]

Sheila and the other young black women of the story already feel that they belong in this public space, that it is a base for the community to elude the expectations of their parents. Johnson's articulation of the women's sense of presupposed belonging resounds with Ramey

[42] Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 202.
[43] Johnson, 'Park Bench Blues', p. 12.
[44] Johnson, 'Park Bench Blues', p. 12.

and Arana's declaration that young black Britons 'do not write about their *staying power* because they are not the ones who migrated. Britain, they affirm, *is* their country. They are now rewriting Britain's literary history as well as drafting its future.'[45] However, Johnson's story contradicts their finding that it is the 'neo-millennial generation' of writers which articulates this belonging in Britain. Rather, Johnson's depiction of black British youthhood subverts the assumption that representational agency was lacking for black youth until the turn of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, by omitting any representation from 'Park Bench Blues' of conflict between black and white communities in Britain and instead focusing on internal generational conflict, Johnson assumes a certain political agency for the young black women of her story. With such agency, they claim the public space of the park and reject the domestic or familial pressures faced by their mothers.

'Park Bench Blues', therefore, poses a challenge to the way that black youth in the 1970s, particularly young women, have frequently been conceived of and written. In a similarly subversive manner, 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope' destabilises the association of black women with the domestic sphere in this period. In both stories, representation of the white community is minimised in order to illuminate the defensive strategies, experiences, and expression of the black community depicted, which is in itself a subversive writing technique for a context in which the realities of (post)coloniality are usually centred. In another of Johnson's stories, though, representation of a white community becomes the focal point of the narrative. In 'Joe Ninety', a group of young women, 'a set a gal whey seh dem a punk rocker', dress up a white student so that 'him […] punk rocker too.'[46] The centring of white fashion in 'Joe Ninety' does not, however, negate Johnson's subversive impact elsewhere in minimalising representation of the dominant and oppressive culture. Rather, Johnson's technique here necessarily upturns the

[45] Arana and Ramey, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[46] Jennifer Johnson, 'Joe Ninety', in *Race Today*, March 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/99), p. 71 (all subsequent page references are p. 71).

model that she has thus far established. In doing so, 'Joe Ninety' is able to highlight the ways in which white posture and fashion of the era assumes political orientation in a way that was not addressed as such in the 1970s. Procter discusses the containment strategies of criminalising the black body, noting how media coverage represented this body via the supposition of threat and opposition. Discussing a *Times* article which was published in 1970, Procter argues that:

> The pedestrian body of this article is called upon to inform deteriorating relations between blacks and the police. […] In the *Times* article perambulation and street occupation appear as racially determined acts. The height of the "Negro", his "litheness", the "elegance" of his walk are used to diagnose an essentialised and innate "negritude" that has its origins in nature, not culture, that is expressive of an unquestionable racial taxonomy.'[47]

As the decade proceeded, black Britons adopted what could be described as political uniforms, certain postures and attire, as a means of making public and recognisable a communal stance against the kind of white oppression which the *Times* article represents.[48] Such uniform signified opposition to oppression, particularly the 'military accent of black clothing in the seventies', but was read and represented by the dominant culture as threatening.[49] While black posture and fashion in the 1970s were firmly politicised and associated with threat, aggression, and battle, similar political statements through white fashions instead saturated the dominant culture. Johnson's 'Joe Ninety' illuminates such permeation.

In the story, a group of young black women are depicted as 'inna some heavy chat' in the school canteen, 'when a bwoy in front a dem start jine in'. The story opens as if it will be focalised by the conflict between the group and this boy – the women are irritated by his interruption and assume a defensive stance, until 'di bwoy stan' up an' wish to gad him nevah

[47] Procter, 'The Street', p. 69.
[48] Procter, 'The Street', p. 72.
[49] Procter, 'The Street', p. 71.

did open him mout'.' Instead of continuing to depict this moment of confrontation, however, the narrator instead turns to focus on this boy's appearance and attitude, his 'style' that associates him with the 'people inna dis worl' ya oonu don't want fi meet.' Specifically, the story details how this boy's youth made him impressionable and vulnerable to the influence of the racist and oppressive ideology of the dominant culture, and closes with his indoctrination into this culture. 'Joe Ninety' depicts the inculcation of this boy via the description of his body and fashion. To begin with, he is physically small – 'him hav' on a pair a glasses dat way too big fi him face' – associating his physique with childhood; by the end, his stature is imposing:

> Di bwoy stan' up. Him eye black, him lip black, him hair red an' him hav' on a nice black cloak. One a di dinner lady stan' up wid har han' ovah har eye dem an' tremble from shack. Andah di cloak di bwoy hav' on a pair a cowboy boot an a straight leg suit whey look like it come off a dead soldier back.

As such, a particular attire is associated with the boy's transformation from youth to political maturity. His punk rocker look establishes him as part of a culture which, to use Procter's term, 'contains' black communities, forcing them out of public spaces and back into the private domain of the home: as the narrator states at the end of the story, 'I really glad seh yu people noh haffi si him ar oonu wouldn't be comin' out a oonu house too aaften.' However, with the founding of the Anti-Nazi League in 1977, punk rock was involved in the era's movements of antiracism. Its political stance allied with Rock Against Racism, a campaign which ran between 1976 and 1981 and, as described by Ian Goodyer, intended to 'compensa[te] for the lack of a powerful industrial challenge to racism and fascism.'[50] Paul Gilroy has discussed the involvement and impact of RAR and punk in antiracism and shaping solidarity between black and white youth in the 1970s, 'with punk supplying an oppositional language through which RAR anti-racism could speak a truly populist politics.'[51] However, in Johnson's story, the

[50] Ian Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 3.
[51] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 156.

narrator does not position the representation of punk rock in solidarity with the young black community she depicts. Rather, the boy is positioned as a threat; even as the narrator sustains her usual tone of jest when describing his dress, she closes with a grave warning to the reader: 'I haffi look pan all ar I wouldn't hav' a damn t'ing fi write bout an' mak oonu realise dat there is some people inna dis world' yah oonu don't want fi meet.' The reason for Johnson's positioning of the punk rocker as a threatening figure may involve the effect of her blurring the description of his clothing with the attire of another prominent fashion and posture of white culture in the period, one which influenced the fashion of the punk movement: the Teds.

When the narrator of 'Joe Ninety' describes the boy's clothing, she emphasises his 'straight leg suit', his long black cloak, and his cowboy boots. Such attire is described as the uniform of the Teddy Boys by Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips:

> By the middle of the fifties, "Teddy Boy" had become a generic name for working-class delinquents, or working-class young men who merely looked like delinquents. They had that name because they had, apparently, adopted what was said to be a version of Edwardian dress – long jackets, sometimes reaching right down to the knee, tight "drainpipe" trousers which fitted so close at the ankles that they had to work their feet into them with care, […] and shoes which came to a point […]. Not every Teddy Boy wore the full regalia, but all of them had at least one of the elements. […] It was the first manifestation of youth culture to sweep across the country […] It remained firmly working class, symbolising rebellion, and the worst Teds were proud to be mad, bad and dangerous to know. Later on people focused on the style, but it was really all about culture. […] The culture was all about territory.[52]

Here, Phillips and Phillips are discussing the 1950s specifically. Due to the racist nature of Teddy Boy culture, its romanticising of a past era of English conservatism and British Empire as symbolised by its fashion, this commanding of territory was rife with violence and aggression aimed at the black communities of Britain. Over the next two decades, rioting and conflict between the Teds and Britain's black communities were widespread, particularly in London and Nottingham. As Procter emphasises, the black body and fashion became sites of

[52] Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 161.

criminalisation and scaremongering, perceived as statements of hostility and threat towards the culture of the state.[53] While the militarism of black attire in the 1970s was a response to the inherent racism of white communities such as the Teddy Boys, the former has received a lasting reputation of racially determined criminality, whereas the latter, though also often associated with violence and antagonism, is filtered through the lens of class rather than race: Teddy Boy culture was a 'routine part of life in every working-class district'.[54] In Phillips and Phillips' terms, the 'ideology of whiteness' adopted the 'racial superiority' central to the culture of the Teddy Boys. On the other hand, media depictions of the black presence in Britain 'represented the migrants as a threat, often regurgitating urban myths about drugging and abducting young women.'[55] The responses of the black communities through fashion and rioting were delineated as hostility; Teddy Boy ideology instead permeated the dominant culture:

> local hooligans and Teds were buoyed up by the self righteous feeling that they were on the cutting edge of a popular consensus […] For many of them the harassment of black people was the first opportunity they had to insert themselves into public life, to become part of the wider community with a recognised social role – guardians of the race, protectors of women and children, a last line of defence against the creeping invasion of aliens.[56]

Teddy Boy culture of the 1950s shaped and was shaped by the conservatism and racism of the postwar decades. Enoch Powell's speeches in the late 1960s demonstrated how 'popular culture [was] still haunted by the memories' of racial conflict in the 1950s.[57] By the 1970s, the notion of the migrant as a threat to society had developed and become institutionalised: 'The Labour Government was defeated in 1970. […] Powellism had distracted, discredited and intimidated the government to the point where it had lost confidence.'[58]

[53] Procter, 'The Street', p. 81.
[54] Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 162.
[55] Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 163-164.
[56] Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 167.
[57] Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 245.
[58] Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 254.

As a result, the style and attitude of the Teddy Boys persisted into the 1970s, as did the saturation of their ideology in dominant and popular culture. However, at the end of the decade, the Teddy Boys came into conflict with a competing faction of white youth culture, punk rock. Despite their opposing political allegiances, the Teds and the punks were influenced by one another in terms of fashion, culture, and music, and style ultimately took precedence over political ideology for the majority of Britain's white youth. As Goodyer notes, the '"ironic" and subversive intentions behind punks' attitudes', such as 'the wearing of Nazi insignia', can be perceived as conservatism when style circulates outside of its political context. [59] When the boy in 'Joe Ninety' assumes the trend of the punks, illustrated in his black eyes and lips and red hair, but with attire indiscernible from the that of the Teds, the story evokes a sense of how these two factions of white culture are confused in the response of white youth to Conservative politics. The punk movement in general was socialist, antiracist, and aligned with the Anti-Nazi League. However, in its response to the National Front, Nazi symbolism and fascism were prevalent culturally. Joe Ninety's attire evokes a sense of the confused response of white youth to the politicisation of style surrounding the Teddy Boys and the punk rock movement. For the characters in Johnson's story, a political divide between the two factions, based on the opposition of conservative and radical politics, is not prevalent in the story. Rather, the image of white fashion and what it could represent in terms of violent traditionalism haunts the practice of dress-up depicted by 'Joe Ninety'.

In making the style, fashion, and posture of punk culture in the period the focal point of the narrative, a threat to the community based on confused responses to politicised fashion, Johnson mirrors with subversive effect the dominant representation of the black body in the 1970s. Johnson's commentary on such prevailing ideological conceptions of the black body in postcolonial Britain is further illuminated by the way in which her formal technique infers

[59] Goodyer, *Crisis Music*, p. 4.

broader political significance when read in reference to the material surrounding it in the magazine. In an article published in the same issue as 'Joe Ninety', Darcus Howe writes that 'the political focus of the entire nation has been trained so mercilessly and murderously on blacks.[60] He is discussing the intentions of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party to 'take us back to the colonial conditions of yesteryear.'[61] Goodyer suggests that the language of Margaret Thatcher's campaign marked a change in racism in Britain, from a language of 'biological inferiority of non-white races' to 'the undesirability of their cultural practices.' He continues,

> [s]peaking in 1978, the Conservative Party leader and future Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher managed to invoke three articles of the racist creed – colour, culture and immigration – when she spoke about limiting the numbers of people entering Britain […]. The shift away from the pseudo-scientific concept of race and towards the more culture-bound notion of "ethnicity" – at least in terms of public discourse – represents, in part a retreat by racists to a more defensible condition.[62]

Given the success of Thatcher's campaign for Prime Minister, when Goodyer describes the ideology of racists, it is perhaps better to consider such racist ideology as representative of the oppressive dominant culture of Britain in the period. As Goodyer notes, '[e]laborate taxonomic hierarchies based on such phenotypical features as eye shape, skeletal structure, and skin colour [continued to have] an enormous ideological significance', even as the racism of Britain was relocated to the realm of culture.[63] In his article, Howe discusses the ways in which the shift towards a rhetoric of culture carries with it the colonial propaganda which turned to science in order to promote fictions about the black body and physiology, its supposed subordination to white biology. He suggests that Thatcher's terminology of culture is a means of sloganizing the notion that 'your head is smaller than theirs and therefore you are inferior', that it is 'another

[60] Darcus Howe, 'Enter Mrs Thatcher', in *Race Today*, March 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/99), pp. 57-62 (p. 58).
[61] Howe, 'Thatcher', p. 62.
[62] Goodyer, *Crisis Music*, p. 6.
[63] Goodyer, *Crisis Music*, p. 6.

stage in the implementation of a system of economic exploitation over blacks' based in this idea of inferiority.[64]

'Joe Ninety' recalls Howe's comments regarding the continuing impact of the fiction of imperial science around the black body in postcolonial Britain. Specifically, it draws the genre of science fiction into the bounds of its narrative. That is, the story takes its title from the fact that the narrator calls the punk rocker by the name Joe Ninety, because of his physical resemblance to the protagonist of the contemporary British television programme by the same name. *Joe 90* imagines the activities of a child in a futuristic Britain who is the subject of scientific experimentation. With unlimited (western) knowledge and advanced technology as a result of such experimentation, Joe becomes a spy for an international intelligence network, an organisation which desires the kind of superior science which Joe embodies. He is an Übermensch-like figure, to be conceived of as a superior human in physiological terms because he has been endowed with the ultimate goal of western modernity: the peak of scientific and technological advance. Via the title of her story, Johnson invites such an idea into the bounds of her narrative. Gérard Genette suggests that the title of a narrative text is a paratextual element of 'reduction'. It is a signifier of 'knowledge by hearsay', a 'situation of communication' which primarily 'identif[ies] the work'.[65] Johnson's 'Joe Ninety' can be understood as an example of what Genette classifies as a 'generic' or 'rhematic' title, one which indicates the formal design of the text rather than its subject matter per se.[66] The title has a 'connotative function'; 'laden with intentions', it is a 'key to interpretation'.[67] A title provides a reduced, economical context through which the body of the text should be read,[68] and Johnson's title directs the

[64] Howe, 'Thatcher', pp. 58-59.
[65] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 72.
Genette, *Paratexts*, pp. 62-76.
[66] Genette, *Paratexts*, pp. 78-79.
[67] Genette, *Paratexts*, pp. 89-91.
[68] Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 93.

interpretation of her narrative to ensure that it will be read in a particular context of science fiction. Johnson's rhematic title filters her depiction of the political undercurrent of white fashion in the 1970s through the lens of a science fiction which promotes the superiority of western knowledge and modernity. Positioned alongside Howe's article in the magazine, the story's inference of this context recalls the taxonomising of black biology as inferior in the name of science and modernity, in the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, in the Enlightenment, in the theory of polygeny, in Darwinism and natural selection, and later in the assumption of superiority in industrial societies. Through genre, through the way in which the title of the story interacts with the agents of narrative, Johnson's reference to science fiction becomes a commentary on the fiction of scientific racism. Furthermore, her rendering of this inference through the symbolism of white culture in the contemporary moment means that such imperial ideology is shown to undergird contemporaneous notions of culture in sociopolitical realities.

'Joe Ninety' is not the only story in which Johnson performs such an adroit play with the inference and expectations of various forms, platforms, and genres. Rather, reference to different kinds of representation and their locations of creation and dissemination are littered throughout her five stories. In 'Park Bench Blues', the cultural significance of Blues to the Pan-African movement is evoked and rescaled for the celebration of local black culture. Furthermore, the story inhabits the mood of 'blues' in order to stress generational conflict. In 'Time Is Langah Dan Rope', the location in which Penny's articulation of his xenophobia takes place is the 'Technical Drawing class'.[69] In a story with extremely limited textual space, being only half a page long, the inclusion of such a detail endues this location with particular significance. Technical drawing implies some sort of association with precision and neutrality, with a visual communication of a structure and its function. Set in this classroom, Penny's

[69] Johnson, 'Time', p. 95.

xenophobia invites reflection on structural forces, on what exactly the idea of 'precision' and 'neutrality' carries with it when racial politics are taken into consideration. Perhaps her most overt interrogation of formal expectations, though, takes place in the first of Johnson's stories published by *Race Today*, 'Ballad For You'. Specifically, this story conflates the historical responsibilities of the ballad, when published in British periodicals, for inciting political action from the masses with the formal characteristics of gossip, the association of the latter with the antipolitical.

'Ballad For You' begins by introducing a set of characters, the young black women who recur throughout Johnson's stories, in various situations in and around the school. The story provides this introduction of character with a significant amount of textual space in a two-page story, suggesting that the young community assumes focal magnitude for the narrative as opposed to its plot. Introduced are the characters Lightening, Chalice, Charlie, Granny Roach and Squeaky; the narrator states that these women are 'one an' di same but individual in every sense', a description which accentuates the dynamics of the individual and the community. Lightening 'hail from Guyana' and her friends at college taught her English so that 'now she pass CSE ina it'; 'Chalice come from Guyana too'; Charlie 'love a trouble an' always in di thick of it'; 'Granny Roach is jus' four feet an' mash-mash', she 'live in Dulwich' and 'she have di biggest mout' in di world'; and Squeaky lives 'right pan di Front Line a Brixton'.[70] While Lightening and Granny Roach have moved from Guyana to London, the 'addah three born right yah soh ina Inglan' but dem parents come from Jam-Down.'[71] The narrator is also presented as a part of this community through Johnson's overt characterisation of this figure. She is given a name, Frontline Jennie, and assumes the dialect, attitude, and culture of rest of the group. By narrating in Caribbean patois, Frontline Jennie speaks with the same dialect as

[70] Jennifer Johnson, 'Ballad For You', in *Race Today*, January 1978 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/97), pp. 10-11 (p. 10).
[71] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 10.

the speech which she narrates, and her style of narration is intended to be humorous – 'jus' a bit of fun' – even while it may illustrate the traumatic realities of racism, prejudice, and oppression faced by black British youth. This discordant humorous tone of narration mirrors the posture of a group which 'pap big laugh' in the face of opposition from the dominant culture.[72] The narrator, while depicted as part of the group through narrative voice, is removed from the activities which she relays: she is the chronicler of events rather than a participant in them. Where Squeaky occupies the 'Front Line' of Brixton in association with political battle, the narrator is instead on the frontline at a textual level, being the mediator between the group and the reader. Both of these senses of the frontline, though, are relevant to the form of the ballad which Johnson infers via the title of the story.

Johnson's centring of political community and the duality of her use of the term 'frontline' accentuates the significance of the form of the ballad which the title overlays upon the narrative. 'Ballad For You' is another rhematic title; it directs the function and interpretation of the story by making overt the formal significance of its structure. Exploring the ballad in the context of eighteenth-century periodical publication in Britain, Paul Goring stresses the significance of narrative to this form of verse. While it assumes the technical precision of other contemporaneous poetry, its publishing circumstances encouraged the 'collision of ideas from "high" and "low" culture', in order to appeal to the masses through its nature of simplicity and encourage emotional response.[73] Thus, refined form was made accessible through the mould of narrative, through the recognisable shape and function of myth and oral storytelling to comment upon the world.[74] Goring continues to explain how in this period, the ballad became a vessel for political rhetoric and action, with the storyteller assuming

[72] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 10.
[73] Paul Goring, 'Literature in the Eighteenth Century', in *Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), p. 76.
[74] Goring, 'Literature in the Eighteenth Century', pp. 76-77.

the role of mediator or mouthpiece for a particular political stance.[75] Johnson's ballad infers this history of the form. Narrative is utilised to accentuate the representation of political realities for young black women; and the overt presence of the narrator in delivering these events bestows upon this figure an almost bardic responsibility, relying on the principles of storytelling to not only inform the reader of the activities of this community, but to incite in this figure a particular political allegiance. Her responsibility as orator and chronicler is emphasised in the way in which the narrator continuously interrupts her delivery of the narrative with references to her own means of narration. She states, for example in 'Ballad For You', that she will get '[b]ack to the story now', and mediates the reader's response to the traumatic events relayed by reminding them that it is 'jus' a bit a fun.'[76] Furthermore, she alerts the reader to the way in which her narration arbitrates the action, suggesting that 'seeing' the activities of this group is 'bettah dan reading it.'[77]

Such an overt characterisation and presence of the voice which delivers the narrative has the effect of associating the narrator with a certain political attitude adopted by the black British youth of the 1970s, in response to the hostility of the dominant culture. That is, the plot of 'Ballad For You' depicts the exclusion that the group faces as its members move in public spaces occupied by the oppressive dominant culture. Above all, it illustrates the means by which the group defends itself against such opposition. The defensive strategies of the group entail an effort to transform its exclusion from the dominant culture into exclusivity, an assertion of difference that is not forced upon the group but is instead deliberate and desirable. The women demonstrate what Dick Hebdige describes as black youth of the 1970s 'moving with a new reassurance' in public spaces, with 'more deliberate "sass"', a posture which

[75] Goring, 'Literature in the Eighteenth Century', p. 77.
[76] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', pp. 10-11.
[77] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 11.

indicates the assertion of belonging in places dominated by a hostile culture.[78] In the terms of narrator Frontline Jennie, 'di five a dem togeddah is not really looking fi trouble; dem is jus' high-spirited. […] But trouble love dem.'[79] Such 'sass' and its response to and from the dominant culture is illustrated in the events of 'Ballad For You'. The way that the women dress, dance, and present themselves at a party, for instance, is met with resentment from the other partygoers, who 'nevah like' the young women, 'but dem nevah seh not'ing.' Instead, they just 'stare'.[80] The implication is a silent or oppressive as opposed to overt tension between the women and the dominant culture. Such tension resonates with Procter's suggestion that racial politics on the street were not embraced as a signifier of a changing, more progressive and inclusive Britain, but subject to an 'architecture of containment' whose tactics were those of 'erasure, distillation, and purification'.[81] Like the masculinist response to such containment that Hebdige highlights, the women in the story also assume a posture of new found reassurance, of deliberate 'sass': Granny Roach 'lif' up she skirt an' ask di gal if she see enough yet' in response to the silent stare.[82] 'Sass' is a political statement at the level of the experience of black British youth, and the narrator declares her support for and engagement with this attitude and stance through her style of narration. Her own 'sass' is established through her tone, her assertion that the humorous account of social conflict is 'jus' a bit a fun. An' it may be at your expense.'[83] Like the women's transformation of their exclusion into exclusivity, Frontline Jennie evokes a similar effect for her narration: she suggests that if 'you noh know [the women], you aint know anybody.'[84]

[78] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 43.
[79] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 10.
[80] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', pp. 10-11.
[81] Procter, 'The Street', p. 84.
[82] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 11.
[83] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 11.
[84] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 10.

The political undercurrent of the attitude of the group and narrator is, however, undermined by Johnson's formal technique of rendering the actions of the group through the style of gossip. Gossip is, according to Newman, somewhat antipolitical. Gossip developed in newsmedia in the interwar period as a 'retreat from heavy political exposition', a means of emphasising lifestyle over politics through a personable and humorous design of writing in order to 'close the gap between authorship and content. The gossip column needed to relay the personal experience of its author in order to engage its readership.'[85] It is profit-driven rather than hard-hitting, and has thus come to be associated with a cultural downturn in newsmedia.[86] For Johnson's stories, however, gossip is not a direct symbol of 'low' culture, but a fundamental tactic for establishing the exclusivity of the community. The young women's social agency is sourced in a section of the school common room which they call 'gossip corner', because 'dem gal will sit ina dat corner an' a laugh an' smile wid you but a chat you same time.' Here, the women become the 'most bold face set a gal you will buck up anywhey.'[87] The agency established in this space becomes transferable to other situations and locations to defend against hostility: 'watch you step 'cause di gossip corner might be there.'[88] As such, gossip is reclaimed by Johnson's stories as a positive signifier of young black British women's identity. It is not an emblem of 'low' culture, but a means of asserting the social agency of a subsection of a community excluded from the structures and institutions of power.

Gossip corner is not only a means of acquiring social agency, but also of obtaining a representational platform for the experiences of young black British women. Frontline Jennie comments on the fact that her narration must be filtered through the style of gossip, because this is the 'corner' that the magazine 'give mi […] fi fill in every month.'[89] The narrator

[85] Newman, *The Celebrity Gossip Column*, p. 18.
[86] Newman, *The Celebrity Gossip Column*, p. 15.
[87] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 10.
[88] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 11.
[89] Jennifer Johnson, 'Prize Giving At The Youth Club', in *Race Today*, February 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/98), p. 45.

explicitly interrupts her duties as orator to remark upon how her platform affects what she is able to write, or rather *how* she is able to write. Speaking from the platform of a gossip corner, She suggests that her narration is 'rubbish ah scrawl', a statement which draws into question the intention and management of its formal design. There is an implication that undergirds Johnson's stories that the style of Frontline Jennie's narration has a potentially undesirable and uncontrollable impact upon what is narrated. The implication is made explicit in 'Ballad For You' when the distinction is introduced between 'seeing' the action and 'reading' it.[90] The separation between what 'happened' and how this has been recorded encourages reflection upon the narrator's tendency towards gossip and upon the ways in which this genre renders the events of the narrative for the reader, filtering them through a certain lens. Furthermore, it draws attention to the platform of dissemination, specifically how this platform has a shaping power over the narrative at hand. Positioned by the magazine as a gossip column, this genre is the only means by which Frontline Jennie or Johnson's voice can find dissemination. The narrator embodies the attitude of such a style while Johnson separates herself from it. That is, Johnson reveals in an interview published in *Race Today* that she associates herself with the 'cagey'[91] Squeaky – a silent character in the narrative action – rather than the mediatorial figure of Frontline Jennie.[92] Johnson's positioning of the representation of herself in her fiction can be read as an act of relinquishing implied authorial control to her narrator. Furthermore, given Frontline Jennie's explicit manifestation of the character of the genre that she inhabits, control is bestowed upon the platform of expression.

To 'squeak', as in the trait attributed to Johnson's character by her narrator, is to inform on someone's agitation of the status quo for the benefit of an authoritative interlocuter. This is indeed the responsibility that *Race Today* enlists for Johnson and her representational capacity.

[90] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 11.
[91] Johnson, 'Ballad For You', p. 10.
[92] Anon, 'Backlash: On Jennifer Johnson', in *Race Today* February 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/98), p. 32.

The magazine suggests that Johnson's stories 'documen[t] the experiences of young blacks in Britain, like herself, with great honesty and humour', for the sake of educating the reader of *Race Today* on the activities and experiences of Britain's black youth in the 'centre of unemployed social activity.'[93] The introduction of Johnson quoted here establishes certain expectations for her work – the illustration of her community's movement and behaviour outside of the labouring sphere of the state, and with accuracy and transparency. The magazine links Johnson's fiction with 'the kind of authenticity that sustains the lives of young blacks in Britain.'[94] Elsewhere, it suggests that what 'sustains' black youth in the 'centre of unemployed social activity' is misbehaviour, truancy, indiscipline, disruption, and rebellion against the structures of the state.[95] *Race Today* finds these to be defensible and defensive responses to the hostility of the dominant culture and its mistreatment of black British youth. However, when the magazine offers Johnson (the voice which it claims can speak for this youth) a representational platform bound to the expectations of gossip, it also generates certain connections between its representation of youth and the characteristics which define the genre.

Quoting the *New Yorker*'s remarks on the nature of gossip, Jack Levin and Arnold Duke note that postwar, gossip in newsmedia came to represent 'the mean, the petty, the unfair, the cheap, the tawdry, the dishonest, and the dishonorable in human nature.'[96] Levin and Duke do not associate gossip directly with these traits, instead defining the genre as 'talk about the public or private lives of other people […] especially when those people aren't around to hear it.'[97] Their attempt to reposition gossip as something worthy of academic study involves establishing the genre's societal value. Such value, they suggest, is found in its propensity to highlight the cultural appeal of scandal as the underbelly of human nature which operates beyond the

[93] Anon, 'Editorial', in *Race Today*, January 1978 (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/97), p. 13.
[94] Race Today Collective, 'Black Creation', in *Race Today* January 1978 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/97), p. 9.
[95] Dhondy, 'Teaching Young Blacks', pp. 81-86.
[96] Jack Levin and Arnold Duke, 'The Inside Scoop', in *Gossip: The Inside Scoop* (New York: Springer, 1987), pp. 1-9 (p. 4).
[97] Levin and Duke, 'The Inside Scoop', p. 7.

established structures of morality and regulation.[98] As such, certain parallels can be drawn between Duke and Levin's assessment of gossip and the way in which Dhondy describes the behaviour of black British youth in response to the oppressive structures of power and wealth that shape the state:

> young blacks fight the police, they refuse dirty jobs; their forms of cultural gathering always bring them into conflict with the rulers of this society, their very music, professed philosophies and life-styles, contain in them an antagonism to school and to society as it is.[99]

Just as the cultural appeal of gossip reveals something of the underside of the realities beget by the institutions of law, morality, and acceptable social conduct, so does black British youth's agitation of the status quo in the 1970s expose the state's intersectional and structural classism and racism. I suggest that, bestowed with the platform of a gossip column to represent her community, Johnson approaches the association of gossip with so-called 'low' culture in order to produce a highly skilful and particularly literary commentary upon such structures and the position(ing) of young black British women within them.

Race Today assumes that its reader is unaware of the true struggles of black British youth, and positions Johnson as the mouthpiece for this community. Johnson is presented as the agent which will illuminate such realities for a reader who perceives the threat, rather than its cause, that this community potentially poses to the norms and standards of society. This much is demonstrated by the magazine's consistent reporting on not only the behaviour of black British youth, but also the stimulus of this behaviour. Johnson, however, negates her role as mouthpiece for the community, by introducing multiple possible authorial presences in her fiction. The role of informant is assigned to Frontline Jennie. The narrator is able to embody the 'squeaking' on her community that the hitherto uniformed reader might expect to find in

[98] Levin and Duke, 'The Inside Scoop', pp. 1-9.
[99] Dhondy, 'Teaching Young Blacks', p. 85.

Johnson's fiction, guided by how it is promoted by the magazine. It is not, however, Squeaky who performs this role, whom Johnson associates with herself. Squeaky is a silent character in the narrative; she does not have representational or societal agency, but is instead subject to the hostility and oppression of the dominant culture. With a representation of Johnson portrayed *within* the narrative, one which shares the limited political and representational agency of young black British women in the structures and hierarchies of the state, Frontline Jennie is free to assume the persona that a gossip column evokes. The narrator inhabits the 'low-culture' expectations of gossip as well as the impression of black British youth culture which *Race Today* imagines its reader to suppose – one which equips itself with 'humour' to defend against oppression and is concerned with the inner workings of its community as opposed to the broader political realities of the labouring sphere. As such, Frontline Jennie's role is important to the representational agency of a black youth that is alienated from the institutions of the family, education, and the law. However, it is not the same role that Johnson intends for herself when she establishes a separation between Johnson the author, Squeaky the character, and Frontline Jennie the narrator.

Johnson's presence in her fiction is apparent in the skilful control she has over how inferences of genre, form, and platform are shaping forces for meaning and content; in her significant political awareness as she moves between contexts of gendered politics, assertions of belonging in Britain, the history of scientific racism, the impact of fashion and posture, and generational conflict; in her redirection of authorial control and influence between three different personae; and in the way in which she renders sociopolitical commentary through formal technique. Where Frontline Jennie represents an important aspect of black British youth culture – its social positioning – Johnson's formal presence in her stories enables the representation of another significant aspect to find a platform: the literary capacity of the young black British woman writer. As discussed above, the representational agency of black youth is

usually associated with neomillennial writers, with the project of redefining Britain at the start of the twenty-first century. Johnson, however, proclaims her representational agency in the 1970s by approaching the short story through adroit literary technique. In *Postcolonial Poetics* (2018), Elleke Boehmer is concerned with focusing postcolonial literatures through the lens of literary technique in the same manner with which I approach Johnson's stories here. She suggests that postcolonial texts operate 'various diachronic forms and techniques' which 'persistent[ly] rewor[k] […] sources and experiences, in order to claim power and express resistance.'[100] Literary craft and contexts are foregrounded with the effect of 'inviting, turning around, and opening readers' attention, while also at times pushing them back.'[101] In her replication and subversion of various genres, forms, and platforms, Johnson similarly evokes a sense of the 'fault-lines' between 'different symbolic vocabularies and registers of representation' coming together in a text.[102] At once establishing the 'low-culture' expectations of gossip and undermining them, contesting such expectations with adroit formal technique, Johnson similarly brings the 'message *and* the medium together'.[103] Johnson overlays formal and generic inference upon the sociopolitical realities that the magazine expects her writing to address and reflect. The commentary on scientific racism and its cultural presence in the contemporary moment in 'Joe Ninety', for example, can only be achieved when the symbolic significance of its title and reference to other forms of media are obliquely invited into the interpretative framework of the story.

Frontline Jennie both is and is not a representation of Johnson. The separation of the two figures creates tension between the representational expectations of young black British women according to their position(ing) in society, and what a literary text can achieve and

[100] Elleke Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st Century Critical Readings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 175.
[101] Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics*, p. 176.
[102] Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics*, p. 176.
[103] Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics*, p. 179.

influence when it circulates beyond the author's control or intent. To 'squeak' also means to achieve something by a very small margin; this alternative definition of 'squeak' can be interpreted in terms of Johnson's silencing of the representation of her own voice through the presence of Squeaky. Johnson's authorial plurality ensures that her literary potential, as it is presented through the formal technique of her stories, clashes with the generic and formal expectations of the platform of dissemination bestowed upon them. The so-called 'low-culture' platform of gossip and adroit formal technique are in constant tension throughout Johnson's stories. The oscillation between the two invites reflection upon how cultural and sociopolitical realities are not only reflected by what is said within a text, but by how this is said – the structure, style, and design available to a writer dependent on their positioning in society. In one of Johnson's stories, 'Prize Giving At The Youth Club', Frontline Jennie, not Johnson or Squeaky, receives an award for her stories published in *Race Today*. Jennie 'feel outta place' at the prize-giving event, in which she is forced to interact with representatives of the institutions which exclude and oppress her community: the deputy mayor and 'one a di hag dem from di poleece station'.[104] Even characters Poet and Darcus, the latter assumedly representative of *Race Today* editor Howe, are depicted as alienating forces, because they misunderstand the intent of her writing when bestowing her with an award of literary merit:

> But is true seh di man noh know rubbish when him see it. If is me anybody give di story to, I woulda tek one look pan di name and di person whey write it, an' half a look pan di name a di people inna it an' fling it give di road-side because mi dus'bin too good fi dem kind a rubbish.

The story draws into question what exactly is being celebrated by this event and by the literary prize granted upon Frontline Jennie and her gossip. The community represented by the narrator is still shown to be at odds with the institution which determines the cultural worth of her literature, to the point that Jennie defines her narration as 'rubbish'. But the fact that she

[104] Johnson, 'Prize Giving At The Youth Club', p. 45 (all subsequent references to this story are p. 45).

has been given a platform for the expression of this community's realities, one which will fulfil the institution's expectations of what her writing could achieve, is congratulated. It is a celebration not of the writing, but of the institution itself, of its admission of Jennie and her work into the kind of networks of literary value which canonise certain literatures and authors. It is a depiction of the determinants of literary value steeped in irony; the culture of black British youth represented by Jennie is applauded and commemorated while her community in reality continues to be alienated from and denied access to the power, culture, and wealth of the state. Any recognition of Johnson's formal technique is overlooked in favour of interpreting Frontline Jennie's narration in the way directed by the magazine – as a representation of sociopolitical realities via gossip rather than literary creativity and innovation through the short story. Each of her stories, but 'Prize Giving At The Youth Club' in particular, reveal that Johnson's representational agency remains subject to the kind of 'hidden, mystified form'[105] of expression which Selma James suggests plagues young black British women in the 1970s.

[105] James, 'Sex, Race, and Working Class', p. 12.

CHAPTER THREE

Anthologising: Black British Women's Short Stories in the Late Twentieth Century

The formal properties of the short story and the process of anthologising share in their acts of selection and omission; both demand a general narrowing of material to adhere to the strictures of form. A metanarrative is created by the literary anthology, an overarching engagement with the cultural and the sociopolitical – with the activities of canonisation. Stories chosen or commissioned for inclusion are to be read in response to such a narrative. Thus, in an anthology, the process of reduction on behalf of the editor, regarding which writings and authors should comprise a literary trend, are present in the formal design of the literary object. Similarly, the short story is often associated with the requirements of limitation and compression,[1] acts of reduction which result from the demands of formal design. This chapter explores the relationship between the literary forms of the short story and the anthology in the context of black British writing. I particularly focus on how their shared characteristics of selection and omission function together to provide narrative silence with textual space. Such a formal effect, I suggest, acutely resonates with the way in which black British women writers command literary presence amid a masculinist literary landscape in the late twentieth century.

[1] This chapter explores theories of short story writing which investigate such properties of the form, but these specific terms, 'limitation' and 'compression', are taken from Judith Leibowitz's delineation of the characteristics of short-form narrative fiction, in Judith Leibowitz, *Narrative Purpose in the Novella* (Paris: The Hague, 1974).

In the previous chapter, I considered the ways in which androcentric representations of street dwelling and political action in the 1970s were predominant in the literary climate of black British writing in the period. I considered James Procter's reading of the street as a 'specifically *masculine* site of self-fashioning in the period', as well as his assessment of how writing of or about the 1970s likewise demonstrates 'masculine pedestrian representation in particular'.[2] I argued that Jennifer Johnson's stories are subversive in how they bring to that context of street occupation the significance of the domestic and the feminine. Here, the masculinist and androcentric representation of black British experience in the postwar decades is again brought to attention. This context illustrates the ways in which the rise of anthologies featuring writing by black women during the late twentieth century can be conceived of as a response to the preceding literary landscape. As summarised by Alison Donnell, in the 1980s, a cluster of anthologies emerged which featured black British women's creative fiction and social documentation, most of which were published by women's and feminist presses.[3] I suggest that such a surge in texts which offer multifarious representations of the experiences and perspectives of black women responded to two specific developments in black British writing during 1970s: the advance of the edited collection and the predominance of male-authored 'classic narratives'.[4]

Donnell discusses how writing of the postwar years centred around the interests of rights and recognition: 'In many of the classic narratives of this generation, it is the great shock of being treated in […] a hostile manner, being denied good housing, enough food and civil company that is registered.'[5] In the 1970s, though, the narrative changed, and it was the question of identity, of being black *and* British that occupied literary production in this decade.

[2] James Procter, 'The Street', in *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 69-124 (p. 72; p. 74).
[3] Alison Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing', *Wasafiri*, 17.36 (2002), 11-17 (p. 14).
[4] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 12.
[5] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 12.

Donnell traces the turn towards collectivity, towards a 'shared past' and the uncertainty of a black British futurity. She notes that the means and forms of representation also shifted between these two generations.[6] As I discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Caribbean writers publishing via the networks of the metropole during the postwar decades largely inhabited the literary scene already existent in London. Thus, the novel was the predominant form through which such hostility was written. In comparison, as Donnell notes, the 1970s turn towards an alternative narrative, one of collectivity and belonging in Britain, employed an alternative form of representation: edited collections.[7] In such publications, 'editors offer a confident articulation of a collective identity and a strong sense of cultural and creative continuity' which countered the preceding generation's representation of exile and alienation. An edited publication allows for the articulation of multiplicity and plurality, though from 'a point of solid identification'.[8] In his discussion of the cultural function of the literary anthology, Paul March-Russell suggests that '[l]iterary anthologies are inextricable from the traditions – hidden or otherwise – that they address. Their composition is necessarily linked to the so-called *canons* of English literature, meaning both the landmarks of prose fiction and the mental maps by which readers make sense of literary history.'[9] In the 1970s, black British edited collections represented 'that brotherhood of struggle that was so significant to those who came during the decolonisation era'. The struggle was for political rights as well as cultural and literary recognition in the national canon.[10]

In the following decade, though, the ability of the edited collection to provide, through form, an anchored centre of collectivity became a means of writing difference in a specific context. As Donnell discusses, amid the 'fractures' beginning to emerge in black British writing

[6] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', pp. 12-13.
[7] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 12.
[8] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 13.
[9] Paul March-Russell, 'Brought to Book: The Anthology and its Uses', in *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 53-65 (p. 56) (original emphasis).
[10] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 13.

in the 1980s, or the 'sustained questioning of the usefulness of black as an organising category', there was a 'conscious sense of the need to articulate difference', particularly in terms of gender and 'not just the difference that being a woman makes but also the difference of being Asian, or lesbian, or a poet.' In this environment, '[c]ultural forms began to reflect the need to articulate the multiple imbrications of identity.'[11] The tradition to which the black British literary anthology responded in this case was indeed 'hidden', to use March-Russell's term. The cultural function of the anthology intended to give a voice to the black women hitherto silenced by the emerging black British canon, to uncover the literary potential of such figures and to mark them upon the 'mental maps' of literary history and futurity. The edited anthology in the 1980s was assumed by feminist and women's presses as a means of expressing the multifaceted identities of black British women. The form was able to retain something of the need for collectivity against the oppressive structures of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and racism.

The era witnessed the publication of many anthologies featuring the writing of black British women, by presses interested in mapping difference through a nexus of shared experiences of oppression – *A Dangerous Knowing* (1985), *Breaking the Silence* (1984), *Let It Be Told* (1987), and *Watchers and Seekers* (1987) are a few notable examples. The context of sociopolitical and literary oppression of women, of such anthologies tracing that oppression and redressing it within their pages, provides a metanarrative which overarches the discrete works contained within the text and associates them with the social, political, and historical, as well as the literary. In general, black British women's anthologies of the period demonstrate a turn towards plurality and intersectionality, towards the articulation of diverse and sometimes conflicting facets of identity. Specifically, it is the representation of the various struggles lived through oppressive sociopolitical structures which occupy these anthologies – texts which, in

[11] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 14.

the terms of the editors of *Breaking the Silence*, 'prioritise the more often silenced women who begin to speak through [the] pages' of the anthology.[12] Such intention, that the edited anthology will allow the hitherto silenced black women a means of expression, is shared amongst other similar texts. In her introduction to *Watchers and Seekers,* for example, Rhonda Cobham begins the text by searching for 'literary foremothers' whose 'aesthetic achievement has been buried in oblivion', but by whom the writers published in the anthology are influenced.[13] In *Let It Be Told*, editor Lauretta Ngcobo reflects upon the desire for black women to 'materialize in the heart of this racist and sexist society where Blackwomen are invisible, to replace the stereotypes in which the white world and Blackmen wish to constrict us.' This involves revealing the 'hidden triumphs that helped us survive the horrors of the past' and bestowing a voice upon the 'unheard'.[14] As is the case for the preface to *Breaking the Silence*, in both of these anthologies, the societal oppression of black women is connected with a suppression of their voices in literature. Resultingly, the provision of literary space for black women writers is linked with sociopolitical agency beyond the text – to confer a voice is to counter the oppression which has forced silence upon the subject. As such, a dynamic between the metanarrative of the anthology – social, historical, political, collective, overarching – and the individual work contained by the text – literary, personal, bounded, determinable – is established, whereby each informs and is informed by the other.

For Gina Wisker, the 1980s is the era in which black women 'moved from invisibility to visibility', revealing the 'many ways [in which] the diaspora is effectively a double dispossession for women, involving colonial oppression and dispossession, and subjugation of

[12] Centreprise Publishing Project, 'Preface', in *Breaking the Silence: Writing by Asian Women*, eds. Centreprise Publishing Project (London: Centreprise Trust, 1984), p. i.
[13] Rhonda Cobham, 'Introduction', in *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain*, eds. Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins (London: The Women's Press, 1987), pp. 3-11 (pp. 6-7).
[14] Lauretta Ngcobo, 'Introduction', in *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain*, ed. Lauretta Ngcobo (London: Virago, 1988), pp. 1-34 (p. 1-3).

women by men.'[15] Wisker connects the literary and the sociopolitical by considering the impact of the literary marketplace upon which writing does or does not find a platform for dissemination:

> there is probably much writing, the publication of which has been stalled or prevented because of the particular, often subtle, often covert, contexts of racism and sexism in which Black women writers work everywhere. While some writers are published, available, others are silenced: complacency is dangerous.[16]

Here, Wisker understands the publishing industry to be a repressive force for black women writers, another structure which functions through the kind of racism and sexism which silences black women in other areas of lived reality. Wisker emphasises the repression of black women's voices in terms of the sociopolitical and the literary: they have been 'hidden and denied', 'silenced', 'dispossessed', 'oppressed', and 'marginalised' by imperial and colonial ideology, by white culture and white feminism, by the patriarchy, and by a metropolitan publishing industry which operates through these structures. By the mid-1980s, though, women's presses, such as Sheba Feminist Publishers and The Women's Press, as well as grassroots organisations, such as the Black WomanTalk Collective, had taken action to challenge the hegemony of the 'largely white, male, middle-class critic and publishing world', as well as the homogeny of the literature that this world made visible.[17] The platform of the edited collection saw 'many articulate and talented black women striving and succeeding in getting published so that they could speak about their own experiences of being women and feminists and black.'[18]

Throughout this period, the silence generated by oppression from such multifaceted areas of society, the 'hidden and denied' experiences of black women, are recorded and

[15] Gina Wisker, 'Black British Women's Writing', in *Postcolonial and African American Women's Writing* (London: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 272-300 (pp. 277-278).
[16] Wisker, 'Black British Women's Writing', p. 276.
[17] Wisker, 'Black British Women's Writing', p. 295.
[18] Wisker, 'Black British Women's Writing', p. 284.

represented by black British women's anthologies. In *Watchers and Seekers*, for example, Millie Murray's 'No Say' takes as its subject the limited agency available to black women under the realities of the patriarchy and racism, in which life-scripts are determined by a dominant-white and male-governed society. The poem produces the effect of such oppression by offering potential alternative life-scripts to the heteronormative, patriarchal, and racially-stereotyped domesticity suffered by the speaker of the poem. However, such alternatives are revealed to be ultimately unattainable. 'No Say' illustrates the ways in which male figures in the woman speaker's life dictate her occupation, her leisure, her emotions, and her dreams, ultimately rendering her silent. For example, the speaker 'day dreams' of being a ballerina, of 'being Odette in *Swan Lake*'. The poem, though, dispels the actualisation of such alternative life-scripts via the repetition of the phrase 'He says' – followed by a recital of his speech in place of her own – between each attempted articulation of possibility.[19] Regardless of such dreams, 'He says what and what I have to do – to be – to live / He doesn't even listen to me – I must do what / He says'.[20] The speaker of the poem is silenced by the male figures who speak over her, whose comments she recounts between the poem's repetition of 'He says'. In her editorial introduction, Rhonda Cobham suggests that the writings collected in *Watchers and Seekers* mark the presence of 'a new voice that would somehow contain and explore the voices of past and present black communities'. The voice is thus able to speak in the present moment, yet retain something of the historical silencing of black British women.[21] Therefore, the positioning of 'No Say', bounded by the act of anthologising which surrounds it, means that its singular depiction of a woman silenced becomes emblematic of the patriarchy in its broader historical context for black British women. This is achieved even while the poem details a specific, individual experience of life under the rule of such an oppressive force. Furthermore,

[19] Mille Murray, 'No Say', in *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain*, eds. Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins (London: The Women's Press, 1987), pp. 52-53.
[20] Murray, 'No Say', p. 52.
[21] Cobham, 'Introduction', p. 7.

such force is shown to be absolute not only for the present moment, but for the past and future as well; the male figure transforms from father, to partner, to son as the poem progresses, demonstrating a generational cycle of the control held by men over women's lives. That control is represented through the symbolism of speech, of the significance of being silenced or heard: 'He says He's my father I come under his rule / […] He says He's my man / […] He says He can understand why his father left / He says He's my son'. By the end, the speaker is returned to silence by her son, able to say 'Nothing'.[22]

In another example of how black British women's anthologies of the period write of the silenced subject, *Breaking the Silence* curates short, anonymised, (auto)biographical essays detailing the lives of South Asian women in Britain. The intention of this anthology is to make 'visible some experiences of the lives of women often hidden within their own, and our dominant white, culture'. Specifically, the anthology is for educational and informative purposes, to be used 'in schools to stimulate discussion with Asian and non-Asian groups of children and teenagers; by Asian parents as a way of understanding their daughters and by those daughters as a way of understanding their parents.'[23] As such, these writings function to document sociopolitical realities that have formerly been hidden from view or whose participants have been silenced. In Parveen's 'No Money in My Hand', for instance, the experience uncovered by the text is that of dispossession, illustrating the anthology's overall concern with the oppression of women between two cultures and two homelands in Britain. The Muslim narrator[24] of the autobiography writes of how she works 'making dresses at home' under the authority of her husband. Her husband 'only thinks of money and food never thinks

[22] Murray, 'No Say', pp. 52-53.
[23] Centreprise Publishing Project, 'Preface', p. i.
[24] Despite being autobiographical in style and form, author names have been anonymised by this publication; therefore 'narrator' is a more fitting term for this figure than 'author', to respect the need for anonymity declared in the introduction of the text.

or treats [her] as human.'[25] Despite working and earning a wage, the narrator is left with 'no money in [her] hand', revealing her dispossession under the control of her husband.[26] However, such dispossession is shown to exceed her financial status. The seizing of her money by her husband recalls for the narrator the moment that she came to Britain; the act of dispossession performed by him echoes her loss of home in India upon their marriage. Her moment of arrival is recollected by the text, and is overwhelmed by the narrator's feeling of being 'lost' and of loss itself.[27] Each facet of her experience in Britain relates back to this fundamental dispossession: she is unable to learn the languages spoken by her peers; she cannot live a life away from her 'mean' husband; and, upon the birth of her son, she longs for a home to which she cannot return.[28] As such, Parveen's account of her life as a Muslim woman in Britain is paradigmatic of the overall intention of the anthology which contains it: to write of the silencing of South Asian women 'hidden' between two cultures, and in an informative, transparent manner.

One anthology, though, Black WomanTalk's *Don't Ask Me Why* (1991), approaches the silencing, dispossession, marginalisation, and oppression of black British women in sociopolitical and literary contexts in a different manner. *Don't Ask Me Why* is an anthology of short stories by black women in Britain. Editors Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse indicate in their introduction that while curating the text, they were particularly interested in reflecting the 'difficult[y]' of the short form, in its status as a medium of narrative prose fiction which 'does not necessarily progress from poetry'.[29] The Collective published *Black Women Talk Poetry* (1987) in the previous decade, and in their introduction to

[25] Parveen, 'No Money in My Hand', in *Breaking the Silence: Writing by Asian Women*, eds. Centreprise Publishing Project (London: Centreprise Trust, 1984), pp. 10-11 (p. 11).
[26] Parveen, 'No Money', p. 11.
[27] Parveen, 'No Money', p. 10.
[28] Parveen, 'No Money', p. 11.
[29] Black WomanTalk Collective, 'Introduction', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black WomanTalk, 1991), pp. v-vi (p. v).

the anthology of short stories, the editors are keen to distinguish this text from the preceding one. They note that they wish to harbour the 'creativity' which 'needs continued expression and encouragement', by running 'a series of short story writing courses for black women' in preparation for the newest anthology.[30] Therefore, when the editors claim that the text circumvents 'the limited stereotypes of what are considered "appropriate" issues for black women to write about',[31] this suggestion of subversion assumes a particular narrative significance.

I suggest that *Don't Ask Me Why* writes *in* rather than of the silence created by the emerging canon of black British literature largely comprising 'classic narratives' written by male authors. The short narrative form enables subversion of the overarching narrative because both share the same prose medium. The editors highlight that the stories produced for inclusion in the anthology inhabit the medium of narrative fiction to write of 'Childhood; Sexual Encounters; Obsessions; and The Supernatural'.[32] In doing so, the stories assume textual space for the areas which are generally omitted, excluded, or overlooked by the sociopolitical, historical, and literary narratives circulating in the landscape which the anthology at hand intends to transform. Such 'classic narratives' can be loosely categorised as realist, documentary, or transparent in style and form, or at least concerned with the representation of social and grounded lived realities.[33] Comparatively, the writings of *Don't Ask Me Why* instead turn to themes and styles relating to the imagination and imaginative form. The former is often

[30] Black WomanTalk, 'Introduction', pp. v-vi.
[31] Black WomanTalk, 'Introduction', p. v.
[32] Black WomanTalk, 'Introduction', pp. v-vi.
[33] I base this characterisation on the discussion of black British texts executed by R. Victoria Arana, Magdalen Mączyńska, and Nicole Rizzuto: R. Victoria Arana, 'Introduction: Aesthetics as Deliberate Design: Giving Form to *Tigritude and Nommo*', in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), pp. 1-13; Magdalen Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism in Contemporary Black London Fiction', in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), pp. 135-149; and Nicole Rizzuto, 'Realism, Form, Politics: Reading Connections in Caribbean Migration Narratives', *Comparative Literature*, 63.4 (2011), 383-401.

focalised through the lens of political maturity and knowledge of the social,[34] but the latter favours the impressionable, sometimes naïve, but inventive and playful perspective of childhood. If the narratives occupying the form of the novel are drawn together through their shared representation of the alienation and exile faced by the commonwealth citizen arriving and living in Britain, then the stories of *Don't Ask Me Why* can be conceived of in response to this representation. They turn instead towards rendering alien, unfamiliar, and uncanny, the social world which exiles this figure, via their engagement with the Gothic and the supernatural.

Beginning with the anthology's engagement with imaginative as opposed to mimetic form, in Shaziya Shuleman's 'The Beginning', the opening narrator reflects upon her capacity to represent the reality of her story. She says that 'To make sense of it all – [she] can only imagine what it was like.'[35] She is referring here to her own birth; the story opens with the narrator imagining the event and relaying her conception of it through narration, so that her imagining transforms into narrative truth. Through narrative, she is able to write the imagined idea as a certainty: 'I remember the vulnerability of it all, the nakedness and the open space no pain, a hard surface and the giant vivid shadows of reflections forming a circle around my vulnerability the ungraspable familiar sound. […] I am no longer together with her, I become one.'[36] The story is about representation, about the task of concentrating into form the experience of motherhood. Specifically, it is about the experience of being and losing a mother, of the separation between mother and child as both a beginning and an ending. Such experience is distilled in literary form by 'The Beginning' through the positioning of two competing narrators, a mother and daughter, to provide the truth of the narrative. They at once remember

[34] I discuss this in more detail below, in reference to Nicholas Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[35] Shaziya Shuleman, 'The Beginning', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black WomanTalk, 1991), pp. 101-109 (p. 101).
[36] Shuleman, 'The Beginning', p. 101.

and imagine their maternity. Maternity is illustrated by the story in the event of the mother carrying the daughter, which the latter imagines, but the memory of which is not recounted by the former. The mother instead assumes narration to tell of her relationship with her own mother, specifically the moment when she learns of the passing of her grandmother and realises the mortality of her parent. As the narrative progresses, each narrator also relays her experience of not only the biological disjunction between mother and child upon birth, but the social separation of the two figures as child becomes adult, moving into their ultimate separation upon the death of their respective mother.

'The Beginning' supposes that representation is not mimetic, but is rather a means of chronicling the mental state which perceives the events. This is indicated by the amplified authority bestowed upon the imagination and memory in illustrating the experience of motherhood. Furthermore, any sense of an objective truth or reality beyond the available narration is denied because of the way in which the two narrators challenge one another. The daughter must imagine her birth because her mother 'ought to remember', but does not;[37] and the mother's narration is read in response to this claim, when she reflects upon her limited capacity to narrate with accuracy: 'I didn't know the truth, […] I don't know how to tell the truth, but I never lie.'[38] The daughter's turn inwards, towards her own mind to make sense of her story in the absence of its actual recollection, alongside the mother's commentary upon her narration as somewhere between truth and falsehood, function together to problematise the notion that the experience of either can be rendered mimetically. Instead, the competing narrations suggest that each depends upon the perspective and perception of the other.

This way in which 'The Beginning' challenges the mimetic authority of representation culminates in an ending where the function of writing is made explicit. Upon the death of her

[37] Shuleman, 'The Beginning', p. 101.
[38] Shuleman, 'The Beginning', p. 102.

parent, the daughter sees herself as 'a child without a mother.' Such a conception of herself compels the daughter to turn to 'her journal and find the empty pages', to 'write down the words that are long overdue.' She writes to stop her memory of 'Mama smiling [from] drifting away.'[39] The journal enables the daughter to remember her mother in this way, rather than as an 'old tired woman'; her memory is an instrument for imagining her mother eternal. Due to the status of narration explicated earlier in the story, as neither truth nor lie, memory is endued with a sense of validity and tangibility when it is recorded or 'told' through the form of the diary.[40] The daughter writes to keep her mother alive in some form and, as she writes through the imagined perspective of this figure, the voices of the two unite through the creative power of narrative. With their voices and perspectives blurred and fluid, mother and daughter in a sense become one again, as in maternity. The dual narration that competes to tell of the events of 'The Beginning' is realised as a condition supporting the story's overall effect: underscoring in the imaginative possibilities and qualities of writing, while its reflective or mimetic capacity is ultimately undermined.

Such emphasis on the imagination, memory, and imaginative form is a feature of *Don't Ask Me Why* more broadly. Imaginative form, for example, is taken up in 'Gulab (Roses)'. In this story, Joyoti Grech makes form, rather than the object of its representation, the focus of the story. Specifically, 'Gulab' challenges, through the image of an envelope, the extent to which form can fully envelop the reach of its object. 'Gulab' is structured around the repeated exchange of blue envelopes between a woman and an unspecified recipient. With narration that details the contents of each envelope and minimal contextualising material, and at only six paragraphs long, Grech's story is partial and fleeting. Characterisation and plot development are curtailed in favour of a structure which revolves around the exchange of the envelopes.

[39] Shuleman, 'The Beginning', p. 108.
[40] Shuleman, 'The Beginning', p. 108.

Ultimately, the envelope and its resonance with form more broadly becomes the focal point of the narrative. Enclosed in the first envelope is a razorblade which never arrives because it has cut through the paper; the object within the wrapping undermines the form's capacity to fully envelop it. Instead, it produces gaps which render both the form and its purpose – the delivery of the object – incomplete. The exchange of the first envelope thus implicates something of the relationship between form and object associated with the short story, specifically in its modernist context. As Dominic Head describes, the short form in this context produces a '*disunifying*' effect; the possibility of literary form to encapsulate a totality is in constant tension with the qualities of ellipsis, ambiguity, compression, and limitation which result from the necessary brevity of the short story.[41] Put another way, narrative form obliges certain expectations to be met regarding the breadth and depth, the comprehensiveness of its object of representation; the short story, comparatively,[42] makes gaps, omissions, and uncertainty central features of its effect, function, or purpose, and thus reveals the limits undergirding the assumed faculty of narrative to produce a totality. The exchange of the first envelope in 'Gulab' reproduces this tension in the image of a different form: the envelope, presented as an absolute container, is weak to the holes produces by the object which it attempts to contain.

Such resonances between the capacity of literary form to envelop its object and the physical image of the exchange of envelopes continue as 'Gulab' progresses. In the envelopes which follow, the woman encloses objects which will not stand alone, but distil instead the suggestion of an emotion – something abstract which cannot be rendered object. The second

[41] Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1-36 (original emphasis).
[42] Following Valerie Shaw's terminology: 'The word "comparatively" is used deliberately here, since the brevity of a short story is something we recognize by relative, not absolute, means; our sense that any given successful story might have been longer, but in that case would have lost something essential to our pleasure in reading it, is not a quantifiable factor, and nor does it appear to obey fixed laws.' Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London, New York: Longman, 1983), p. 21.

envelope contains pieces of flesh 'picked' from the woman's head.[43] The woman intends for these to be received within the specific context of her grief, alongside a 'picture of the holes so [the recipient] could see where they came from.' The echoes or impressions of something once animate but now succumbed to inanimate remains – imagery which signifies in material form the experience of loss and grief – are also sent in the following envelopes: the third and fourth contain 'the dry bones of the cactus plant that died in her room while she was away' and 'the short dead prickly pear from the same plant', respectively; and the fifth envelope contains a fingernail which she pulled from her hand to 'stop the screams' in the middle of the night. The sixth envelope contains the remains of petals from a rose, which are now 'a dark stain on the blue' paper. Finally, she sends a bandage, and the impression of healing, of an end to this period of grief, is established. The items are symbolic of a wider context of inferences and implications unable to be bound by the act of exchanging envelopes. Despite the story's demanding of 'No more. The end. Goodbye', 'Gulab' does not have the capacity to render the experience of grief through these objects without producing gaps which undermine its attempt to provide an exhaustive rendering of the emotion. Instead, it turns to represent the exchange of these objects in order to suggest the impression, the abstracted experience of its wider context, but cannot contain it as a totality. In this way, the story's depiction of the exchange of objects through form reveals something of the difficultly of delineating the object of representation in a given narrative. It engages with that tension and distance between fabula and syuzhet, between abstract idea and formalised material, which concerns the field of narrative theory. Or rather, in the specific context of short fiction, 'Gulab' dispels the capacity for totality which Head suggests is often inaccurately associated with the short story. Instead, it self-consciously

[43] Joyoti Grech, 'Gulab (Roses)', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black Womantalk, 1991), p. 57 (all subsequent references to this story are from the same page).

foregrounds form and idea together, 'to express that which is absent from the surface […] level of the narrative'.[44]

'Gulab', therefore, engages with the way in which narrative produces matter from figuration. More accurately, it produces an oblique commentary on the limits of narrative upon its fulfilment of this task. This is an effect found throughout the stories in *Don't Ask Me Why.* Teresa Alexander's 'A', for example, curtails the responsibilities of its narrator in synchronising its events into a story by omitting an authoritative narrative voice. Instead, it comprises two separate narrative modes which create alternate ways to narrate the fabula, bringing these together in irresolute tension in a single story. The first mode is a diary, which undertakes the responsibilities of accuracy, transparency, and documentation found in autobiography. Magdalen Mączyńska discusses the significance of these characteristics of autobiography for postwar black British writing. Mączyńska suggests that the way that these texts 'inhabit a space between fiction and non-fiction' via the qualities of autobiography has endued them with the 'ultimate form of mimetic narrative.'[45] Indeed, Alexander's 'A' establishes a 'grounded' and 'stable sense of reality'[46] which indicates mimetic intention through the format of the diary; as the author of the journal states, she 'chart[s]'[47] rather than narrates her history with the character A. Throughout the journaling sections, the account of events is depicted in this manner of charting, as a transcription of occurrences. However, such direct chronicling is juxtaposed with the second mode of narration, which takes shape in the story in the form of poems written by the diarist. In contrast to the social world depicted by the journal, which is indicated by the inclusion of the shared and structured format of calendar time

[44] Head, *The Modernist Short Story*, p. 8.
[45] Magdalen Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism in Contemporary Black London Fiction', in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R Victoria Arana (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 135-149 (p. 139).
[46] Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism', p. 139.
[47] Teresa Alexander, 'A', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black Womantalk, 1991), pp. 15-26 (p. 24).

in these sections, the poems reveal the diarist's emotional responses to the events which the diary charts. The nature and purpose of the form of the diary or journal might indicate individuality in another context, but in 'A', and in *Don't Ask Me Why* more broadly, the form instead becomes associated with the passing of shared time, with the experience of collectivity and the world of the social. The diary records that A grows distant, and the diarist turns to poetry in the hope that this will 'open' up avenues to '*real* communication.'[48] Despite the fact that the diary relays the events of the social world, it is poetry, rather than the journal, which the diarist associates with her reality. Where in the journal she is restricted to charting events, poetry enables her to direct, control, and manage her response to such events by imagining herself in writing. In the final poem recited by the story, the diarist can detach herself from her grounding in the social world and see her 'whole existence' as a 'flame', unbounded by the 'compromises that will have to be made' in the world beyond the poem.[49] As such, 'A' occupies the short form as a means of exploring the dynamic between autobiography and creative freedom in writing. 'A' ultimately calls to question the suggestion that it is mimetic representation, as opposed to imaginative form, which constitutes the impression of reality in literature.

The notion of representing reality through the mimetic power of autobiographical form is again challenged by the presence of the imagination and imaginative form in the diary format in another story in *Don't Ask Me Why*. Joy Russell's 'Flying Box' assumes the shape of a journal. In her diary, the young protagonist writes of her experiences with her imaginary friend Thunder Thighs, a kind figure who coaches her in her learning to navigate the adult world – and teaches her how to fly. Again, the structuring of this tale around the framework of a diary draws the significance of autobiography and its association with non-fiction into the bounds of

[48] Alexander, 'A', p. 25 (original emphasis).
[49] Alexander, 'A', p. 26; p. 24.

the story. As with 'A', this is set against the remarkably fictional and imaginative. However, unlike Alexander's story, 'Flying Box' is particularly concerned with how the fulfilment of mimetic representation requires the prerequisite of knowledge of a social totality, in order to concentrate this reality in fictional form. In the terms of Nicholas Robinette, in a socially mimetic narrative, or literary realism, 'an active work of knowing the world must precede the literary narrative.'[50] By writing through the perspective of childhood and the learning of the social world, 'Flying Box' negates such knowledge of a social totality. Instead, the presence of the imaginary in transforming such knowledge into narrative is personified: Thunder Thighs lives in the 'little tin box'[51] in which the young protagonist Josetta keeps her school supplies – the instruments which represent her learning, her acquisition of knowledge. Thunder Thighs appears from this box to teach Josetta about both her schoolwork and the social world which she must grow into. This role of Thunder Thighs is captured by Josetta's reflection upon what her friend has taught her: 'She said that the importent [sic] thing was that I looked at something and tried to understand why things go the way they do.'[52] As such, Russell's story is subversive against the 'classic narratives' of black British writing which precede it because of how it depicts the learning of the social, rendering this realm ultimately unfamiliar to its protagonist rather than depicting it as already known and thus narratable. In order to conceive of 'Flying Box' as subversive in this way, though, the connections between black British realism, mimesis, and social knowledge in the 'classic narratives' of postwar black Britain must be explored.

[50] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 7.
[51] Joy Russell, 'The Flying Box', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black Womantalk, 1991), pp. 29-44 (p. 31).
[52] Russell, 'The Flying Box', p. 38.

As outlined above, Mączyńska discusses the significance of autobiographical tendencies – of the non-fictive – to black British writing's mimetic power. Her discussion of this is part of her broader exploration of realism in the field. She states that:

> Discussions of Black British cultural production have long been dominated, for historical and political reasons, by questions of ideology, identity, and power. Considerations of content have often overshadowed considerations of form. In the case of the novel, this has meant a focus on characters-as-real-people with authentic geographical, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds […]. This lack of aesthetic analysis points to the power of representation as the most highly valued aspect of Black London literary production.[53]

By 'the power of representation' for black British literature, Mączyńska means its 'dedication to realist aesthetics', to the mimetic, the 'privileging of reason and scientifically inspired epistemological and ontological models'.[54] The stories in *Don't Ask Me Why*, however, indicate that representation is not necessarily linked with the mimetic in this way. Rather, imagination and imaginative form in stories such as 'The Beginning', 'A', and 'Gulab' are located as significant qualities of the representational.

Mączyńska's study is interested in tracing the extent to which black British novels since the 1970s employ a realist aesthetic; she is discussing specifically here the texts of the postwar decades, establishing the emergence of a black British literary canon and tracing the ways in which texts of the late twentieth century respond to these earlier texts. Mączyńska suggests that both postwar and late twentieth century black British novels 'seem curiously uninterested in questioning or abandoning traditional methods of representation', instead 'show[ing] a strong dedication to the principles of realist aesthetics.'[55] Her statement is supported by her delineation of the connections between the literary and the social document in black British writing. Such texts, she suggests:

---

[53] Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism', pp. 136-137.
[54] Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism', pp. 136-137.
[55] Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism', p. 138.

> are powerfully realist novels, even as they engage in intertextual allusion and metafictional play. Their nuanced character development, attention to the formative power of the environment, specificity of description, and inclination towards social satire make them accomplished heirs to the nineteenth-century novelistic tradition. The dominance of realist aesthetics […] is not only apparent in authorial choices, but also reinforced by the apparatus of critical analysis, book reviews and literary prizes. While scholars focus on the novelistic techniques valued in the tradition of realism, reviewers use the notion of "authenticity" as a marker of authorial achievement. […] It appears that the recognition and applause are consistently based on veracity more than any other aspect of the evaluated narratives.[56]

As such, certain elements of narrative are positioned in opposition to one another: 'veracity' and 'sentiment'; the social and the individual; and 'mimesis' and 'aesthetic innovation'.[57]

The stories of *Don't Ask Me Why* write in the spaces between such oppositions: the suggestion of veracity is implied by the formal approaches of stories such as 'A' and 'The Flying Box' – in recognisable common forms, such as the shared time of a diary or a grounded London setting. However, sentiment, the imagination and the imaginative power of narrative are drawn into focus in such stories, so that subjectivity is central to what might otherwise be conceived of as objective. The dynamic between mother and child in 'The Beginning' – written as one-yet-separate via the duality of competing narrators – reinforces this tension between the subjective, the individual, and the collective or the generational. In the same vein, the collective and the individual are consistently present at once in the very form of the anthology; the metanarrative by its nature marks a collectivity, while the discrete works which comprise this narrative are fragments of individuality. For this reason, *Don't Ask Me Why* is more akin to the kind of subversion of black British realism from within that is explored by Nicholas Robinette, rather than the kind of 'heirs to the nineteenth-century novelistic tradition' described by Mączyńska.

[56] Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism', pp. 140-141.
[57] Mączyńska, 'The Aesthetics of Realism', pp. 142-143.

Speaking of the development of the realist novel in the nineteenth century, Robinette states that:

> The realist novel would map social life: the writer strives to uncover the disavowed aspects of capitalist modernity and give narrative shape to dissociated experiences otherwise exiled from the consciousness of the reading public. Through breadth of narrative, realism outlines the totality that associates the labor of production and the delicacies of the bourgeois milieu. Combining documentary immediacy and elaborate formal structure, realism solders together a vision of historical forces unavailable to the fragmented perspective of the individual. However, the realist drive has repeatedly encountered conditions in the contemporary word-system that are more difficult to know and narrate than those of nineteenth-century Europe […]. To deal with these changed conditions, the best realist novels have also changed, mutating as they pursue social knowledge and literary form […]: realism has pillaged the full array of techniques generated by modernism and accepted a peripatetic representation of actuality as the condition for portraying an intangible, diffuse social totality.[58]

For Robinette, the postcolonial novel retains something of the nineteenth-century tradition. However, unlike Mączyńska, who suggests that black British realism continues in this tradition, Robinette explores black British realism as part of a broader postcolonial occupation of the aesthetic to 'mutate' from within. For Robinette, realism is a means of writing the fracture of totality in the postcolonial world. However, the qualities of mimesis, actuality, and social totality are retained by this reading of postcolonial realism. More specifically, the 'work of knowing' the social world, or 'the labor of knowing, crystallized in form' by literary realism, is sustained by the postcolonial realist novel, even while the very notion of a totality which can be fully known is challenged.[59] That is, the 'fundamental necessity of realism' may be that 'an active work of knowing the world must precede' and then be rendered in literary form, but postcolonial novels 'will not achieve a total map of the world system'. Instead, they 'buil[d] a world of knowledge for themselves […] through an implicit search for totality.'[60]

[58] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 2.
[59] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 7-8.
[60] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 7-8.

However, in such a search for knowledge through postcolonial realism, an act of imagining is also necessary in order to produce the impression of a world in literary form – an act which 'disappears behind the veil of the narrative, which only shows the results.'[61] It is this veiled act of imagining in producing knowledge which I suggest is made visible in 'Flying Box'. By offering the perspective of childhood through protagonist Josetta, the story inhabits the mental state of learning, of coming to know, rather than presenting 'the results' of knowledge rendered in realist form. 'Flying Box' writes in and of that which Robinette suggests is masked by realism's prerequisite of knowledge: 'Naïve reflection [and] sense-certainty which […] produce […] "unrelated experiential fragments"'.[62] Where knowledge is expected in the story, 'Flying Box' instead offers a figuration of the imaginative processes involved in coming to know. This figuration is the presence of the imaginary Thunder Thighs, who assumes the responsibility of making the social world knowable to the young protagonist, and by extension, the world of the story to the reader.

Such undermining of the kind of knowledge expected of realism is present throughout *Don't Ask Me Why*. Other stories similarly focalise their narration through the perspective of childhood, with the effect of dwelling upon the requirements of establishing the impression of knowledge in realist form. For example, in '(For)give Me Sexuality' by Monica Aguilhas, the narrator states that she 'might just be sixteen, but [she] know[s] things.'[63] Her claim here is in reference to the sexual activities of her mother. She tries, in contradiction to her assertion of already acquired comprehension, to understand why her mother 'still masturbates!' at the age of forty-four.[64] Aguilhas's story obliquely depicts the oppression of women's sexual liberty and the impact of this upon the generational teaching of womanhood which takes place between

[61] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 7.
[62] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 7.
[63] Monica Aguilhas, '(For)give Me Sexuality', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black Womantalk, 1991), pp. 7-11 (p. 7).
[64] Aguilhas, '(For)give Me Sexuality', p. 7.

mother and daughter; the body of the story enacts the blurring between the 'giving' and 'forgiving' of learned sexuality prefigured by its title. At school, the daughter is taught that masturbation is part of a 'naughty and experimental […] teenage scene'. [65] She also learns about sex through the erotica that her mother reads, which is 'covered with knives and open-mouthed scared women wearing black bras and suspender belts with fluid dripping into pools of blood.'[66] Her mother refuses to give her daughter 'the proper answers' to her questions about sex. She learns, however, through the kind of 'naïve reflection' and 'sense-certainty' described by Robinette, about the structural oppression of women's sexual liberty, by reflecting upon the relationship of her parents witnessed as an infant. She remembers the way in which her father violently punished her mother for her sensuality and desire.[67] Throughout, friction between a naïve perspective which learns through sense-certainty and the daughter's proclamation of 'knowing'[68] unfolds. The narrator moves fluidly between perspectives of naivety – 'mommy is still looking for a good husband'[69] – and the kind of authoritative knowledge expected of realism: 'I know now what was going on.'[70] '(For)give Me Sexuality' provides textual space for naïve reflection and sense-certainty in order to justify the narrator's claim to knowledge. It does not veil or mask such a process of learning, but instead makes this explicit.

For Robinette, postwar black British realism, or what he terms 'realism for the *Empire Windrush* generation',[71] also makes explicit the process of coming to know. He suggests that the writings of this generation mark the 'emergence' of a desire to 'map diasporic London and synthesize a new perspective appropriate to a new social class.' This involves an attempt to *re*-map London, to bring to light a 'Caribbean reality' for the context of London, to 'preserve an

[65] Aguilhas, '(For)give me Sexuality', p. 7.
[66] Aguilhas, '(For)give Me Sexuality', p. 7.
[67] Aguilhas, '(For)give Me Sexuality', p. 8.
[68] Aguilhas, '(For)give Me Sexuality', p. 7; p. 8; p. 10; p. 11.
[69] Aguilhas, '(For)give me Sexuality', p. 9.
[70] Aguilhas, '(For)give me Sexuality', p. 8.
[71] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 12.

historical awareness that may otherwise disappear from conscious reflection.'[72] Robinette discusses in particular George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), reading this text as paradigmatic of the '*beginning* of the Anglophone Caribbean and Black British novel.'[73] Lamming's text, Robinette suggests, produces 'an animating tension' between the fragmentary, partial, and fleeting experiences of migrants arriving in a hostile London, and the emergence of a new 'historical knowledge', a 'social whole', which develops as the migrants settle in the metropole. Totality and knowledge are associated with the migrants establishing themselves as 'a new social class', a community as opposed to a diversity of individuals.[74] Such tension is written by the novel through form. The experience of arrival, of being uncertain of the position of the self in the new society, is established through 'fragmentary antirealism', in which there is 'nothing everyday about [the emigrants'] reality'. Such antirealism is based on the absence of social knowledge, because, in the novel, 'emigration strips life of its old habits and familiarities and whittles down perspective'. The 'world has become deeply ambiguous' and 'old habits of perception and knowing' have been 'ruptured'.[75] However, while the novel begins in this state of antirealism, when the emigrants find in one another representations of their own experiences, *The Emigrants* ultimately 'conducts the kind of broad survey of social life typical of the realist novel, building outwards from the restricted perspective in which [it] began.'[76] In other words, a social whole is established as the novel transforms from fragmentary antirealism into a realism which depicts a new social reality for London, one in which the presence of the emigrants is marked and is inclusive of (post)colonial historical awareness. As Robinette puts it, the 'form of *The Emigrants* may best be characterized as an arc that begins in a fragmentary antirealism but culminates in the discovery of a new social whole.'[77] The

[72] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 14.
[73] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 13 (original emphasis).
[74] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 13-15.
[75] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 18-21.
[76] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 15.
[77] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 18.

discovery is written through realism, a framework which 'tracks the characters' developing familiarity with and knowledge of their circumstances', a 'knowledge in which the narrative will ground itself'.[78] In comparison to the jarring effect of fragmentation and partiality of what Robinette terms the antirealist, realism is an organising force, a 'structure of intelligibility' which ultimately forms a 'recognizable, ordered world' through an 'ordered cognitive map'.[79] Realism thus indicates the known and the knowable – the familiar and the recognisable. Antirealism, on the other hand, signifies a lack of perception and a limited perspective. Ultimately, the tension between the two in Lamming's novel indicates that 'a more complete and transparent perception remains an object of the future'. Realism, in this light, is the objective of the 'crystalliz[ing] in form' a new social totality inclusive of postcolonial realities, while Lamming's novel demonstrates the 'labor to chart emergent reality in a foreign land.'[80]

If Lamming's text is taken as indicative, as Robinette intends, of 'realism for the *Empire Windrush* generation', or as emblematic of the interests of the 'classic narratives' of postwar black British writing, then the subversion of *Don't Ask Me Why* against this model can be traced in how the anthology produces its own tension between realist and non-realist tendencies. For Robinette, realism is the objective of rendering a new known and knowable social whole. He suggests that at the opening of Lamming's novel, upon their journey to London, the 'world aboard the ship is strange and the emigrants are equally strangers to one another.'[81] The journey itself and the 'foreign land' arrived upon are alien to the emigrants as they make their individual journeys. As the narrative progresses, however, and a collective consciousness begins to be located and represented, the other – both land and people – becomes familiar. Such familiarity is formalised through the novel's turn to realism. The experience of migration and settlement,

[78] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 24-25.
[79] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 21-23.
[80] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 29.
[81] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 21.

including social exile, cultural alienation, and political injustice, becomes the object of realism's representation. The new reality mapped by the aesthetic is thus filtered through recognisability and familiarity in opposition to the 'strangeness' of arrival. Indeed, black British writing does often represent the hostility of the dominant culture in order to, in R. Victoria Arana's terms, 'communicate biting truths about social realities in the U.K'. Such communication utilises techniques of realism – social engagement and alertness which is 'plainly representative of real social and moral dilemmas' – to make such realities known and knowable.[82] The dissemination of narratives of social exile and alienation has been invaluable for marking black British identity and experience upon the cognitive map of postcolonial Britain; for bringing to light the institutional and cultural structures of racism and oppression; for establishing a voice for the silenced peoples of conventional historical records. In *Don't Ask Me Why*, though, such connections between realism and the familiarising of experiences of social exile and injustice are challenged and problematised by narrative engagement with the supernatural. Ultimately, such experiences are rendered alien and unfamiliar when they are positioned in some form of other world.

In Sheila Auguste's 'In Loco Parentis (A Ghost Story)', for example, an impression of the reality of social exile, of isolation and cultural alienation, takes shape not through realist ordering, but through the presence of a ghost. This figure is no longer of the social world, but not wholly separate from it, either. In the story, young protagonist Nadine is followed by the ghost of her mother, who committed suicide when Nadine was six years old. As a ghost, the mother, Sonia, remembers her decision to take her life, revealing that it was her method of doing 'what people had been advising and encouraging her to do for so long.' That is,

[82] R. Victoria Arana, 'Introduction: Aesthetics as Deliberate Design: Giving Form to *Tigritude and Nommo*', in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, ed. R. Victoria Arana (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 1-13 (pp. 3-4).

committing suicide was Sonia's means of 'tak[ing] her life into her own hands'.[83] Sonia's decision was in response to the disjuncture between her selfhood and the social world: the sociopolitical structures surrounding her – 'the housing offices', 'Social Security', the expectations and norms of society at large for 'a stout black woman' in Britain – were oppressive and ultimately alienating forces.[84] Upon death, Sonia sees herself as a 'puppet whose strings were no longer being manipulated'.[85] Her death symbolises her ultimate separation from the workings of the social world. But such separation – representing estrangement – does not feature as a part of the realism of the story, which follows Nadine's interactions with society as a child growing into this world. Rather, as a ghost, Sonia's presence interrupts the realist drive in the story to map a new social world for Nadine in which she is not at odds with the dominant culture, but already part of a community. It is not that the kind of exile depicted by 'realism for the *Empire Windrush* generation' is absent from the story. Indeed, the story is structured through the framework expected of realism (reality as immediately at hand and open to objective observation),[86] when it depicts Nadine's relationship with her family and friends. However, the estrangement that the ghost of her mother represents is at odds with Nadine's belonging within this world, and is also at odds with the synchromism of the story's realism. The figure of a ghost, a presence somewhere beyond yet connected to the social world, challenges the story's drive towards realism; and when the ghost of her mother appears, Nadine is marked as different from her community – her friends call her 'crazy' and she must 'excuse' herself from the group.[87] As such, 'In Loco Parentis' demonstrates engagement with the tension between the realist and the antirealist explored by Robinette.

[83] Sheila Auguste, 'In Loco Parentis (A Ghost Story)', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black Womantalk, 1991), pp. 121-130 (p. 126).
[84] Auguste, 'In Loco Parentis', pp. 124-125.
[85] Auguste, 'In Loco Parentis', p. 124.
[86] George Joseph Becker, 'Introduction: Modern Realism as a Literary Movement', in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George Joseph Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 3-38 (pp. 6-8).
[87] Auguste, 'In Loco Parentis', p. 129.

However, rather than driving towards a realism which depicts a new social whole based on the exile of a social class of emigrants in Britain, its realism is interrupted by a figuration of estrangement which haunts the story, ultimately rendering such alienation unfamiliar and otherworldly.

A similar effect is achieved by other stories in *Don't Ask Me Why*. Meiling Jin's 'The Tall Shadow', for example, makes the 'shadow'-like mirror world of representation a literal place, one of entrapment.[88] In the story, black women with dreams of transcending their social positioning are entombed in daguerreotype pictures of themselves by a man made powerful in his occupation as an 'old judge at the court house'.[89] The authority bestowed upon him by the structures of law, policy, and governance enable him ultimate representational control of these women: the protagonist, trying to escape from the man, 'makes a mad dash for the door […] and realises it's a mirror […] and finds herself "inside".'[90] Not only does the man produce these women in representational form through his trapping photographs, but his means of capturing them involves assuming control of their reflections of themselves in the mirror. As such, his representational authority also impacts the way in which such women see and reflect upon their own selves. 'The Tall Shadow' produces the impression that the world of representation is controlled by a male authority which warps the gaze of women viewing their own lives, because the instruments through which they see themselves represented are governed by a perspective which is not their own. The patriarchy of the sociopolitical is blurred with the dominance of androcentrism in representation; the women depicted by the story become ultimately trapped in a world of representation – in both the mirror and their portraits – in which they have no agency. As with 'In Loco Parentis', another world, one separate from yet connected to the

[88] Meiling Jin, 'The Tall Shadow', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black Womantalk, 1991), pp. 45-54.
[89] Jin, 'The Tall Shadow', p. 53.
[90] Jin, 'The Tall Shadow', p. 53.

social, is imagined by 'The Tall Shadow'. The otherworld interrupts the story's drive toward realism. In the case of 'The Tall Shadow', the otherworldly literalises the kind of representation produced by realism, drawing attention to its organising and ordering forces – perspective, governance, formalisation and associated borders or limits. It positions these not as neutral, 'reliable', or 'objective',[91] as Robinette suggests of the aesthetic, but rather as subject to the same kind of structures of power which govern the social world depicted by the realism. Both 'In Loco Parentis' and 'The Tall Shadow' meet realism with the presence of non-realist worlds, with the effect of drawing the notion of the unfamiliar and the unknown into the bounds of the anthology.

Where, as Robinette suggests, realism for the Windrush generation may ultimately strive for a new kind of realism capable of mapping a new ordered and knowable social whole, *Don't Ask Me Why* instead writes in the areas omitted from this particular aesthetic. The anthology assumes textual space for that which is silenced by the classic narratives of the generation: coming into knowledge is articulated through the perspective of childhood; an impression of the unknowable is generated when the ability of form to capture its object is challenged; and the unfamiliar is centred by the anthology's engagement with non-realist representation. In this way, *Don't Ask Me Why* interacts with the emerging canon of black British writing in a different manner to other anthologies of black British women's writing of the era. Texts such as *Let It Be Told* trace the silencing, dispossession, marginalisation, and oppression of black women in Britain in both sociopolitical and literary terms. They strive to 'create new models'– to use Ngcobo's terms – for the experiences and representations of such women – to 'replace the stereotypes in which the white world and Blackmen wish to constrict us.'[92] Comparatively, *Don't Ask Me Why* does not function to 'replace' such an aesthetic, but

[91] Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 26.
[92] Ngcobo, 'Introduction', p. 1.

to interrupt it. Ultimately, I suggest that *Don't Ask Me Why* employs the short form because it is a medium of narrative prose that is able to challenge from within the emerging narrative of black Britain, to reveal its silences, its omissions, and its gaps.

CHAPTER FOUR

Anthologising: Black Britain in the Twenty First Century – Closure?

Alison Donnell suggests that the influx of women's anthologies in the late twentieth century potentially signifies the publishing industry's lack of commitment to invest in standalone black British texts.[1] In Donnell's terms:

> such anthologies were also convenient publishing opportunities for presses such as Virago and the Women's Press who wanted to demonstrate their commitment to black writing but perhaps didn't want to risk single volume publications by 'unknown' authors.[2]

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the multiauthorial character of the literary anthology was amenable to the interests of black British writing in articulating difference and plurality. However, it was also appealing to an industry which wanted to engage with the increasing cultural interest in black British writing, without having to invest too much in what might have been a passing trend in the literary marketplace. The industries of publishing and marketing have impacted the ways in which the cultural functions and effects of literary forms are conceived. That is, the black British women's anthologies of the late twentieth century may illuminate the era's interest in the plurality of identity, but this collective form also suited the publishing industry's need to address the emerging interest in black British writing quickly and

[1] Alison Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing', *Wasafiri*, 17.36 (2002), 11-17 (p. 14).
[2] Donnell, 'Nation and Contestation', p. 14.

without too much risk to profit. Such a dynamic between the requirements of form according to the needs of publishers, editors, and marketing teams is of significance to the anthologising of black British writing and culture beyond the late twentieth century context of women's writing. It is with this broader context of anthologising black British writing that I am concerned in this chapter.

In the introduction to his own anthology, *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998* (2000), James Procter reflects upon the anthologies which precede his text. He considers the relationship between their form and function and the cultural landscape and literary marketplace into which they enter. The anthologies that he cites are all postwar texts which collect writings relating to the diasporic condition, and include James Berry's two edited anthologies, *Bluefoot Traveller: An Anthology of West Indian Poets in Britain* (1976) and *News for Babylon: The Chatto Book of Westindian British Poetry* (1984), as well as *Hinterland: Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain* (1989) edited by E.A. Markham, and *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women* (1988) edited by S. Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar. In his discussion of such texts, Procter suggests that they all 'signal the hyphenated, the cross-cultural.'[3] Based on this assessment, I would add to this list texts such as *The Map of Me: True Tales of Mixed-Heritage Experience* (2008), which 'represent[s] the very best writing about being one thing and another',[4] as well as *From Trinidad: An Anthology of Early West Indian Writing* (1978) edited by Reinhard W. Sander. The latter text correlates the 'iconoclastic zeal' of magazines *Trinidad* and *The Beacon* with a 'similar revolt in England against conventional values and sensibility

[3] James Procter, 'General Introduction: "1948"/"1998" Periodising Postwar Black Britain', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998*, ed. James Procter (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1-12 (p. 8).
[4] Anon, in *The Map of Me: True Tales of Mixed Heritage Experience*, ed., Penguin Books (London: Penguin, 2008), p. i.

in the 1890s.'[5] Such anthologies similarly imply the sense of hyphenation rather than fluidity between 'black' and 'British' which Procter locates in his list.

As a corpus, these anthologies share in their depiction of the diasporic condition, situated between cultures, identities, and nations or localities. The form of the anthology bolsters such a sense of in-betweenness because its structure positions discrete works between one another; the anthology is a whole yet fractured or fragmented form. Robert Luscher suggests that in collections of this sort, 'neighbouring' stories come together at an interpretative level 'to construct a network of associations that binds the stories together and lends them a cumulative thematic impact'.[6] Luscher is discussing specifically the kind of 'sequence' created by story collections. However, his assessment of the way in which the 'insular identity' of a story is always compromised by 'the context its neighbours within a publication provide'[7] is highly relevant to the anthology form in its collating of a single yet multiauthored text. The narration of the anthologiser or voice of the editor, whose responsibilities reside in the organisation of material, is the one that is circulated alongside the literary object, rather than a single authorial figure. A sense of 'traffic'[8] – to use Michael Levenson's term – between literary works and documents, as well as between author(s) and editor(s), is inherent in the form of the anthology. Such 'traffic', though, also reaches beyond the text, relating to the construction of canons from corpuses. In Levenson's terms, to

> place aesthetic activity within a network of activities: making, exhibiting, reading, debating, viewing, reviewing, [is to] acknowledg[e] that such networks had no determinate origin[…]. What justifies the network is not only the satisfaction of having

[5] Peter K. Ayers, 'Introduction', in *From Trinidad: An Anthology of Early West Indian Writing*, ed. Reinhard W. Sander (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), pp. 9-20 (p. 10).
[6] Robert M. Luscher, 'The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book', in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellen Clarey (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 148-167 (p. 149).
[7] Luscher, 'The Short Story Sequence', p. 148.
[8] Michael Levenson, 'The Avant-Garde in Modernism', in *Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 12-54 (p. 17).

> wrought an artifact but the conviction that it will be sanctioned by artistic comrades, that it will be published and reviewed'.[9]

Jeremy Braddock similarly defines the literary anthology as a 'collectivist and interventionist' form.[10] He argues that an anthology is a 'provisional institution' because it is 'a mode of public engagement modeling future […] relationships between audience and artwork.' It is 'a means of addressing the work of art to the public, modeling and creating the conditions of […] reception.'[11] Like the singular works contained by the text, the anthology is never 'insular' because it is involved with acts of exhibiting, reviewing, debating, 'sanctioning'. In short, it is an 'institution' because it 'intervenes' in processes of canonisation.

Braddock is interested in particular in the role of the anthology for the context of American modernism. However, he suggests the very form of the anthology – the act of anthologising which the form sustains as a literary object – interacts with processes of canonisation. Such a suggestion is prevalent to the context of anthologising black British writing which I discuss here. For example, for Procter, the anthologies preceding his own foremost 'recognise […] the diasporic conditions under which black British cultural production takes place'. Significantly, though, 'there is also a sense in which "black Britain" appears available here *only* as a hyphenated discourse: as a body of writing not quite substantial or valuable enough for consideration "on its own".'[12] The consequent impression of black British writing as a canon, due to its publishing in diasporic anthologies, is also intricately linked with the literary landscape and marketplace in which the texts are disseminated. Procter continues:

> The presence of an 'indigenous' (no matter how 'dispersed' or diasporic) community or tradition of writing has at times been curiously negated by this kind of double-

[9] Levenson, 'The Avant-Garde in Modernism', p. 14.
[10] Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 209.
[11] Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, p. 3.
[12] Procter, 'General Introduction', p. 8 (original emphasis).

> barrelled black Britishness. Equally, it is notable that the anthologies enlisted above are characterised by their immediacy or 'nowness': there is no historical conception of a discourse within these anthologies, which tend to present a round-up of writings available 'there and then'. On the one hand this reflects and reproduces a more pervasive 'forgetfulness' within the field. On the other hand, it is perhaps symptomatic of a publishing industry that is reluctant to commit itself financially to a more ambitious, costly, historical anthology of postwar black British writing.[13]

Procter's comments here echo Donnell's suggestion that black British women's anthologies of the late twentieth century were the product of an industry interested in marking a moment, rather than tracing a history. Indeed, the anthologies which I explored in the previous chapter can be loosely placed within the category which Procter discusses here – one which delineates diaspora, in-betweenness, 'double-barrelling' or plurality for an epoch of black British writing in which difference was harboured. Like Procter's note on how such texts were restricted to the 'there and then', this period of anthologising women's writing related to the needs of the moment rather than to a broader history per se.

However, texts such as *Don't Ask Me Why* endeavour to establish a history in order to interrupt it. By interacting with and intersecting an emerging canon of black British writing, such texts operate as a bridge between the category of anthologies which Procter describes in his introduction – what I call the 'first wave' of anthologising black Britain – and the category into which his own anthology falls: the 'second wave'.[14] Procter finds that his predecessors 'assist in dehistoricising [black British writing] and confining it to the present', because of how they present black Britishness as hyphenated as opposed to 'indigenous' – without 'tradition'.[15] In comparison, Procter's text strives to historicise black British writing and culture, presenting it as both a history worthy of documentation 'on its own', as well as a fundamental part of

[13] Procter, 'General Introduction', pp. 8-9.
[14] I have chosen this term 'wave' here because it at once responds to the temporalising and chronologising which Procter assumes for black British writing in his anthology, but also suggests a certain level of overlapping, of to-ing and fro-ing which is more accurate to the publishing dates of the anthologies.
[15] Procter, 'General Introduction', p. 9; p. 6.

British history. It is not double-barrelled, but fluid and interconnected. In Procter's terms, as opposed to the hyphenated discourses of black Britishness, '[i]t is [a] kind of politicised, untidy, "lived" version of blackness which […] this anthology struggles to evoke, but which remains worryingly absent in literary studies where there is virtually no sense of community (albeit imagined) or tradition (albeit invented) of black British writing.'[16] To achieve his historicising of black Britain, Procter periodises the material that he collates, generating the kind of temporal chronology of cause and effect expected of historiography. Specifically, he categorises the material in order to position it in relation to significant historical or generational moments: the first category, '1948 to late 1960s', is largely characterised by its foreshadowing of the kind of 'policing strategies' of later decades, and depicts 'the pioneering black settlers of the 1950s and 1960s frequently […] struggling to "fit in" or assimilate';[17] the second section, 'late 1960s to mid-1980s', collects works with exemplify the turn from the '*laissez-faire* phase within black British cultural history' towards 'a growing politics of racial intolerance expressed at an official, institutional level';[18] and part three, 'mid-1980s to late 1990s', traces the general movement of writings of this period towards the politics of representation and the '*historicity* of the black British experience'.[19] The function of *Writing Black Britain* in its 'trac[ing] the historical routes of a black British past' is marked as different from preceding anthologies based on how it establishes such chronology, longevity, and sense of archiving; it negates the 'immediacy' and 'nowness' of the anthologies which came before.

Procter's text is not alone in its effort to historicise and chronologise black writing, mapping it to Britain rather than maintaining the former sense of hyphenation and double-

[16] Procter, 'General Introduction', p. 6.
[17] James Procter, 'Introduction 1948 to late 1960s', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1968,* ed. James Procter (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 13-16 (p. 15).
[18] James Procter, 'Introduction late 1960s to mid-1980s', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1968,* ed. James Procter (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 95-97 (p. 95).
[19] James Procter, 'Introduction mid-1980s to late 1990s', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1968,* ed. James Procter (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 193-196 (p. 195) (original emphasis).

barrelling. It is this particular effort to recollect a history of black Britain which I suggest typifies the second wave of anthologising black Britain, which is largely constituted by texts published around the turn of the twenty-first century interested in charting a black British past. *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain* (2000) edited by Courttia Newland and Kadija Sesay, for example, assumes an organisational structure which mirrors Procter's historicising categories. The anthology likewise distorts distinctions between the literary and the sociopolitical document by favouring categories relating to period, generation, and interdisciplinarity: the categories, 'Settlers', 'Explorers', and 'Crusaders', each comprise of essays, stories, poetry, and memoirs. Such a structural framework is justified in the introduction to the text. The editors explain that the text is interested in tracing a conception of black Britishness based on belonging to and in Britain, as well as on common ancestry and descent.[20]

Such an interest is reflected by the title of the text as well. In his introduction, Newland remarks that the only thing which, at the time of writing, determines a collective black identity of Britain is the police identity code 'IC3'. It is his intention to employ and appropriate this term in order to enable the anthology itself to establish new forms of collective identity based on shared experiences of being black *and* British, marking the presence of residents of Britain and challenging the association of blackness with exile, criminality, and migration.[21] *The Fire People: A Collection of Contemporary Black British Poets* (1998) edited by Lemn Sissay is similarly interested in endorsing a community of writers distinctly of Britain, 'the Black and British poets' which Sissay calls 'The Fire People.'[22] Another example of the endeavour to ascertain a black history of Britain through the form of the anthology is *Burning Words, Flaming Images: Poems and Short Stories by Writers of African Descent* (1996) edited by

[20] Courttia Newland, 'Introduction', in *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*, eds. Courttia Newland and Kadija Sesay (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. x-xi.
[21] Newland, 'Introduction', p. x.
[22] Lemn Sissay, 'Introduction', in *The Fire People: A Collection of Contemporary Black British Poets*, ed. Lemn Sissay (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1998), p. 8.

Kadija Sesay. This text which traces the Caribbean and African roots of black British identity, but only in order to 'announce [a] presence certainly to Britain.' The writers

> are not […] exiles writing of landscapes to which they will return, nor ex-colonials admitted into the literature of Britain on the condition that they will continue to speak of 'homelands' that exist primarily for them as a memory. These writers live here. They must navigate the passage between memory and experience. They must guard against accepting the margins of society as their place.[23]

In each of these texts, belonging in Britain for a new generation of black writers is marked through the act of tracing a black British past. Thus, where the diasporic or hyphenated anthology is concerned with the 'there and then', this second wave of anthologising black Britain traces a past in order to contextualise and direct the present moment of canonisation.

There are other examples from this wave of anthologising black Britain which undertake such a task in a different manner. For example, *Out of Bounds: British Black and Asian Poets* (2012) edited by Jackie Kay, James Procter, and Gemma Robinson, maps black Britain according to geographical rather than temporal or generational coordinates. Like Procter's anthology, its aim is to dehyphenate black Britishness so that cognitive mapping of Britain is inclusive of its (post)colonial histories and present realities. However, where Procter takes up a temporal scale for such historical interjections, Kay et. al instead turn to map the spatial, offering 'compass points' between Scotland, Wales, and England and 'the global communities caught in Britain's imperial past and present.'[24] Another example is the anthology edited by Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen, *Black Writers in Britain 1760-1890* (1991), which reaches further into the past to locate black identity and experience as a longstanding part of British history. It is not that the tension between the notions of 'black' and 'British' is

[23] Earl Lovelace, 'Burning Words, Flaming Images', in *Burning Words, Flaming Images: Poems and Short Stories by Writers of African Descent*, ed. Kadija Sesay (London: SAKS, 1996), p. i.
[24] Jackie Kay, James Procter, and Gemma Robinson, 'Introduction', in *Out of Bounds: British Black and Asian Poets*, eds. Jackie Kay, James Procter, and Gemma Robinson (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 2012), Kindle edition.

lost by what I call the second wave of anthologising. Rather, such a tension becomes a productive means of interrogating conventional records of British history from within, as opposed to a discourse that overlays such records in a 'double-barrelled' manner.

Summarising the second wave of anthologising black Britain in this way, it becomes clear that the anthologiser and editor have central roles in how disparate materials are collected in order to construct a black British historicity. The conclusions which I am drawing from this corpus of anthologies are based largely on the material provided by the anthologiser, by the paratextual and allographic matter rather than by the collected works per se. Such overt mediation between material and reader is the 'interventionist' function of the anthology form outlined by Braddock. The authority of the interventionist function is something that the figure of anthologiser appears to be aware of across the second wave texts discussed here. Procter, for example, draws attention to the ways in which, as editor, he is responsible for bringing discrete texts together in a 'dialogic relationship' with one another, with his own commentary, and with the broader contexts and texts of (post)colonial and British history.[25] It is his intention to 'foreground' the 'narration of history […] as a process not of reflection but of construction.'[26] The other anthologies which I have cited as examples of a second wave of anthologising black Britain also engage in an act of construction rather than reflection, in order to position a collection of disparate texts as a history of black British writing. In *Black Writers in Britain 1760-1890,* for example, Edwards and Dabydeen mediate – make relevant to their project of historiography – the reception of each excerpt in their anthology in the form of a short introduction which locates the text within the specific context laid out by their introduction. In another example, Sesay in her introduction to *IC3,* makes explicit the intended effect and function of the works when collected as a whole. She suggests that:

[25] Procter, 'General Introduction', p. 10.
[26] Procter, 'General Introduction', p. 2.

> what this landmark anthology says most of all is that […] continued hope is evident in the advances that Black people in England have made and the positive impact we have made on British society, daring and challenging it just as much as our own, by whoever and however we choose to do so.[27]

Kay, Procter, and Robinson deliberate upon the role of anthologies in general and the mark which their own text will make on black British writing:

> If all anthologies offer readers ways to make a journey, they also limit the roads that we can take. *Out of Bounds* offers these same promises and restrictions. But, by explicitly plotting its various routes and cul-de-sacs, this collection also strives to open up the very boundaries which have historically disconnected poets from place.[28]

As revealed by such comments, the editors of second wave black British anthologies all demonstrate awareness of the ways in which the form of the anthology produces a historicising metanarrative governed by the act of anthologising. Surrounding and directing the intended function of the collected material are the anthology's acts of construction, consolidation, and narration; its interaction with time and space, with history and locality, with 'plotting'; and its imposition of 'limits' and 'boundaries' upon the anthologised.

Such a metanarrative relates to the processes of canonising black British writing. But the markers of narrative implicated by the 'interventionist' function such as plotting, narration, and limitation, also affect the temporality and orientation of canonising black British writing. If the first wave of anthologising black Britain is, as Procter suggests, typified by 'immediacy' and 'nowness', a sense of the 'then and there' when the diasporic condition is centred in the absence of historicity, then the interest in a black British past which characterises the second wave can be conceived of in response to such scaling. In his discussion of race and the modern anthology, Brent Hayes Edwards suggests that 'the form serves to "mark time"': the anthology

[27] Sesay, 'Introduction', p. xiii.
[28] Kay, Procter, and Robinson, 'Introduction'.

is 'above all a way of accounting for a given cultural conjuncture. It delimits the borders of an expressive mode or field, determining its beginning and end points'.[29] The effect of 'marking time' is particularly prevalent to the context of anthologising black Britain at the turn of the twenty-first century. This moment, as summarised by Procter, witnessed a turn towards the 'concentrated consolidation of [the black British] past in 1998' amidst the celebrations and commemorations of the fifty-year anniversary of the docking of the SS Empire Windrush. In Procter's terms, such consolidation is

> indicative of a prevailing mood of optimism as we pass the millennial threshold. […] However, and despite the feelings of optimism and celebration accompanying the Windrush commemorations, some degree of caution needs to be maintained in the assessment of historical trends they embrace. […] For example, it needs to be considered to what extent the renewed focus on and manufacture of a black British past might also form part of an escape from or evasion of the black British present/future. How much easier is it to embrace that past – supposedly finished, completed 'over' (and of course it can be none of those things) – than to attend to the messy, unsettled politics of the 'here-and-now'?[30]

Procter continues to show awareness throughout his text of the impact of the anthology's endeavour to locate a black British past on how the present is constructed. Nevertheless, the overt presence of his mediation as anthologiser means that the kind of determining of beginning and end points inherent to the anthology form described by Edwards influences the processes of canonising black British literature in Procter's text, as well as in second wave anthologies more broadly.

Discussing 'the idea of a black British canon in the cultural and political climate of Britain at the start of the twenty-first century', Alison Donnell suggests that such a canon is

[29] Brent Hayes Edwards, 'Race and the Modern Anthology', in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 43-50 (pp. 43-44).
[30] Procter, 'General Introduction', pp. 1-2.

necessary to counteract the 'false separation between postcolonial and British writings.'[31] Echoing Procter's discussion of the progression from diasporic anthologies to his own historical one, Donnell finds that embracing a black British canon can dehyphenate or, in her terms, assert the 'black in British' and thus 'be released from increasingly narrow ethnically-based criteria […] – criteria that generate anxiety, mistrust and a negative sense of difference'.[32] In saying this, Donnell promotes the idea of a 'heterodox' canon for black Britain, one able to productively challenge its own provision of borders and limits, where more traditional conceptions of canonising impose 'authority and closure'.[33] Donnell cites anthologies such as *IC3*, *The Fire People*, and *Afrobeat* as models for such a heterodox canon. These texts comprise a 'range of voices, subjects and styles', and are described by Donnell as 'canon-making projects' that are 'centrally concerned with making visible new literary constellations and new critical conversations.'[34] This movement into the future, into the new and the challenging, the diverse rather than limiting, is what makes the texts, for Donnell, suitable for a new kind of canonising for the context of black Britain. Indeed, there is a general projection into the future in each of the texts that I have cited; the wave as a whole can be summarised in the terms of Sesay in her introduction to *IC3*: the hope that new writers will be able to 'follow in the footsteps' of the history of writing mapped by the anthology.[35] However, because of the interventionist function of 'marking time' through the delimiting of borders, the extent to which such texts can, in their effort to historicise black Britain, negate the tendency of anthologising towards closure is uncertain. That is, second wave anthologies document the history of black British writing with the intent of directing future canonising processes. However, unlike a canon which is, as Christopher Kuipers suggests, 'a field of force that is never exclusively

[31] Alison Donnell, 'Afterword: In Praise of a Black British Canon', in *A Black British Canon?*, eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 189-204 (pp. 189-191).
[32] Donnell, 'Afterword', p. 202.
[33] Donnell, 'Afterword', p. 190.
[34] Donnell, 'Afterword', p. 192.
[35] Sesay, 'Introduction', p. xiii.

realized by any physical form', an anthology is a '*literary storage and communication form*'.[36] A canon is a 'dynamically changing field of force' which can 'pick up the most likely or unlikely things and carry them great distances'; comparatively, an anthology is 'limited' and 'abstracted', a 'clear text' which necessitates the formal markers of a beginning and an ending.[37] As a literary artifact, a bounded object, an anthology marks time through text, and is thus subject to firmly delimited beginnings and endings in its necessary processes of selection and omission, regardless of the extent to which it strives to direct the future of a given canon; it succumbs to the 'authority and closure' described by Donnell because of its textual, formalised nature.

The second wave of anthologising can be conceived of as a formalisation of the 'mood of optimism' described by Procter, for the future of black Britain accompanying the Windrush anniversary celebrations at the turn of the century. However, as Procter warns, this formalisation, in its tracing of a black British past and its positioning of historicity at the forefront of anthologising, inevitably did have the effect of offering the present moment – the closing of the pages of the anthology – as some sort of end point to the metanarrative of black British writing. Though not necessarily described in terms of anthologisation, the foreclosing of black British history in this way has been the focus of much anxiety around the future of black Britain. For example, Koye Oyedeji discusses the 'post-millennial' realities of black British writing as the period of optimism draws to a close. He suggests that the '"struggle" […] to reconcile the black presence in the national identity with that of migrant ancestry becomes the narrative on which rests any sense of collectivity'. This is because there is a metanarrative surrounding black British writing which presents an 'ideal' based on 'reach[ing] a clear and

[36] Christopher M. Kuipers, 'The Anthology/Corpus Dynamic: A Field Theory of the Canon', *College Literature*, 30.2 (2003), 51-71 (p. 51) (original emphasis).
[37] Kuipers, 'The Anthology/Corpus Dynamic', pp. 56-58.

simple utopian resolution'.[38] Thus, post-millennial black British writing faces a kind of entrapment between the closure or resolution of the millennial moment and the uncertainty of the future. Or, in Oyedeji's terms, it 'faces both an assortment of political objectifications created by theorised meta-narratives about Black Britain and the challenge of escaping them.'[39] Oyedeji calls this sense of entrapment 'the burden of the meta-narrative', asking: 'Is Black Britain shackled by the continual interrogation of our histories?'[40]

Second wave anthologising, because of its attempts to consolidate, construct, and narrate, formalises the imposition of metanarrative upon black British writing, the endeavour to 're-present what *black* meant in the past.'[41] However, this is not due to an intent on behalf of editors and anthologisers to present black British historicity as a 'tied-up' phenomenon of the past. Rather, it is due to the very nature of the presence of the act of anthologising in the form of the text, the way that resolution or closure precedes the collected and collated works in the paratextual material. According to Edwards:

> The allographic preface of the anthology "speaks before" (*prae-fatio*) what it collates. […] It conditions the protocols of reception for the documents it presents. It purports to strike a path, to point the reader through a door over a horizon, but paradoxically is usually written only after the text has been assembled. If the preface functions as a frame, we should recall that a frame in the etymological sense (as in the phrase "to frame an idea") refers both to the materiality of the limits or the edges of an object and to the interior force that gives it shape, that gives it life […]. As a formal device, the preface speaks double in this way: it is outside, it marks what is not within the book, it precedes the book's "speaking," but it is also the very force that animates the book, that opens it for us and shows its contents. The preface therefore is a frame not always easily separable from the artifact itself, even as it rhetorically holds itself to be distinct from and prior to what it introduces.[42]

[38] Koye Oyedeji, 'In Search of… (Adequate Representations of Our Post Black Condition)', in *'Black' British Aesthetics Today*, ed., R. Victoria Arana (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 119-134 (p. 126).
[39] Oyedeji, 'In Search of…', p. 125.
[40] Oyedeji, 'In Search of…', pp. 128-129.
[41] Oyedeji, 'In Search of…', p. 133.
[42] Edwards, 'Race and the Modern Anthology', p. 45.

Thus, the anthology assumes certain undergirding expectations in line with the kind of 'authority and control' which Donnell suggests is at odds with the aims of canonising black British writing. The anthologised material is subject to the governance of anthologising, and the 'double speak' of the frame asserts authority and closure even while this may be resisted by the anthologiser or editor. Such 'double-speak' resonates with Oyedeji's suggestion of the 'shackles' or burden for black British writing under the authority of metanarrative. In both cases, a conclusion or resolution has already been hypothesised both before and after the individual articulation takes place, an articulation which is presumed to prove or validate such a postulation. Consequently, Oyedeji's proposition for breaking free of such shackles correlates with the activities of anthologising black British writing which follow the second wave.

Oyedeji suggests that what is 'important in the paradigm forward' is the movement away from interdisciplinarity and historicity and towards 'the creative experimentation of our future.'[43] That is, the 'artful magic' and 'creative fantasy' of aesthetic innovation enables writers 'not [to] forget [their] history, but face it in new ways'.[44] Such positioning of formal creativity as an objective of the future is echoed in the studies of Suzanne Scafe, Elisabeth Bekers, and Helen Cousins, which explore narrative experimentalism in black British women's writing.[45] Scafe, for example, suggests that the fiction of Irenosen Okojie, whose work I discuss in the next chapter, experiments with forms of narrative to 'challenge the reader to see worlds differently.'[46] Oyedeji employs the term 'post-black' to indicate resistance to the 'burden of the meta-narrative', deliberately invoking markers of closure in order to highlight movement

[43] Oyedeji, 'In Search of…', p. 129.
[44] Oyedeji, 'In Search of…', p. 133.
[45] Suzanne Scafe, 'Daring to Tilt Worlds: The Fiction of Irenosen Okojie', in *Women Writers and Experimental Narrative,* eds. Kate Aughterson and Deborah Philips (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 245-264; and Elisabeth Bekers and Helen Cousins, 'Helen Oyeyemi at the Vanguard of Innovation in Contemporary Black British Women's Literature', in *Women Writers and Experimental Narrative,* eds. Kate Aughterson and Deborah Philips (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 205-266.
[46] Scafe, 'Daring to Tilt Worlds', p. 245.

beyond the 'shackles' – as well as future orientation. It is also a subversion of the authority of the metanarrative, a claim to acceptance and ownership of the fact that the 'subject position' from which the literary is articulated is 'inherently political': 'we will not allow anyone, or any market, to dictate what black art is, but continually redefine it aesthetically ourselves, on an individual basis.'[47]

Postmillennial, or third wave anthologising, likewise demonstrates such resistance to the authority and imposition of closure of the metanarrative, instead turning towards the potential of the literary and artistic to, in the terms of the editors of *Bare Lit* (2017), 'open possibilities'.[48] *Bare Lit* is an anthology of creative literature by writers of colour in the UK, a text collated from the material delivered at a literary festival of the same name in 2016. Co-editor of the anthology and co-founder of the festival Mend Mariwany states in his foreword to the text that the aim of *Bare Lit* was to release such writing from its 'prescriptive themes' and 'bulk of constraints'.[49] To achieve such release, the sociopolitical and historical contexts of writing need not be lost, but function as part of a conscious strive towards 'balance' in the organisation and presentation of material – balance between awareness of the 'politicised role of selection' and 'what is present [in the text] and what needs to be more present' after its dissemination.[50] Thus, Mariwany demonstrates awareness and subversion of the tendency of his own input in the text towards the kind of 'double speak' of the allographic in anthologising, described by Edwards, of its association with authority and closure. Furthermore, he indicates the ways in which the text intends to evade these impulses. The impression of an 'exhaustive and complete' text is circumvented by the 'unimaginably vast scope [of writing], reflecting the wide, and at times irreconcilable and contradictory, range of themes and the political élan

[47] Oyedeji, 'In Search of…', pp. 132-133.
[48] Mend Mariwany, 'Foreword', in *Bare Lit*, eds. Kavita Bhanot, Courttia Newland, and Mend Mariwany (Green Bay: Brain Mill, 2017), pp. ix-xii (p. ix).
[49] Mariwany, 'Foreword', p. ix.
[50] Mariwany, 'Foreword', pp. x-xi.

present'.[51] Above all, it is 'literary imaginations' that are presented by the anthology, and these are endued with insurgent potential against 'overburdening' constraints.[52] That is, *Bare Lit* intends to provide 'the space' for its writers, through aesthetic innovation and creative liberty, to 'free themselves of the constraints placed upon them'.[53] Through the provision of such 'space' for literary agency, *Bare Lit* intends to elude the authority and closure associated with the politicised acts of selection and omission, and instead present the 'possible' and the 'potential'.[54] In this way, the anthology advocates for the same kind of 'paradigm forward' that is proposed by Oyedeji, one which challenges the authority of the metanarrative in speaking before, for, and after the individual articulation, through aesthetic innovation. It is also in this way that *Bare Lit* can be regarded as paradigmatic of the postmillennial wave of anthologising more broadly.

A number of anthologies of black British writing in the twenty-first century echo Oyedeji's anxiety around the closure imposed by the 'burden of the metanarrative', and similarly turn towards the potential of the literary to open up possibilities and challenge constraints. For example, *Red: Contemporary Black British Poetry* (2010) edited by Kwame Dawes, influenced its contributors by offering the image of the colour red as inspiration. This was in order to 'avoid the didacticism that telegraphed the need to write about "blackness".[55] The intention was to negate the kind of categorising expected of a black British anthology and instead 'inspire poets to create' and consequently 'allow for possibilities more than anything else.'[56] In this example, an aesthetic expectation, an image, is presented as means of encouraging the 'evolution' of the term 'Black British'.[57] *A Change is Gonna Come: Brand*

[51] Mariwany, 'Foreword', p. x.
[52] Mariwany, 'Foreword', p. ix.
[53] Mariwany, 'Foreword', p. xi.
[54] Mariwany, 'Foreword', p. xi.
[55] Kwame Dawes, 'Preface', in *Red: Contemporary Black British Poetry*, ed. Kwame Dawes (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2010), pp. 17-20 (p. 17).
[56] Dawes, 'Preface', p. 18.
[57] Dawes, 'Preface', p. 19.

New Stories and Poetry about Change (2017), edited by Aa'Ishah Z. Hawton, is similarly projected towards the future of black British writing. The anthology endeavours to diversify the literary landscape for black British writers through generic and formal innovation in the Young Adult market, guiding the concerns of the next generation of readers and writers. Its theme of changing the metanarrative is echoed by other anthologies of the period: *Safe: Twenty Ways to be a Black Man in Britain Today* (2020) edited by Derek Owusu aims to 'shatte[r] the widely held opinions about Black men in the UK', and asks 'the reader to rebuild their views more carefully based on what is learned about Black British men as individuals', to 'face themselves, their beliefs, the institutions they trust';[58] the *Ten* series (2010-2017) variously edited by Bernardine Evaristo, Daljit Nagra, and Karen McCarthy Woolf strives to challenge the metanarrative sustained by a largely white publishing industry where a 'tacit colour/culture bar is still operative', and intends to mark such change by displaying the 'diversity of style' of black British writers;[59] and anthologies such as the Nottingham Writers' Studio's *Black Lives* (2021) fight to effect structural and institutional change through stories when feelings of 'powerlessness' over sociopolitical realities threaten the fight against racism.[60] This list of postmillennial anthologies which are concerned with the future, change, and development could also include texts such as *More Fiya: A New Collection of Black British Poetry* (2022), which intends to revaluate, continue, and redirect the black and British tradition of creative writing originally anthologised by Lemn Sissay in *The Fire People*.

Throughout the third wave of anthologising black Britain, there is a general sense that anthologising is connected to the canonisation of black British writing, but not in the way

[58] Derek Owusu, 'Introduction: Is it True What they Say about Black Men?', in *Safe: Twenty Ways to be a Black Man in Britain Today*, ed. Derek Owusu (London: Trapeze, 2020), pp. 1-5 (p. 5).
[59] Bernardine Evaristo, 'Why it Matters', in *Ten: New Poets from Spread the Word*, eds. Bernardine Evaristo and Daljit Nagra (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2010), pp. 9-16.
[60] Adam O'Connell, 'Foreword', in *Black Lives*, ed. Nottingham Writers' Studio (Nottingham: Big White Shed, 2021), pp. i-iii (p. ii).

suggested by Donnell, whereby the anthologising impulse straightforwardly makes the 'new' visible. Rather, the impression is sustained across these texts that the usual role of the anthologiser is potentially burdensome in how it gives form to the authority of the figure speaking for, before, and after collected writers and their works. In these texts, the figure of authority, the editor or anthologiser, reflects upon their own position within the text. The editors of *Bare Lit*, for example, reveal their own resistance to the anthologising impulse, suggesting that it is their intention to 'make a space that allowed for the existence' of works which conceive of writing as political in and for itself. This is in opposition to the anthologiser's usual function, which generally enforces upon such works 'frameworks', 'boundaries', and 'categories'.[61] Similarly, *Red* strives for 'an innovative way to tackle the anthology' so that the 'exciting[…] future' is prioritised.[62] In third wave anthologising, there is an attempt to negate the authority of the anthologiser. The imposition of boundaries and limits upon the anthologised is similarly challenged in the endeavour across the texts to allow space for possibilities outside of the predominant metanarrative; and the potential of the literary and creative freedom to open itself up to such possibility is the central means by which the negation of authority and closure can be achieved.

In operation here is a dynamic between the metanarrative as authoritative and limiting, and the individual text as subversive against the former's impulse towards closure and resolution. However, the extent to which the proclamation of future orientation through creative liberty can, in actuality, negate the allographic nature of the interventionist function is still uncertain. The form of the anthology must still delimit borders, beginnings, and endings because of its textual nature. Whether resistance to their own imposition of authority and resulting closure on behalf of editors and anthologisers is enough to change the dynamic

[61] Kavita Bhanot and Courttia Newland, 'Introduction', in *Bare Lit*, eds. Kavita Bhanot, Courttia Newland, and Mend Mariwany (Green Bay: Brain Mill, 2017), pp. 1-4 (p. 4).
[62] Dawes, 'Preface', pp. 19-20.

between anthologising and canonising black British literature can only really be assessed when third wave anthologising can be considered in retrospect. One particular postmillennial anthology though, *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories* (2015) edited by Jacob Ross, does not only resist its own authority and closure, but makes the kind of delimitation and demarcation of anthologising a theme and formal device of its collection. Thus, *Closure* overtly engages with rather than denies the charged interventionist function. Furthermore, it does so through employment of the short narrative form.

That is, like black British writing under the terms of the metanarrative, Ross suggests in his 'Note from the Editor' which opens *Closure*, that the modern short story is similarly subject to 'increasingly rigid (some may say constricting) definitions placed on the form.'[63] Through the publication of an anthology such as *Closure*, which strives to undermine 'authoritative taxonomies', Ross hopes to reposition the short story back into the 'domain of being a basic human reflex and need for narrative' – a means of 'making sense of the world'.[64] The kind of authoritative narratological taxonomies implied by Ross are those that make completeness, limitation, the imminence of the end, wholeness, and (pre)closure the focus of short story structure. I am referring here to a range of short story theories, from Edgar Allan Poe's 'unity of effect', in which end(ing)s determine all other aspects of the composition and reception of a story;[65] to Susan Lohafer's suggestion that the short story can be defined through 'the periodicity of an overdetermined, early-signaled closure';[66] to John Gerlach's centring of closure in *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story* (1985); to Charles E. May's concentration on the way in which short fiction creates the impression of

[63] Jacob Ross, 'A Note from the Editor', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2015), pp. 9-13 (p. 9).
[64] Ross, 'A Note', pp. 9-10.
[65] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale', in *The Short Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*, ed. Ann Charters, 5th edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), pp. 1531-1552
[66] Susan Lohafer, 'Introduction', in *Reading for Storyness: Preclosure Theory, Empirical Poetics, and Culture in the Short Story*, ed. Susan Lohafer (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 1-5 (p. 2).

totality through reduction;[67] to Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell's assertion that the postcolonial short story is not 'a fragment of something larger but complete in itself: striven with its own fault-lines.'[68] Across such theories of the short story is the implication that the brevity of the form generates a sense delimitation, of the imminence and anticipation of the end; the end structures the whole and closure, resolution, and reconciliation become of foremost significance. This does not mean that such principles are always achieved by the short story according to such theories, but that their presence or omission are directive agents in the crafting and interpretation of the short form.

Ross draws upon this charged notion of closure associated with the short story through the very title of the anthology: he suggests that the title was chosen 'precisely because it undermines itself.' He continues, '[l]iterary fiction is rarely – if ever – about closure. Rather, it is concerned with the opening up of possibilities. At best we are taken to a point of rest rather than a neatly tied-up ending.'[69] Thus, in curating the text, Ross is interested in the potential of the short story to 'open up possibilities', to 'make sense of the world' through 'writing [as] an adventure'. Above all, to show how 'meanings are not fixed', cannot be reduced or limited to taxonomies and categorisation.[70] Significantly, though, the endeavour to define the short story as an open form in this way is positioned in direct response to notion of closure that occupies short story theory. Unlike in *Red*, where poetry is championed as a form that 'throbs and pulses

[67] Charles E. May, 'Why Short Stories are Essential and Why They are Seldom Read', in *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*, eds. Per Winther, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 14-25. Also relevant to this point and published within this volume is Per Winther, 'Closure and Preclosure as Narrative Grid in Short Story Analysis', in *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*, eds. Per Winther, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 57-69.
[68] Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell, 'Introduction: The Short Story and the Postcolonial', in *The Postcolonial Short Story: Contemporary Essays*, eds. Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-14 (p. 5).
[69] Ross, 'A Note', p. 11.
[70] Ross, 'A Note', pp. 11-12.

and seeps and flows', one that is 'moving forward and standing tall',[71] Ross centres the short story's specific narrative qualities and asks what the limits of narrative can achieve when presented with the 'subversion that a theme/title such as "closure" might trigger'.[72] As such, Ross invokes a sense of the charged notion of closure in the short story in order to highlight the opening up of possibilities performed by his anthology as something that functions in reference to the tendency of the short narrative form towards closure.

To the context of the burden of the metanarrative, the authority and allography of anthologising and canonising processes, and the dynamic force of the individual text that strives for creative freedom against such authority, Ross's centring of a charged idea of closure is pertinent. Ross correlates the opening up of possibilities through the short story with a particular moment in black British writing, when the politics of representation potentially burden and limit the freedom of authors to write beyond definitions of black Britishness. He suggests that, in *Closure*,

> There is less of an attempt by writers – overtly or through their characters – to self-define. 'Black Britishness' is what it is – a lived reality that is like air or breath or blood: important, but hardly at the forefront of one's consciousness except in moments of confrontation or self-assertion, and even then, it is not always recognised as such.[73]

If black Britishness is subject to taxonomies, categorisation, and (de)limitation under the metanarrative and its politics of representation, then the short story, a narrative form also subject to similar delimitations, allows for the exploration of black Britishness beyond such confines, but via formal means which sustain something of the charged expectation and subversion of overt taxonomy. The resistance to its tendencies towards closure, wholeness, and

[71] Margaret Busby, 'Foreword', in *Red: Contemporary Black British Poetry*, ed. Kwame Dawes (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2010), pp. 15-16 (p. 16).
[72] Ross, 'A Note', pp. 11-12.
[73] Ross, 'A Note', p. 11.

boundaries which Ross associates with the short story becomes a formal approach to writing black Britishness in the text, allowing it to 'not be recognised as such', or to negate the need for explicit definition and categorisation.

Writing in reference to and concurrent subversion of limits and closure is what unites the stories of *Closure*, which variously thematise ideas of opening up, obliquely imagining forms of seeing anew in diverse contexts. For example, Dinesh Allirajah's 'Easy on the Rose's' is set in a public house on the brink of its 're-open[ing] as an eatery specialising in Valentine's and Christmas menus'. The story is concerned with what is lost when gentrification forces the 'old regulars' out of a former place of belonging; it reflects upon a moment of simultaneous closing off and opening up in order to mark movement forward, but at the same time stresses a need to protect and carry forward the experiences and knowledge of a passing generation.[74] Ayesha Siddiqi's 'The Typewriter' achieves a similar effect when an old, broken typewriter writes of the history of a departed woman via her granddaughter, who does not understand the language of the writing or have any conscious knowledge of what the machine narrates through her hands. Like 'Easy on the Rose's', Siddiqi's story is concerned with the idea of opening the present moment to the knowledge and significance of heritage and history.

Approaching the theme of opening up in a different manner, Leone Ross's 'The Müllerian Eminence' takes a bodily orifice as its stimulation, specifically the membrane which partially covers the vaginal opening – the hymen – and conceives of this tissue as a means of representation. Ross offers as a preface to the story a textbook definition of the Müllerian eminence:

> The Müllerian ducts end in […] the Müllerian eminence … in the male [foetus] the Müllerian ducts atrophy, but traces … are represented by the testes … In the female [foetus] the Müllerian ducts … undergo further development. The portions which lie in

[74] Dinesh Allirajah, 'Easy on the Rose's', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2015), pp. 120-126 (p. 120).

> the genital core fuse to form the uterus and vagina … The hymen represents the remains of Müllerian eminence.
>
> In adult women, the Müllerian eminence has no function.[75]

The fact that the eminence and the hymen resulting from it have no function is imaginatively refuted by the story that follows. The hymen is often associated with the threshold between women's virginity and sexual maturity: the cultural myth surrounding the hymen is that the breaking of this membrane occurs when virginity is lost. Thus, the rupturing of the hymen symbolises the moment between and movement from one state to another. The myth of the broken hymen is the resulting emblem of cultural ideas around a dichotomy between virginity, virtue, and purity on one side, and sexual activity, promiscuity, and impurity on the other, with the hymen as a threshold between the two. Such cultural symbolism of the breaking of the remnant membrane is steeped in patriarchal and misogynistic ideology around women's sexual activity. However, in her story, Ross subverts the significance of the hymen so that it becomes a vessel representing the trauma of sexual and domestic abuse experienced by women.

In 'The Müllerian Eminence', hymens are shed from abuse victims and found by Charu Deol, a cleaner of government buildings. When Charu Deol picks up the hymens, they disclose to him their owners' histories of abuse. He becomes 'witness' to the stories of their trauma.[76] The story suggests that the

> knowledge inside the hymen did not manifest in good and tidy order, like a narrative on a TV screen. It was more, thought Charu Deol, like being a djinn or a soul snake, slipping inside the [women's] skin and looking out through [their] eyes.[77]

[75] Leone Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2015), pp. 90-100 (p. 90).
[76] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 93.
[77] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 92.

The hymen as a representation of the threshold between two states is reimagined here: in the cultural myth, the hymen channels misogynist notions of impurity into a single symbol; in 'The Müllerian Eminence', the hymen is a vessel for different kind of story, one which shares the burden of living with trauma. The hymen becomes a form of representation, a threshold into the experiences of others only accessible to Charu Deol. As the man collects the hymens, the weight of witnessing such trauma becomes overbearing, and he begins to consider his knowledge an 'invasion' of both his own repose and the discretion and privacy of the victims.[78] Charu Deol contemplates discarding the hymens, but resolves that he cannot 'forsak[e] his new knowledge, as if he had no responsibility.'[79] As witness to these stories, his own reflection is compromised by a 'spray of crystalline hymens across the mirror';[80] he fears that his skin is 'transparent' in the same way that the women's hymens are to him;[81] and he wonders why the universe does not 'break into small pieces' when stories 'so long and fractured' are only knowable through oblique interpretation.[82] As such, Charu Deol's responsibility as witness influences how he sees himself, others, and that which is 'beyond him'.[83] It therefore resonates with a fundamental function of art forms in their representations of reality.

It is in this way that Ross's image of the hymen connects with *Closure*'s overall interest in opening up. The hymen is a barrier, a threshold, a limit. But, in this story, its physicality gives way to what it represents in terms of the cultural, the social, and the abstract. What the hymens reveal to Charu Deol are not ordered and neat narratives of abuse, but fragmented and complex images of unresolved trauma which cannot be settled into narrative form despite Charu Deol's attempts to 'write [them] down'.[84] Furthermore, narrative reconciliation and

[78] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 96.
[79] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 94.
[80] Ross. 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 96.
[81] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 98.
[82] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 98.
[83] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 99.
[84] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 99.

closure are negated by the end of the story. Overburdened with the responsibility of carrying the trauma, Charu Deol abuses his landlady, her hymen 'inching down her thigh, like a rubied snail, like torn underwear.'[85] Such a circular structure shaping the story mirrors, on a formal level, the sense of the irresolvabilty of trauma depicted by 'The Müllerian Eminence'. Through this meeting of form and theme, Ross's story produces the kind of irresolute tension with which *Closure* is concerned, between limits and the possibility of what could be beyond them. As a result, the story engages with Jacob Ross's intent to unsettle limits, borders, and demarcation in the context of black British writing through the anthology. It does so in a way that is, indeed, not necessarily 'recognised as such'. The politics of representation explored by Jacob Ross in his introduction are implicitly, covertly invoked by 'The Müllerian Eminence' when the hymen is imagined as a mode of representation, one which cannot present its subject through delineated form but instead offers the impression of complexity and unsettlement.

Leone Ross's story is not the only narrative in the text which approaches the charged conception of closure through the portrayal of some sort of threshold. Thresholds are variously imagined and centred by the anthology, enduing the notion of in-betweenness – rather than what is entered into or closed off by the threshold – with heightened significance. The idea of a threshold as a precipice into the unknown is presented in, for example, 'Malik's Door' by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi. The story details the relationship of a couple, Katula and Malik, at a moment when Katula is considering leaving the relationship. As the story progresses, it depicts Katula's memories of meeting her husband, of their wedding day, and the unhappy marriage. However, it starts at the end of this tale, with Katula 'starting at Malik's bedroom door', a symbol of his neglect of her needs and his consistent 'concealment'. She imagines

[85] Ross, 'The Müllerian Eminence', p. 100.

what is and could be beyond this barrier.[86] Katula pictures the possible outcomes of her opening the door to confront Malik, things that 'haun[t] her every time she decides to be strong and leave him':[87] Malik's possible confirmation of his homosexuality; the potential revocation of Katula's visa; Malik's inevitable shame over his failed marriage. The story also closes at this point, with Katula considering opening the door and confronting her husband, but unable to act when she cannot determine the outcome. As such, 'Malik's Door' makes the threshold – the possibility of what is beyond the barrier, and the notion of the unknown – the focal point of its narrative, ultimately resisting any expectation of closure.

Many of the stories in the anthology achieve a similar effect of highlighting the significance of the threshold, but by centring liminal and transitory spaces and journeys. There is a consistent interest in the works which constitute *Closure* in the moment of voyage and the possibilities invoked by this moment, rather than in an explicit destination or grounded setting. For example, Tariq Mehmood's 'The House' initially presents itself as the story of character Kamil Kaur looking for the house in which she was born. But, by the end, it is the significance of this journey of tracing forgotten histories for taxi driver Raja Iqbal which provides the story with its momentum; while Kamil finds what she is looking for, Raja is changed by a journey which he 'will never forget' and which has incited in him curiosity over his own heritage.[88] In Pete Kalu's 'Getting Home', which I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the narrator depicts the obstacles that he faces as a lone black man at night on his journey from Manchester Piccadilly to his Oldham flat; again, it is the journey as opposed to the destination that is centred by this story. In the same vein, liminal spaces of travel such as airports, train stations, and roads feature as settings in many of the stories, as is the case in Gaylene Gould's 'Chocolate Tea',

[86] Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, 'Malik's Door', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2015), pp. 41-52 (p. 41).
[87] Makumbi, 'Malik's Door', p. 41.
[88] Tariq Mehmood, 'The House', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2015), pp. 53-60 (p. 60).

Raman Mundair's 'Day Trippers', Valda Jackson's 'An Age of Reason (Coming Here), and Muli Amaye's 'Streamlining'. In these stories, the kind of closure associated with the terminus of destination is undermined. The opening up of possibilities anticipated by Jacob Ross in his editorial is depicted by the various representations of travel.

It is, therefore, a fluid notion of closure which is conceptualised by the majority of the stories of the anthology. Resultingly, as a whole, resistance to closure is diversly approached across different contexts and themes. A few stories, however, engage with frameworks of closure more readily recognisable to the context of black Britain and postcolonialism more broadly; the 'post' in postcolonial also evokes a charged notion of closure which resists its own demarcations. Olivia U. Rutazibwa and Robbie Shilliam suggest that the '"post" in postcolonial functioned […] not as an escape from history but as a marker of limits: to think beyond colonialism was to unavoidably grapple with the intellectual and practical legacies of empire.'[89] Thus, postcolonial politics similarly evokes and challenges the delineation of ends, limits, and boundaries which Jacob Ross correlates with both the taxonomising of the short story and with the politics of black British representation. Like the way in which Ross draws attention to a tendency towards closure in order to subvert it, Rutazibwa and Shilliam similarly suggest that '[t]here is no postcolonial politics without contention over the continued existence of coloniality' and that, therefore, 'the *principles* of the rule have survived the end of the *rule* itself.'[90]

Stories such as Chantal Oakes's 'The Weight of Four Tigers', Hana Riaz's 'A Cartography of All the Names You've Ever Given Me', Bernardine Evaristo's 'Yoruba Man Walking', and Karen Onojaife's 'Here Be Monsters' approach such charged postcolonial

[89] Olivia U. Rutazibwa and Robbie Shilliam, 'Postcolonial Politics: An Introduction', in *The Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ebook edition, eds. Olivia U. Rutazibwa and Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2018).
[90] Rutazibwa and Shilliam, 'Postcolonial Politics', ebook edition.

politics by employing the short story in order to explore, revisit, and disclose historic sites, artifacts, practices, and ideologies. Ultimately, these stories undermine any sense of closure in conventional, colonial historical records. 'The Weight of Four Tigers', for example, negates the distinction between colonial history and a postcolonial present in its reimagining of medieval hunting tapestries as twenty-first century performance art-cum-science experiment. Both are exhibited at the same seventeenth-century English 'grand house',[91] and both reveal the problematic interference of (neo)imperial powers, 'stripp[ing]' Africa of 'its natural wealth of wildlife and resources'.[92] In another example, 'Here Be Monsters' obliquely reimagines the processes involved in medieval and imperial cartography for the twenty-first century.

'Here Be Monsters' depicts a 'mind' seeking medical help for mental health in the boundless, uncharted realm of information and communication provided by the internet.[93] The 'unknown territories' marked with the 'legend "Here be monsters" [on] old fashioned maps' are likened to the 'reckless and dark thoughts' which are demarcated as 'mental illness'.[94] Like imperial cartography which revised the mapping of supposedly unclaimed and unknown territories via the domination of colonialisation, it is implied that the Eurocentric classification of mental illness similarly governs a host of yet to be understood conditions of experience in the guise of an authoritative taxonomy. This is not to suggest that medical recognition and understanding of mental illness is not advantageous or imperative; indeed, it is comforting for protagonist Arike to know that classification – 'a name for every thought and feeling a human has ever experienced' – demonstrates that 'someone else has been there first.'[95] Rather, what is called into question is the capacity of a taxonomy saturated by western science, modernity,

[91] Chantal Oakes, 'The Weight of Four Tigers', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2015), pp. 61-68 (p. 61).
[92] Oakes, 'The Weight of Four Tigers', p. 64.
[93] Karen Onojaife, 'Here Be Monsters', in *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories*, ed. Jacob Ross (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2015), pp. 29-40 (p. 37).
[94] Onojaife, 'Here Be Monsters', p. 37.
[95] Onojaife, 'Here Be Monsters', p. 37.

and capitalism to classify a diversity of global experiences, subject positions, and states of mind. However, Eastern forms of coping strategies such as meditation, yoga, and chakras are also shown to be ineffective for Arike. Arike finds that such strategies cannot help her locate her 'spiritual purpose' as a black British woman. In 'Here Be Monsters', the internet represents *terra incognita*: a potentially limitless, complex, interwoven, ungovernable space, in charged relation to the authoritative taxonomies of imperial modernity. In this way, Onojaife revisits and revises cartography as the science of modelling and communicating spatial information for the digital age. In doing so, the story draws attention to what kind of ideologies are carried forward by the scientific and technological advance of modernity in a postcolonial world. 'Here Be Monsters' approaches the charged 'post' of postcolonial by obliquely considering what cartography can mean when the physical world is already mapped, and when the political legacy of such mapping remains in the minds of global citizens and the technologies of their future.

In stories such as these, the charged 'post' in postcolonial acts as a model for conceiving of the anthology's overall approach to the concept of closure. Like the simultaneous calling forth and challenging of endings, limits, and demarcation summoned by 'post' colonialism, *Closure* similarly commands the overt presence of delimitation in both the context of the short story and the politics of black British representation. With such an impulse towards closure undergirding and uniting the collected works, *Closure* is able to build from the 'delimiting of the borders of an expressive mode or field' which Edwards suggests defines the form of the anthology.[96] By thematising the burden of the metanarrative, *Closure* accepts rather than rejects the textual confines of anthologising, and is therefore able to openly interact with the allographic nature of this form. The 'authority and closure' of canonising are operative even

[96] Edwards, 'Race and the Modern Anthology', p. 45.

while they are problematised, because they are the very kind of historic principles which the fields of black British and postcolonial studies strive to revisit and see anew. Thus, a heterodox canon cannot be achieved without first recognising its own limits. I suggest that the various formal approaches to and thematising of the principles of opening up and closing off mark the anthologising performed by *Closure* as something fundamentally black British, through a return to both the hybrid, diasporic, and hyphenated discourses of first wave anthologising and the historiography of the second wave. Engaged in postcolonial politics, the fields of black British literature, culture, and history have always been concerned with opening up, returning to, and revising that which is presumed to be closed, defined, and certain; they uncover the biases, injustices, and inaccuracies undergirding conventional records of British history and dominant conceptions of British identity. They do so by retracing and refuting the classifications and demarcations of the nation, ultimately seeing and writing Britain anew.

This point has been made recently by Deirdre Osborne in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)* (2016). She begins the text by affirming that:

> Populations from African, Caribbean and South Asian locations arriving in Britain post-war brought diasporic sensibilities and literary heritages that have profoundly transformed British national culture, leading to a more complex and inclusive sense of its past.[97]

Even while its 'distinctiveness' is advocated by Osborne, 'the influential presences of contemporary Black and Asian literature [is] intrinsic to conceptions of British cultural heritage'.[98] Postwar black British writing's 'renovation of British culture' is testament to the fact that Britain has '*never* been a monolithic racial enclave'.[99] Thus, hybridisation and

[97] Deirdre Osborne, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*, ed. Dierdre Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1-22 (p. 1).
[98] Osborne, 'Introduction', p. 1.
[99] Osborne, 'Introduction', pp. 2-3 (original emphasis).

historicisation are both significant principles in the cultural function of black British literature for opening up Britishness to possibility. By undertaking an exploration of black Britishness beyond categorisation and limitation through the tropes of opening up and closing off via the short story, *Closure* resonates with and in many ways demonstrates Osborne's point that (black) Britishness is 'interpretable'.[100] It is not closed, demarcated, and limited, but open to the subversion of the impulse towards closure incited by the processes and forms of defining and canonising a field of literature.

[100] Osborne, 'Introduction', p. 2.

CHAPTER FIVE

Single-Authored Collections: Antirealism in the Twenty-First-Century Black British Short Story

In this chapter, I explore several twenty-first-century single-authored short story collections which interrupt the predominance of realism in black British writing. The overarching argument of this thesis is that a realist technique has become dominant rather than simply prevalent in black British literature, due to the strictures and expectations of contemporary metropolitan publishing. Now, I focus on the defining characteristics of realism, in both literary and philosophical contexts, outlined by George Becker, Matthew Beaumont, Ruth Ronen, and Rachel Bowlby. I consider the extent to which twenty-first-century single-authored black British short story collections engage with antirealist practices in order to recall and subvert the shape of literary realism, and why. Ultimately, I reflect upon the sociopolitical potential of subverting publisher expectations via antirealist narrative approaches and frameworks.

To begin, I explore Zadie Smith's first collection of short stories, *Grand Union* (2019), as well as Jackie Kay's *Why Don't You Stop Talking* (2002) and Merle Collins's *The Ladies are Upstairs* (2011). I consider the extent to which these collections employ realism in order to reveal its limits. For this exploration, I consult Rachel Bowlby's defence of the realist aesthetic against its supposed simplicity.[1] I then turn to explore Bolu Babalola's *Love in Colour: Mythical Tales from Around the World, Retold* (2020), a text which creates tension

[1] Rachel Bowlby, 'Foreword', in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. xi-xviii.

between realism and myth. I investigate such tension with reference to what Matthew Beaumont calls the 'illusionist character' of realist representation.[2] Next, I explore texts which engage directly with antirealism. First, I analyse Irenosen Okojie's *Speak Gigantular* (2016), in terms of the degree to which this collection's blurring of the material world with the otherworldly challenges the immediacy of 'documentation and observation' that is central to literary realism, according to George Becker.[3] Second, I explore Leone Ross's *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (2017) in reference to how this text challenges realism's ostensible claim to represent, in Ruth Ronen's terms, the 'mind-independent existence of the world of objects'.[4] Finally, I explore Okojie's second collection, *Nudibranch* (2019), in terms of its problematising of the position of literary realism within the philosophy of nineteenth-century scientific realism, from which the aesthetic derives. As Bowlby notes, realism 'was joined with a desire to use the novel to take the measure of recent and ongoing social changes with the would-be detachment of a scientific observer.'[5] I suggest that Okojie approaches literary realism from this scientific-philosophical context of realism more broadly, and I consider the extent to which *Nudibranch* can be conceived of as enacting, through literary form, what Christopher Norris terms 'discovery procedures'.[6] My contention is that these twenty-first-century black British story collections recall what are often understood to be the defining characteristics of realism. At the same time, they undermine these characteristics by reflecting on their own textuality. The stories challenge realism by placing its characteristics side-by-side with non-realist elements. Positioned within multiple non-realist models, such conclusively realist tendencies are striking because they are incongruous with the mood and style established by the

[2] Matthew Beaumont, 'Introduction: Reclaiming Realism', in *Adventure in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 1-12 (p. 6).
[3] George Joseph Becker, 'Introduction: Modern Realism as a Literary Movement', in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George Joseph Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 3-40 (pp. 31-32).
[4] Ruth Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', *Style*, 49.2 (1995), 184-200 (p. 186).
[5] Bowlby, 'Foreword', p. xiv.
[6] Christopher Norris, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Contemporary Philosophy: "What's truth got to do with it?"', in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 241-260 (p. 241).

surrounding narrative, inviting consideration of why they have been placed where they have, of why realism has been evoked in literary contexts which knowingly destabilise its authority.

A brief look at the recent history of publishing longform black British fiction demonstrates the predominance of realism: Diana Evans's *Ordinary People* (2018) is a tale of domestic, everyday life that depicts real-world locations in and around London; Candice Carty-Williams' *Queenie* (2019) has been described as 'an important political tome of black womanhood and black British life' due to its scrupulous social commentary;[7] similarly, Okechukwu Nzelu's *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney* (2019) follows the coming of age of a young black woman as she navigates daily racism, discrimination, and prejudice in the UK; Paul Mendez's *Rainbow Milk* (2020) is an exploration of sexual identity for a young black and gay man in the face of the history of fetishisation of the black male body, as well as internalised racism. *Rainbow Milk* is set across the Midlands and London, and traces the familiar trajectory from Windrush migration to present day Britain. Texts which explore matters of form, such as Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016), which takes influence from the choreography of dance and overtly engages with textuality through its punctuation and form,[8] and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), which is collective in voice and innovative in layout, also tend to operate through a framework that is realist, even while form is an area of experiment. The commercial success of non-fiction texts such as Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (2017) also demonstrates the

[7] Diana Evans, '*Queenie* by Candice Carty-Williams review – timely and important', *Guardian* (2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/apr/12/queenie-candice-carty-williams-review> [last accessed 20 January 2021].
[8] Jenni Ramone, 'Black Writing in Britain: Going Back to Move Forward – Black Consciousness Now and in the Archives', in *Postcolonial Literatures in the Local Literary Marketplace: Located Reading* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 141-190 (p. 173).

inclination towards social commentary and documentation in the current climate of publishing black British literature.[9]

Jackie Kay's story collection, *Why Don't You Stop Talking* (2002), marks a movement away from realism, when seemingly grounded stories are interjected with the uncanny and the implausible. The stories variously feature non-realist elements, such as an utterly imaginary but nonetheless fatal shark attack, a mother who spontaneously grows a tortoiseshell, and the personification of physics and chemistry. However, realism is upheld by this collection – the majority of stories bearing the 'psychological observation' central to realism's imitation of social behaviour[10] – but the incorporation of implausible episodes interspersed throughout the text has the effect of undermining its seemingly uncomplicated affiliation with social reality. In Merle Collins's *The Ladies are Upstairs* (2011), realist modes of narration are similarly beckoned-yet-interrupted, in this case by fleeting moments of magical realism. Realism is asserted but ultimately subverted by the unexpected presence of non-realist elements in both of these texts. Such engagement with the aesthetic complicates a straightforward comparison between long- and short-form narratives in black British literature, whereby the former would be dominated by realism and the latter would outright reject it.[11] Rather, it seems that awareness of the dominance of realism is sustained and counteracted by the black British short story, at least as far as Collins's and Kay's collections suggest.

Zadie Smith's first collection of short stories, *Grand Union* (2019), similarly advances a realist aesthetic while striving to challenge its authority in the field. Unlike Kay's and

[9] The commercial success of Eddo-Lodge's text is illustrated here: https://www.thebookseller.com/news/eddo-lodge-scores-second-week-sales-figures-return-chart-1207582.
[10] Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 10.
[11] It is important to note here that stylistically and formally experimental novels such as Monica Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch: A Love Story* (2020) and Selena Godden's *Mrs Death Misses Death* (2021) are becoming more prevalent, but that these are generally published by independent rather than conglomerate publishing houses. This is the case for these two texts, which are published by Peepal Tree and Canongate respectively.

Collins's texts, though, *Grand Union* largely works within realism, pushing against its limits and thus revealing that which is overlooked by realism's claim to objectivity and omniscience. Such are the characteristics of realism according to George Becker, who suggests that that the aesthetic is capable of capturing 'total reality' through its 'objectivity', 'observation', and 'authorial self-effacement'.[12] In this light, *Grand Union* returns to those elements of realism associated with Smith's writing since her novelistic debut in 2000. *White Teeth* and *Grand Union* both occupy realist modes of narration with subversive effect, the former satirising the image of a 'happy multicultural land'[13] for millennial Britain, while the latter highlights the constructed nature of literary realism. Smith's irony in depicting multiculturalism in Britain has been consistently misinterpreted since the publication of *White Teeth*; certain characteristics of the realist aesthetic, including sociopolitical panorama and historical awareness and accuracy, have been associated with Smith's ironic proposal that her text is a 'gigantic mirror' of England.[14] While she has turned to alternative forms and platforms[15] to challenge the misreadings and identity politics surrounding herself and her debut, it is in *Grand Union* that she returns to realism through an alternative form of narrative prose. I suggest that Smith employs the short story primarily as a means of interrogating that which is taken for granted in realist storytelling; stories such as 'The Canker', 'Kelso Deconstructed', 'The Dialectic', and 'Blocked' expose the limits of a verbal medium in striving to produce objective representation, ultimately calling to question whether a total mimetic representation of reality can be achieved.

[12] Becker, 'Introduction', pp. 31-32.
[13] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000), p. 398.
[14] Smith, *White Teeth*, p. 230.
In terms of the misreadings of *White Teeth*'s realism, see: Molly Thompson discusses this in more depth in '"Happy Multicultural Land"?: The Implications of an "excess of belonging" in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*', in *Write Black; Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib, 2005), pp. 122-140.
[15] Such as the essay in *Changing My Mind* (2009) and *Feel Free* (2018), as well as the public platforms discussed in the general introduction to this thesis.

In ‘Blocked’, for example, the narrator reflects upon her ability to ‘creat[e] something from nothing’; there is no ‘revelatory illumination’ or reflection, no ‘gigantic mirror’ of reality underlying and informing this ‘nothing’. Instead, undergirding the narration is a reflection of the ‘self’ who creates but is effaced by realism’s illusion of panorama.[16] Undermining the omniscience of the aesthetic that she speaks through, the narrator suggests that she ‘can’t be in every household, sitting at a person’s shoulder, asking: *So, what do you think of what I did there? Or here – does that work for you? Can I do anything to improve your experience?*’[17] *Grand Union* has been reviewed as autofiction,[18] a categorisation that continues to blur fiction and reality in Smith’s realist writing. In ‘Blocked’, the narrator’s identity is conflated with Smith’s own when she indirectly recalls the aesthetic of *White Teeth*: as the narrator contemplates her creative authority and its limits, she compares the ‘fragment’ of the short story to the ‘completist model that got [her] in into such trouble in the first place’.[19] As this demonstrates, autofiction is indeed signalled by Smith in *Grand Union,* but this is a deliberately charged response to the reception of her realism, rather than an indented slippage between reality and representation. The impulse to read *Grand Union* as autofiction is challenged by Smith’s choice to write through a short story collection, offering multiple and various realist narrators and thus enabling contradictions and conflictions to be written through realism, undermining ‘authorial self-effacement’. Even while ‘Blocked’ tackles metafictional themes, reflecting upon the nature of storytelling, such metafictional properties give way to the undergirding realism which details the story of a woman contemplating her own storytelling practices. The realist narrator of ‘Blocked’ may be conflated with Smith, but no more so than the narrator of ‘The Canker’, who similarly reflects upon the capacity of a storyteller to ‘enter

[16] Zadie Smith, ‘Blocked’, in *Grand Union* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), pp. 201-206 (pp. 201-202).
[17] Smith, ‘Blocked’, pp. 201.
[18] Johanna Thomas-Corr, ‘*Grand Union* by Zadie Smith review – wisdom, heart… but an uneven collection’, *Guardian* (2019) < https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/14/grand-union-zadie-smith-review-short-stories> [accessed 1st January 2022].
[19] Smith, ‘Blocked’, p. 203.

minds'.[20] Where the narrator of 'Blocked' may be more identifiable with what is expected of Smith, due to an oblique commentary upon the reception of *White Teeth*, the narrator of 'The Canker' is equally an identity assumed by Smith to narrate and create something from nothing, to contemplate 'what […] a story [is] for'.[21] Therefore, when the speaker of 'The Canker' strives for omniscience and effacement to tell the story of a fundamentally fictional character, Esorik, rather than one who might more readily resemble what is known about Smith's identity, neither takes precedence as Smith's autobiographical voice. Rather, both narrators are realised as fictional when the stories are brought together by the collection, and the slippage between autofiction, realism, reality, and representation is highlighted.

Rachel Bowlby argues that 'realism can never be simply codeless in its claimed replication of reality […]. It is always representing a particular theory of what will count as a picture of reality'.[22] As such, Bowlby defends realism as an aesthetic which does not in actuality propose an uncomplicated affiliation between reality and representation, in the way proposed by scholars such as Becker. Rather, she suggests that it is aware of how its imitation of reality relies on sustaining the illusion of a straightforward relationship between the two.[23] As such, realist technique involves a sophisticated self-reflexivity; faith in the immediacy of representation as well as knowledge of its detachment from reality are simultaneously procured. In her employment of realism to highlight the storytelling properties of the aesthetic, its constructed nature, Smith demonstrates such self-reflexivity. Significantly, though, her movement between realism and autofiction speaks to the way in which realism is continuously burdened with a reputation of straightforward mimetic representation, a condition of the reception of the aesthetic in a general context as well as for black British literature more

[20] Zadie Smith, 'The Canker', in *Grand Union* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), pp. 207-212 (p. 208).
[21] Smith, 'The Canker', p. 212.
[22] Bowlby, 'Foreword', p. xv.
[23] Bowlby, 'Foreword', pp. xi-xviii.

specifically. Suggestions, such that proposed by Becker, that realism captures 'total reality' via 'authorial self-effacement', have bolstered the impression of simplicity in realism. The insistence on realism's neutrality and plain imitational capacity located realism as a foil against which the formal experimentation and innovation of postmodernism could be proved. Matthew Beaumont summarises the postmodernist treatment of realism by suggesting that it was 'admonished for its simple-mindedness, its lack of self-conscious sophistication.' He continues, 'the anti-realist impulse in postmodernist discourse [contends that realism] allows us to think that pictures of the world are in some uncomplicated sense reflections of the world'.[24] For black British literature, an uncomplicated relationship between reality and its representations offers a means of directly interrogating the political through the literary. However, as James Procter discusses, this can never truly be uncomplicated because, when the 'aesthetic values of realism' are 'privilege[d]', there is a 'tension between representation as a process of fictional depiction and representation as an act of political delegation'.[25] Therefore, for black British writing, the predominance of realism also begets a need to scrutinise the aesthetic under the terms of the realism-modernism-postmodernism debate.

Bowlby illuminates the way in which postmodernism secured realism's position as the 'foil (or the cling-film) for showing up the more exotic and more complex courses that are always to be preferred to it.'[26] Despite realism's complexity, Bowlby suggests, certain apparently straightforward characteristics are said to define it: linear narratives, 'naively "omniscient" narrators', and transparency.[27] As a foil, these aspects of realism, whether they stand up to analytic scrutiny or not, are assumed as givens. The ways in which such effects are achieved are not explored but presupposed, for the purpose of demonstrating how postmodern

[24] Beaumont, 'Introduction', p. 8.
[25] James Procter, 'New Ethnicities, the Novel, and Burdens of Representation', in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. James F. English (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 101-120 (pp. 102-103).
[26] Bowlby, 'Foreword', p. xi.
[27] Bowlby, 'Foreword', p. xi.

technique can better encapsulate the fracture and uncertainty that characterises the modern world. This postmodern antirealism, in which the certainties of realism are both assumed and challenged, does not so much contradict realist logic as foster it in order to surpass it. Unlike the self-reflexive realism explored by Beaumont and Bowlby, postmodern antirealism assumes that objectivity and transparency are straightforwardly achieved by realism, in order to demonstrate the potential of antirealism to problematise the uncomplicated relationship between reality and its representations. As such, antirealism maintains the significance of the tropes of realist representation while presenting them as too uncomplicated to warrant investigation, with the aim of ultimately advancing from realism. Antirealism does not reject realism, but rather relies on its undercurrent presence to make its own innovative methods known.

Bolu Babalola's *Love in Colour: Mythical Tales from Around the World, Retold* (2020) sustains the tension between realism and non-realist material. The text disrupts the sacred grandeur of myth by retelling global mythical tales through a realist mode of narration for the modern reader. By having myth as its subject matter, it takes on the aspects of canonical literature that are antithetic to realism. While myth and realism share the function of encapsulating and shaping social behaviour, their methods are opposed. The detachment of myth from lived reality was rejected by the realist movement in favour of, according to Becker, the 'effort at accuracy in the description of human behaviour and human motives'.[28] This effort strives to shed the interpretative requirements of allegory and metaphor for deciphering meaning, and instead offer exactness and immediacy. As Becker explains, particularly because of myth's association with theism and allegory, its defining characteristics are overtly derided by the operation of positivism undertaken by the realist movement. He argues that material which 'escape[s] the otherwise ineluctable laws of causality' is inconsistent with the intentions

[28] Becker, 'Introduction, p. 27.

and worldview of realism.[29] Therefore, when Babalola's collection constructs itself around the sacred material of myth and channels this through a realist framework, it entails a formal contradiction, a meeting of opposing narrative approaches: the determinism and positivism of realism with the telicity of myth.

Bolu Babalola's story 'Scheherazade', for example, reimagines the frame tale from *One Thousand and One Nights.* Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers discuss the technique of myth to tell of truths of reality specifically through the properties of narrative:

> Mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. It has been well said that mythology is the penultimate truth – penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words. […] Mythology pitches the mind […] to what can be known but not told.[30]

If myth aims to impart a wider truth of reality than it can offer in the bounds of a narrative, this truth is realised through cross interpretation between the structures of society and the available narrative discourse. Scheherazade's frame tale exemplifies the animating power of storytelling for the attitude of society. It is allegorised by the myth when Scheherazade's ability to tell compelling stories is life-giving for the new bride – the knowledge, stories, and history she has collected over her lifetime are the weapons with which she battles the king's will to execute her. In terms of its allegorical significance, the king is representative of the attitude of society more broadly, due to his position of power. As such, Scheherazade's bringing knowledge to his awareness through stories is symbolic of society's capacity to be changed by the unique function of narrative structure for disseminating ideas and lessons.

In Babalola's 'Scheherazade', this truth – the animating or vitalising power of storytelling – is literalised because it is built into the structure of the story. Firstly, as narrator,

[29] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 34.
[30] Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), p. 163.

Scheherazade is aware that she can transform her 'transient' and 'ephemeral' love for Shahryãr into something concrete, something 'a person could see, could hear, could taste, could feel', by translating this love into a story.[31] As such, the form of the story is life-giving in the sense of the unconscious of the text, the way in which the transformation of the non-narratable into narration is likened to animation. By the animating power of narration, I am referring to Peter Brooks's suggestion of the relation between mortality and narrative. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle suggests that plot – the structure undergirding narrative momentum – is the life force of tragedy or dramatic fiction, the soul of narrative in action.[32] Brooks discusses Aristotle's plot in terms of the 'shaping power of narrative' as a sense-making device, one that gives life to or animates ideas, because it renders them subject to the terms of the temporal.[33] To form narrative from ideas is animating because 'narrative has […] to do with time-boundedness, and […] plot is the internal logic of the discourse of mortality.'[34]

The effect of the animating power of storytelling is achieved through Babalola's 'Scheherazade' because the narrator openly engages with her own textuality as well as that of the story itself. The narrative opens with the voice of Scheherazade mimicking the behaviour of the mythical character: like her name-sake's manipulation of story conventions to bide her time with the king, the narrator of Babalola's story tells her listener that she is 'controlling the length' of her tale.[35] This is a manipulation that the narrator revels in; aware of the principles of storytelling, she 'suppose[s]' that she should start at the beginning, asking the listener to confirm that '[t]hat's the convention, right?'. She offers to begin the story '[o]nce upon a time', suggesting that it is 'not bound by the temporal', only to undermine this by striving to assert

[31] Bolu Babalola, 'Scheherazade', in *Love in Colour: Mythical Tales from Around the World, Retold* (London: Headline, 2020), pp. 21-37 (pp. 21-22).
[32] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 678.
[33] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 10-11.
[34] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 22.
[35] Babalola, 'Scheherazade', p. 21.

the parameters of an event that could comprise the beginning. Furthermore, she overtly presents her authority over the narrative when she reflects on how her 'character development was finite, [her narrative] threads taut.'[36]

Babalola's story provides a realist framework for the idea, here summarised by Northrop Frye, that '[w]riters are interested in [myths] for the same reason that painters are interested in still life arrangements, because they illustrate essential principles of storytelling.'[37] With the narrator's control over the narrative announced throughout, 'Scheherazade' takes the allegorical message of the myth and transforms it into realist technique:

> I was a storyteller and a world shaper. I was behind the scenes of the great cultural and political performances. […] My story was rather pathetic: motherless, would-have-been fatherless, unloved, unwanted, and so I wrote my own and conjured myself up from nothing.[38]

Here, the idea of conjuring herself into existence signifies the role of the narrator in storytelling: the narrator is the figure within the text responsible for translating non-narratable events into narration, for making something of 'nothing'. As with Smith's realist narrators in *Grand Union,* such exposing of the narrator's influence over the shape of the narrative, this 'contract with the reader' that establishes how the reality of the story will be relayed, is a 'rhetorical strategy' which has a complicated relationship with realism.[39] On the one hand, such overt presence of the narrator contradicts the realist logic that the aesthetic is characterised by the minimising of authorial voice, the idea that the 'facts in a realistic work should speak for themselves as they do in life'.[40] This is a rule that the overt narrator breaks in its role as mediator between 'reality' and story. On the other hand, the self-reflexivity of the text through the narrator enables a realist

[36] Babalola, 'Scheherazade', pp. 21-22.
[37] Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), p. 27.
[38] Babalola, 'Scheherazade', p. 27.
[39] Beaumont, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5.
[40] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 28.

narrative to attain the self-consciousness, the complexity of psychological observation that is required to translate the 'no longer empirically available' into a verbal medium.[41] Becker concedes to this point when he admits that the impression of objectivity in realism can only be filtered through the psychological introspection of an individual speaker. An individual, the speaker is necessarily incapable of perceiving 'total reality', and is separate from society as a whole. The narrator is therefore not able to offer 'the complete representation which is the realist's goal'.[42] Objectivity and introspection are conflicting requirements of a realist narrative, but both are necessary to achieve the causality which Becker finds to be the defining feature of realism. Such causality shapes realist texts. The shaping force of causality is directly linked to the philosophy of determinism that characterises the mechanistic scientific age within which realism developed.[43] The narrator is the figure within the text responsible for tracing the cause and effect of narrative events, translating these events into the order of a story for the reader's comprehension. When the narrator of 'Scheherazade' makes explicit her search for a beginning to her story, and shows how the subsequent events relate to this beginning, the text exaggerates the responsibilities of the narrator of a realist text. As a result, Babalola imprints upon her reimagining of the frame tale a distinctly realist character, a causation which challenges the teleology of a myth whose telling is driven by the importance of storytelling for a functional society.

This brings me to the second way in which Babalola's 'Scheherazade' approaches the animation-of-storytelling allegory of the frame tale. The frame tale establishes the significance of Scheherazade's storytelling from its beginning, making clear that its telic motion is guiding ultimately toward her charming the king and saving her own life. Scheherazade's willingness

[41] Beaumont, 'Introduction', p. 5.
[42] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 26. Becker explores this through a discussion of Dostoevsky's 'underground man' who is both a part of and alienated from society, allowing him a unique ability to reflect upon that society; the underground man is likened to the narrator who is both a part of and detached from the events of the story.
[43] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 34.

to be the king's next bride is based on her presupposition that her stories will have their desired effect upon him. As the reader is motivated to continue reading, so is the successful outcome of Scheherazade's plan realised. Such teleology justifies the inclusion of the framed tales, uniting the multiple layers of the narrative on a textual and material level. Thus, teleology is the formal framework of the tale, making it effective in its function of framing. In Babalola's story, though, teleology is not only circumvented, but subverted. Babalola's 'Scheherazade' appropriates the content of the frame tale's teleology – the preservation of her life – and removes it from its position in directing the narrative. That is, the preservation of life in Babalola's narrative relates to Shahryãr, not Scheherazade. Following a car crash, Shahryãr relies on a life-support machine for blood circulation and breathing regulation, and Scheherazade 'talks to him every day' in the hope that it 'might get [him] out of this indefinite state'.[44] Undermining the structure of the frame tale, the mechanical support of Shahryãr's life is not revealed until the close of the story, and thus this trope is relieved of its formal function and is repositioned as thematic. When this information is withheld until the close, the rhythm of cause and effect sustained by 'Scheherazade' is bolstered, revealing the expectation of the end (the expectation directed by the frame tale) to be misguiding for this particular retelling. The teleology of the frame tale is highlighted as formal directive and is replaced by the causality of realism. As such, the themes and content of the frame tale are upheld by the retelling, but channelled through a structure that carries the realist framework of organising and ordering narrative events. The structure of the story therefore engages with the undergirding principles of realism, particularly with that which is highlighted by Becker, that '[a] really faithful representation of life cannot be achieved within a dialectic based on teleological concepts.'[45]

[44] Babalola, 'Scheherazade', p. 36.
[45] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 23.

Babalola's 'Scheherazade' creates further tension between the teleology that structures the frame tale and the expectations of realism. The narrator tends towards portraying events as if they were 'storybook', describing Shahryār as having 'an auric nobility, with his crown of thick wavy hair, a sunrise smile and caramel skin that almost gleamed gold'.[46] Such a 'storybook' tone is established only to be disrupted by stark implications of realist technique. Turns of phrase such as 'those in glass towers need their narrator to be invisible for their new stories to work'[47] assume the detachment of myth from lived reality, yet contradicts it with the immediacy of realist narration. This example replaces the image of the seclusion of a writer in an ivory tower with the transparency of a glass one – a symbol of the decreasing space between the text and its reality, as well as a gesture towards the omniscience central to realism. It signals the shifting responsibilities and expectations of a narrator in a realist text compared with mythic narration, the way in which this figure must be both hidden and present in a narrative. The emphasis on 'new stories' implies the 'fresh start' of the realist movement to give literary form to the 'new set of assumptions about the universe.'[48] Such assertion of the changed techniques of a realist text compared with myth is again illustrated when the narrator discloses that she does not wish to recount the story in a 'pretentious mystical way', but 'basically',[49] eluding the need for allegory in myth and instead favouring of the immediacy of realism. With the example of 'Scheherazade' in mind, Babalola's collection performs the same kind of upholding-but-subverting of realism found in the collections of Collins, Kay, and Smith, but approaches it via a reverse model. That is, non-realist material is filtered through a realist framework. Babalola's story ultimately undermines the association of realism with the imitation of social realities by

[46] Babalola, 'Scheherazade', p. 24.
[47] Babalola, 'Scheherazade', p. 27.
[48] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[49] Babalola, 'Scheherazade', p. 21.

juxtaposing it with myth, emphasising the world-shaping responsibilities and individuality of the narrator in a realist text.

Irenosen Okojie's short story collection *Speak Gigantular* (2016) also evokes a sense of the world-shaping power of realism, by drawing into focus the material world of objects. Literary realist ideology supposes that there is an existing reality 'which is anterior to and independent of the individual mind'. Furthermore, it suggests that realism's objectivity can be achieved by observing this world and rendering it through narrative.[50] *Speak Gigantular* simulates the shared, material world by setting its stories in recognisable real-world locations. However, the collection subverts its proximity to reality by inviting into these locations distinctly *other*worldly phenomena. *Speak Gigantular* moves between locations across the globe which are, in the stories, inhabited by supernatural presences: the ghosts of suicide victims are held in a kind of purgatory in the London Underground; the dusty, open roads of Las Vegas are traversed by a mysterious omnipotent woman; and in Frederiksberg, Denmark, a young boy is born with 'a long furry tail',[51] which his mother eventually cuts off with an axe. The collection preserves the likeness of each setting to its real-world counterpart by providing the kind of 'concreteness of depiction' and 'dominance of description' expected of realism.[52]

In 'Please Feed Motion', for example, the statues of Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square, Stockwell Memorial Gardens, and South Bank are central to the plot. Moreover, their presence in the story is accompanied by indicators of the sociopolitical contexts of which they are emblematic. When the statue of Eros is introduced to the narrative, for instance, its appearance is supplemented with a description of how 'Piccadilly Circus buzzed around him', of how

[50] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 34.
[51] Irenosen Okojie, 'Animal Parts', in *Speak Gigantular* (London: Jacaranda, 2016), pp. 5-25 (p. 5).
[52] Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', pp. 186-187.

> [h]uge, brightly lit billboards blinded from all directions beaming *Sanyo! TDK! Coca-Cola!* The concrete steps usually heaving with bodies were fairly empty except for a homeless man curled up in the middle of the bottom one.[53]

The juxtaposition of commerce with homelessness evokes both the wealth of the metropole and the uneven distribution of this wealth at once, without explicating the relationship between the two images. The immediacy of this description, the way in which it supposes the impression of both the physical location as well as its social landscape, is an example of the of lens of realism that 'should not distort'.[54] Frederic Jameson suggests that realism 'is historically associated […] with the function of demystification […] to foreground features of the social reality'.[55] In this sense, objects and materials in architecture are emblems of the capitalist modernity that created them. Thus, the centrality of the statues and their sociopolitical weight implicates such a lens of realism for 'Please Feed Motion'. However, this impression of the aesthetic is counteracted by the fact that these statues of inner London are anthropomorphised.

In the story, the statue of Eros steps down from his podium in Piccadilly Circus upon the death of his beloved prison inmate Nesrine. Before death, Nesrine regularly sent Eros postcards sealed with the distress and injustice suffered by herself and her fellow inmates. Eros wanders inner London to awaken his fellow statues. He finds Charlie Chaplin, the Bronze Woman, and the Vomiting Sculpture, all of whom wish to follow him to the prison to avenge Nesrine for her death at the hands of negligent guards. Finding Nesrine's death to be indicative of an abuse of power on behalf of the prison guards more broadly, the statues free the prisoners from their cells. They lead the women 'into the streets, down dawn's memory of the night before', into a changed London, altered by the actions of the statues.[56] By anthropomorphising the statues and giving them an active role in social realities, 'Please Feed Motion' does not

[53] Irenosen Okojie, 'Please Feed Motion', in *Speak Gigantular* (London: Jacaranda, 2016), pp. 127-138 (p.
[54] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 7.
[55] Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 4.
[56] Okojie, 'Please Feed Motion', p. 138.

only reflect London as it is, as is expected of a realist narrative. Rather, the story incorporates supernatural elements with the effect of revealing the role of the city in creating social norms. The political is embedded into the structure and architecture of the city, and the statues therefore carry with them a past; their purpose as material objects is to memorialise figures and events from history. However, in Okojie's story, the statues also have the power to effect change, to challenge the history that they symbolise and create a different future. This power to change is written into the story: as the statues embark upon their journey, 'the particles of a tiny planet assembl[e] inside them',[57] shifting the world of the story from the recognisable, material one, and towards something new, an alternative planet created by the story itself. When Eros leaves the prison, he is carrying Nesrine's diary, which holds within it records of the injustices faced by the prisoners. The book details their societal oppression as black women, which led them to commit their crimes, as well the inhumane way that they were treated by the court system and by the prison guards. Upon imprisonment, their names are substituted for inmate numbers, and Nesrine's diary therefore becomes a text for the representation of her identity. As Eros holds Nesrine's diary,

> Bits of corroded flesh gathered within the void in his chest. He read the pages in sly concrete gaps longing, wanting, crying, while the thing from her throat now powerful, uglier, spilled bits of another earth all over the city.[58]

The 'thing from her throat' leaks from Nesrine when Emerico, the boyfriend responsible for Nesrine's prison sentence, tells her that he will not return to visit her at the prison. Nesrine's relationship with Emerico, his 'groom[ing] her to be his soldier on the streets',[59] is representative of her positionality in society. Emerico's presence therefore reflects the material world simulated by the story, before it is interrupted by the supernatural. In this way, Emerico's

[57] Okojie, 'Please Feed Motion', p. 134.
[58] Okojie, 'Please Feed Motion', p. 138.
[59] Okojie, 'Please Feed Motion', p. 127

voice is endued with certain expectations of realist narration. He tells her that '[t]his is how it is',[60] a moment of unmediated diegesis which infers the function of a realist text to accurately and objectively mirror the material world. At the close of the story, the 'thing from her throat' is realised as indicative of Nesrine's own voice. When Emerico leaves her, her connection to society is fractured; the image of her voice as a physical object dispelled from her body symbolises such disconnect. With just her diary to record her reality, Nesrine's voice becomes wholly textual. When Eros carries this diary out of the prison, it is 'powerful' because it is once again connected to society outside of the prison, and has the ability to inform the world of the injustices within the system; it has given Eros life, and with this life he can effect change, spilling 'another earth' – a changed reality – 'all over the city.'

As 'Please Feed Motion' demonstrates, *Speak Gigantular* upholds certain tropes of realist representation, largely the depiction and description of recognisable locations from the material world; but the collection establishes such a straightforward impression of mimesis only to interrupt it. The seemingly transparent rendering of real-world locations is paralleled with and contradicted by the presence of obscuring elements which are bestowed equal significance. This apposition creates the effect of perceiving the familiar locations with a fresh perspective, defamiliarising the recognisable in order to see what it could be rather than what it is. John McLeod suggests that one of the major issues of supposing that the individual voice in black British literature can be representative of the wider community is that it assumes that the accurate depiction of British places can be taken as 'paradigmatic of other British locations or indeed the nation as a whole.'[61] In actuality, such depictions are generally too 'concrete, complete and specific' to be 'figurative templates for wider environs or metaphors of a

[60] Okojie, 'Please Feed Motion', p. 127.
[61] John McLeod, 'Extra Dimensions, New Routines: Contemporary Black Writing of Britain', *Wasafiri*, 25.4 (2010), 42-52 (p. 47).

changing UK at large.'[62] The implication is that immediacy and accuracy hinder the possibility of collective representation, and striving for the latter through the former leads to the placement of tokenistic expectations upon black British writers. In fact, creating distance between reality and its representation allows fiction the freedom to draw upon reality without the requirements of authenticity and accuracy. In other words, as Anne Hegerfeldt argues, 'fiction may produce insight, but only as long as it is recognised as [fiction].'[63] *Speak Gigantular* demonstrates that realism and reality do not need to be rejected altogether for the achievement of this effect. Rather, 'Please Feed Motion' is powerful in its commentary upon reality because of the way in which it recalls realism in order to subvert it.

'Please Feed Motion' addresses the idea central to realism that the aesthetic responds to a material reality 'which is anterior to and independent of the individual mind'.[64] It does so by affording the objects of this material world a mind of their own, through anthropomorphism. Okojie's story therefore undermines the idea of a world independent of subjectivity; by imagining that the statues are conscious beings, the story supposes that there is no clear distinction between materiality and human behaviour. The subjectivity of the statues is representative of the fact that in reality, they are only material because of the historicity that they bear. This interrogation of the extent to which the material world can be said to exist independently of the mind that conceives of it is one of the key concerns of antirealism in its philosophical context.

The term antirealism is most widely used in the context of philosophy rather than in literary studies, but Ruth Ronen considers the value of the term for an interdisciplinary usage across these two fields. I wish to develop here the connections Ronen makes between

[62] McLeod, 'Extra Dimensions, New Routines', p. 47.
[63] Anne C. Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), p. 7.
[64] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 34.

philosophical realism and literary realism: 'both in philosophy and literary studies realism has to do with the relations between signs (of thought or language) and the world of objects.'[65] As opposed to its function in purely philosophical terms,[66] antirealism in the interdisciplinary context that Ronen sketches serves to problematise the relationship between signs and objects; it does not plainly contradict the realist logic that these are separate spheres. Rather, like the function of a metalanguage while discoursing around its subject, when antirealism asks whether realism can demonstrate the 'mind-independent existence of the world of objects,' it actually assumes the legitimacy of this concept – at least to the extent that its ability to be represented is drawn into question. This is because antirealism challenges the way in which realism positions signs and objects in relation to one another.[67] Such is the benefit of interpreting realism through an interdisciplinary framework for Ronen: if antirealism is widely conceived of as shifting the sphere of the object to the level of the epistemological in philosophical terms, then the domain of antirealist representational arts draws into focus instead the idea that 'realism […] is part of the object of investigation itself'. That is, realism is realised as 'more of a thing to be constructed than a "reality" to be justified.'[68] Philosophical realist ideology maintains that the mind-independent world exists regardless of humankind's capacity to comprehend it, that this world constitutes reality. Comparatively, antirealism finds that what actually comprises reality is not this world itself, but the human ability to recognise and represent this world.[69] Therefore, antirealism ascertains a fundamental interrogation of

[65] Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', p. 186.
[66] The line that separates the realist from the antirealist in philosophical terms involves with whether the point of reference that proves truth is positioned as epistemological or ontological, not with the question of whether or not the material world truly exists. According to Michael Dummett, '[i]t is not […] simply a matter of whether or not the truth of a statement of the disputed class is something objective. The realist and the anti-realist may agree that it is an objective matter whether, in the case of any given statement of the [disputed] class, the criteria we use for judging such a statement to be true are satisfied: the difference between them lies in the fact that, for the anti-realist, the truth of the statement can only consist in the satisfaction of these criteria, whereas, for the realist, the statement can be true even though we have no means of recognising it as true.' Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 147.
[67] Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', p. 186.
[68] Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', both p. 187.
[69] Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 145.

realism's tools of mimesis, rather than an outright rejection of its ability to produce a mimetic effect. A focus on antirealism does not work to disprove the authenticity of the reality behind a realist representation, nor the realness of the representation itself, though the prefix 'anti' may suggest that this could be the case. Antirealism is a term which retains the significance of realism in order to challenge it, positioning 'anti' and 'realism' on a scale of effect rather than in a dichotomous relationship.

A story from Leone Ross's collection, *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (2017), can elucidate such preservation of realism within antirealism at the level of the literary. The story, 'Pals', sketches a representation of reality, but without a mind to interpret it. Specifically, 'Pals' is the story of a headless schoolgirl. This single implausible element structures the total story in the place of a causal plot. The very framework of the story is built around the image of the headless girl, and around its rendering of this situation believable without a plot that justifies or rationalises it, as would be expected of realist ordering. The events sketched and the ideas put forward all revolve around the condition of missing this major organ and, consequently, around the girl's limited access to the senses which results from this absence. The protagonist wonders what she looks like, having no eyes with which to view her reflection; she worries that she smells of dog, having no nose to gauge her odour; she 'clap[s] her hands instead of smiling' because she has no facial expressions that indicate how she is feeling to others; and she contemplates the advantages of being without a head – 'no dandruff no eyelash tinting or face waxing no rouge no sloppy kissing no fags'.[70] Delivered in free indirect discourse, the sentences also run into one another without punctuation, which imprints upon the form of the narrative a sense of a life without language and syntax, without a voice. The run-on sentences have a secondary function, which is to reinforce the suspension of disbelief in the image of this

[70] Leone Ross, 'Pals', in *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2017), p. 46 (single-page story: all subsequent references to this story are p. 46).

headless girl by eluding absolute meaning and interpretation. Without grammar to separate the events and dialogue of the story, a polysemic effect is achieved whereby each word and turn of phrase could potentially imply more than it directly states, depending on whether it is read in isolation, or in terms of what it follows, or what follows it in the consecution of the narrative.

Realism is not positioned by this story as a constituent of its craft; the structure of the story clearly defies those techniques that characterise the realist aesthetic. Rationalisation, dominance of description, causality, and omniscience are all waived in favour of problematising just one trope of realism: 'Pals' takes the 'mind-independent existence of the world of objects' as its subject and irrationalises the logic of this concept. Thus, even if a realist framework is refuted by 'Pals', the significance of its tropes is not; rather, these tropes are the very matter of the story. The image of the headless girl literalises the idea of a mind-independent world and proposes that this notion is at odds with realism rather than informing it. Without a head for the character, the world cannot be known through the representation offered by the story. The form of the story is resultingly discordant with the kind of rationality that structures realism. The stressing of sensibility in the illusion of realism's mind-independent world is again drawn into focus when, in response to the protagonist's worry that people will be perturbed by her missing eyes, her friend tells her that 'people [don't] look into your eyes anyway'. In this image, gaze is emphasised, but this gaze is directed away from the subject and towards the material world, to the disability services that the school teacher brought in to explain the girl's condition to her classmates. Such a line of sight is contradictory to the story's centring of its subject and its repudiation of the ability to represent a mind-independent world. Thus, the presence of the material world is made abject to the order established by the surrounding story. By making the material world unfamiliar to its fantastical narrative order, 'Pals' creates tension between the story's realist implications and its antirealist framework. In this way, 'Pals' advocates for the role of the subject and sensibility in creating representations

of a mind-independent world, a position that corresponds with antirealist theory. Moreover, it does so through literary technique, evoking a sense of the usefulness of the interdisciplinary context sketched by Ronen. 'Pals' separates the tropes of realism from its structure. By making the mind-independent world a theme, the story is able to carry the expectations of realism but through a non-realist framework, enabling these expectations to be challenged rather than embodied. The effect of Ross's story involves the fact that realism is often occupied as a structuring device which rationalises a given narrative. 'Pals', however, challenges this formula by circumventing the organisational properties of realism and instead making them anomalous to the order that it creates.

Literary realism evades a single representational conception, as Ronen describes. On the one hand, it can be equated with a specific literary movement or history (usually the nineteenth-century novel). On the other hand, the characteristics of its mode and style saturate all literature to the extent that the usefulness of delineating it as a singular category is often contested.[71] Indeed, Ronen considers the extent to which realism is a structural matter undergirding narrative, rather than a particular aesthetic in its own right. As a structural framework, it can be said to transcend generic categorisation, and certainly transcend its association with the nineteenth-century novel.[72] As such, the argument can be made that literary realism is a framework of representation, that its tools of mimesis provide a structural design that is organisational and ordering in character. Realism can be understood as having two distinct roles, one which is structural, shaping, primary, and concerns mode and mood, and another which is more of a matter of content, thus traceable via certain tropes and characteristics. Ronen traces such a duality central to realism, a certain 'ambiguity of the

[71] Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', pp. 186-187. See also Becker's introduction which offers a detailed exploration of whether or not realism should be considered a movement in its own right: Becker, 'Introduction', pp. 3-40.
[72] Ronen makes this case by exploring questions such as 'Can fantasies be realistically rendered? In what sense is science fiction realistic?': Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', p. 187.

concept'. It is identified firstly with structuralist thought and approaches – as an entryway into questions of how reality is structured, perceived, and communicated. And secondly, it is associated with certain traits that seemingly represent a singular and stable reality: 'everyday life, coarse, unsublimated domains of reality [and] detailism, concreteness of depiction, dominance of description, transparent rendering, dominance of referentiality'.[73] This latter formulaic detailing of the tropes of literary realism places emphasis on the straightforward perception and reflection of a referential reality. Furthermore, it stresses the stability of that reality as well as its capacity to be accurately depicted through careful observation and rendering. Such emphasis is echoed by George Becker's argument that objectivity and observation are the defining tropes of literary realism, that the aesthetic filters referential reality through a lens that 'should not distort'.[74] These two tropes which are formulaic – objectivity and observation – are also significant elements for providing literary realism with its structuring force: observation suggests that there is a pre-existent reality which the representation reflects, rather than creates; and objectivity suggests that such a reality is stable and singular, and can therefore be rendered transparent. Realism, therefore, performs both of these roles. On the one hand, and in the vein mostly associated with philosophical realism, it gives shape to reality by providing a structure through which reality can be represented and subsequently interrogated. On the other hand, in the manner of literary tropes, it assumes that reality can be rendered transparent because total knowledge of it can be attained and enough detail can illustrate its exactitude. The two roles are interdependent; the traits that define realism are what provides its structuring force, but they can still be separated, as 'Pals' demonstrates.

The saturation of the structuring role of realism across various literatures can be recognised in the way in which non-realist literature, postcolonial magical realism, for

[73] Ronen, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', pp. 186-187.
[74] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 7.

example, 'naturalises'[75] its supernatural or fantastical elements. It renders them plausible via the form of realism, channelling such elements into a composition that is fundamentally based on rationalisation. Such rationalisation appears as 'naturalisation' because of the way in which realism permeates the foundations of literary construction.[76] In studies of postcolonial magical realism, the argument is frequently made that the stability of a singular reality – usually that which pertains to a western scientific-rational worldview – is undermined by literary modes that disrupt the dominant and authoritative conceptions of truth and history, through the inclusion of fantastic elements. The poetic act of subverting or rejecting realism is dependent on an inversion of the western categories 'real' and 'fantastic'.[77] In Anne Hegerfeldt's terms:

> people's multiple ways of perceiving and constructing their world must be acknowledged as real, for insofar as these fundamentally influence actions and decisions, they have significant repercussions on the level of social and material reality. [Magical realist] fiction re-evaluates modes of knowledge production generally rejected within the dominant Western paradigm.[78]

The innovative aspect of these literatures is the way in which they highlight the act of seeing the world, which considers the perspective of the mind and senses of the subject viewing the object of focus alongside the object itself. Significantly, neither is undermined. In Hegerfeldt's analysis, the fantastic components align with the subject and its perspective, whereas realist elements illustrate the singular world of objective or material reality. In this context, realism must be countered by the fantastic because on its own, its very tools of representation sustain the impression of a singular, stable world that is independent of the operations of the mind. This mind-independent world, and realism as the medium that communicates it, is problematic because it developed in correlation with the imperialist ideology of colonialism. As Christopher

[75] Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 3.
[76] Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 3.
[77] Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth*, p. 6.
[78] Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth*, p. 5.

Warnes explains in his analysis of the 'historical alliance between reason, realism and colonialism', imperialist ideology undergirds the scientific pursuit of rational reason.[79] As such, realism is entwined with the oppressive forces of colonial power through its embodiment of the scientific-rational worldview of imperialism.[80]

In Warnes's terms, magical realism is a 'mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural', ensuring that the supernatural 'always already answer[s] to the terms of causality.'[81] As such, while realism's alignment with the rational-scientific worldview is confronted by magical realism, the terms of realist logic are accepted and assumed. And so, it is realism that provides the framework within which fantastical elements can undermine the scientific-rational worldview. Such a distinction between a structure and its parts illuminated here is something that 'Pals' addresses, as discussed above. Magical realism may channel its fantastical elements through the structure of realism, rendering the implausible plausible via the structure of the aesthetic, and therefore revealing the tenuousness of realism's claim to total reality. 'Pals', however, rejects this structuring force of realism by putting its own non-realist framework at odds with the tropes of the aesthetic. This is not the only way in which *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* interrogates realism by establishing a division between the structure and its individual parts. Throughout the collection, solid, indifferent, and inhuman(e) structures are pitted against emotion, idealism, and art. The effect of this division creates a dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity, much like that which characterises magical realism, but through an alternative technique.

In 'The Heart Has No Bones', for example, a future is imagined where the surveillance of the digital age has culminated in a society that is purely structural. Freedom of will has been

[79] Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 19-20.
[80] Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth*, p. 6.
[81] Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 2; p. 11.

eradicated by an embassy that watches and preserves the structure – CCTV, wiretapping, and the internet ensuring that human movements are constantly tracked and recorded. The dystopian setting conceives of a digital world powered by the scientific advances of western modernity. Human emotion is shown to be dangerous to the functioning of this society. The protagonist is a student of the embassy, training to be an agent monitoring human behaviour. His teacher stresses the importance of detachment, revealing that he put his duty in jeopardy because 'he'd once fallen in love during surveillance.'[82] The teacher reflects upon the risk that his desire posed to the functioning of society, 'bellow[ing] […] about the loss of objectivity, the risk of betrayal, the inability to get the job *done*.'[83] This revelation comes as the teacher's final opportunity to impart wisdom upon the student before he graduates to become an agent of the embassy. To relay the importance of the lesson, the teacher tells his student that he is now 'on the front line', and must 'watch [the population's] bones, not their eyes.'[84] Watching their 'bones' – such skeletal imagery bolsters the story's illustration of a world defined by objective structures. The student, now a qualified agent of the embassy, contacts his former teacher when he himself falls in love with the subject of his surveillance. The woman with whom he falls in love is a resister of the structure, and she is representative of the counterpoint to the eradication of human emotion: her eyes are 'full of dreaming.'[85] When the agent looks into her eyes, he is introduced for the first time to the potential of such dreaming to interrupt the callous structural society; where he once saw 'the skeleton as a frame', he now understands 'that it's an orchestra.'[86] The significance of 'dreaming' to the realisation of the skeleton as an 'orchestra' is that it compels the agent to apprehend the synchronicity of humanity. With the skeleton as symbolic of the structural society more broadly, the agent is also alerted to the ways

[82] Leone Ross, 'The Heart Has No Bones', in *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2017), pp. 157-159 (p. 157).
[83] Ross, 'The Heart', p. 157 (original emphasis).
[84] Ross, 'The Heart', p. 157.
[85] Ross, 'The Heart', p. 157.
[86] Ross, 'The Heart', p. 157.

in which this society is stilted by the authority it bestows upon objectivity and its correspondent repression of sensibility.

When the agent contacts his former teacher to ask for guidance to dispel his love for this woman, the teacher replies, '[t]he heart has no bones, son.'[87] The heart, which connotes the full range of human emotion, is symbolic of subjectivity and sensibility, of the freedom of human will. At this point in the narrative, it is juxtaposed with the objectivity of the structural society, represented in the image of the skeleton. The two parts of the human body are placed in opposition, and the tension created between them and their representative qualities echoes throughout the story. The teacher gives the agent permission to consider the potential of the heart to disturb the mechanic structure of the society, to explore his love for this woman in defiance of his role as keeper of objectivity. Resultingly, the agent offers the woman a gift. It is a bottle of wine which she lets slip to the floor and smash. Watching from a window, he takes this as a sign of rejection, and subsequently hears 'a small noise in his left ear. No doctor will confirm it, but he knows. It is the sound of his stirrup bone splintering: one tenth of an inch, the smallest bone in the human body.'[88] It is here that the story ends, but the closing image has significant implications for the leading metaphor of 'The Heart Has No Bones' and its effect. Upon experiencing love and rejection, the agent imposes upon the skeleton a fracture; as keeper of the structure, acting upon his personal will is conclusively dangerous to the oppressive structural society, and the integrity of the skeleton is compromised.

'The Heart Has No Bones' ultimately positions objectivity – structural, mechanical, rigid – against subjectivity – emotional, desire-driven, dreamlike, fluid. This opposition is a prominent theme throughout *Come Let Us Sing Anyway*. 'Pals' explores the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in its interrogation of the mind-independent world. In

[87] Ross, 'The Heart', p. 158.
[88] Ross, 'The Heart', p. 159.

'Fix', the imagery is more overtly political: structures such as capitalism and the 'World. Wide. Web.'[89] govern the globe, but such authoritative and hegemonic forces can be undermined if humanity can realise its capacity for compassion. Compassion is symbolised in the story by the poignancy of sound, the power of singing against the 'mechanised, empty sound of simulation'.[90] This revolutionary potential of voice is echoed in the very short closing story of the collection, 'Maski-Mon-Gwe-Zo-Os (The Toad Woman)'. In the story, the law – divorce courts, the right to abortion, and a 'warrant out for [the toad woman's] arrest' – is in conflict with 'the sound of [her] voice'.[91] The story concludes with a repetition of the title of the collection: 'But come, let us sing, anyway.' By ending the collection with a reiteration of the title, Ross underlines a central concern that is addressed in various ways throughout: the ability of art to counter the positivism of modernity. To sing – correlated with pathos – is to celebrate the humanity of literature, and in Ross's collection, singing is affiliated with emotion, idealism, dreaming, the soul – those aspects of literature which Becker argues are antithetic to the objectivity of realism.[92] Such singing is presented in direct opposition with the structural, the factual, and the objective, which are in comparison impersonal and therefore lacking in some way. The opposition of these two forces throughout the collection can be conceived of as a commentary upon the predominance of realism in black British writing. That is, Ross's assertion of 'singing' against callous structures echoes the duality between the expectations of authenticity, accuracy, and omniscient objectivity in black British realism, and the needs of individuality, humanity, and artistic freedom.

In its association of objectivity with rational-scientific ideology and subjectivity with the multiple and individual ways of seeing the world, Ross's collection achieves that which

[89] Leone Ross, 'Fix', in *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2017), pp.145-156 (p. 153).
[90] Ross, 'Fix', p. 152.
[91] Leone Ross, 'Maski-Mon-Gwe-Zo-Os (The Toad Woman)', in *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2017), p. 187 (single page story: all subsequent references to this story are p. 187).
[92] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 34.

Hegerfeldt suggests is the decolonising merit of magical realism. It demonstrates that '[r]ationalism and science alone[…] cannot adequately account for human experiences of the world.[93] However, *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* is not a magical realist text, it does not present the 'matter-of-fact depiction[s] of magical happenings' that Maggie Bowers argues is the defining feature of magical realism.[94] Bowers's definition here recalls the way in which magical realist literature retains the framework of realism as a structuring device. In Warnes's terms, magical realism is a 'mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural', ensuring that the supernatural 'always already answer[s] to the terms of causality.'[95] Such structuring force of realism is something that Ross's collection actively resists, as is the case in 'Pals', for example, where a non-realist narrative framework makes realist tropes anomalous to its own logic and order. By presenting aspects such as objectivity as themes of content and metaphor, rather than matters of lens or focalisation, *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* exaggerates the structuring role of realism. It is transformed into an overt presence in the narrative, as opposed to a passive element of structure or frame that may otherwise remain undergirding. In its exaggeration of this, the collection significantly poses a challenge to the structuring force of realism and ultimately highlights the imprint of realism on non-realist texts. Ross encourages consideration of what exactly is being carried forward when a realist framework is maintained for the purpose of creating a logical narrative which handles matters of the supernatural or fantastic – elements which otherwise purposefully defy the logic and rationality of the imperial age of reason.

Come Let Us Sing Anyway variously presents dystopian futures and narrative orders that are characterised by technological, commercial, and scientific advancement above the

[93] Hegerfeldt, 'Introduction', p. 7.
[94] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism (The New Critical Idiom)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 16.
[95] Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 2; p. 11.

needs of humanity. In this way, the collection recalls the age of scientific discovery in which realism developed, as well as the channelling of its ideology into narrative form that a realist text embodies. According to Becker:

> Realism came into being in the ferment of scientific and positivist thinking which characterized the middle of the nineteenth century. […] Realism really did constitute a fresh start because it was based on a new set of assumptions about the universe. It was denied that there was a reality of essences or forms which was not accessible to ordinary sense perception, insisting instead that reality be viewed as something immediately at hand, common to ordinary human experience, and open to observation. […] This attitude demanded that its readers and adherents abandon a host of preconceptions about human nature, about the purposes and mechanism of the universe, and above all about the role of art.[96]

By positioning subjectivity – 'singing' – in opposition to the observable material world, Ross's collection reaffirms the role of art for distilling human nature; it does so only by implicating that which objective observation lacks into the bounds of a given story. The positivism of realism, symbolised in the collection as oppressive structures, is retained but undermined by the insurgence of 'singing'.

Irenosen Okojie's most recent collection of short stories, *Nudibranch* (2019), achieves a similar defiance of the structuring role of realism, likewise recalling-yet-subverting the scientific-philosophical ideology that the aesthetic carries. Throughout the text, *Nudibranch* evokes but counters the 'belief in fact as a way to truth', a belief which Becker suggests is fundamental to realist writing and to the ideology of the age of reason within which the realist novel developed.[97] The collection approaches form and textuality in a manner that echoes the philosophical debate between realism and antirealism in literary form. It is therefore another example of how an interdisciplinary antirealism could significantly rethink the sociopolitical functions of literary realism. More specifically, *Nudibranch* is concerned with the

[96] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[97] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 28.

mathematical and scientific facts of philosophical realism, and interrogates their relevance to and place in realist literature. According to Christopher Norris, nineteenth-century realism has now evolved into a philosophical antirealism which

> reject[s] the realist ("Platonist") idea of a realm of objective mathematical truths or abstract entities – numbers, sets, classes, etc. – which are somehow conceived as existing quite apart from our methods of proof or discovery-procedures.[98]

Nudibranch undertakes a similar interrogation of the extent to which scientific and mathematical truths are dependent on their 'discovery-procedures', but through literary form. That is, Okojie takes the kind of objectivity, transparency, and causality, which are the remnants of philosophical realism in the literary aesthetic, and subjects them to the same requirements of 'methods of proof' as Norris places upon mathematical truths. This takes shape in the text when equations, functions, and scientific phenomena are assigned the role of title or leading metaphor or image. Their responding narratives perform the calculations or experiments that prove their truth, therefore mirroring in literary form the discovery procedures on which their factuality depends.

The opening story 'Logarithm', for example, consists almost entirely of sentences that begin 'Here is'. A logarithm is a device used in mathematics for enabling the human mind to parse very small or very large numbers into terms that are in keeping with the scale and scope of human comprehension. The function of logarithm is to trace patterns or solve equations. The story 'Logarithm' presents a series of things – objects, subjects, concepts, images – ranging from the miniscule to the galactic: fingerprints and atoms to constellations and collisions.[99] Each entity is seemingly disconnected from the others and positioned in no recognisable or conventional narrative structure. Rather, the story encourages a parsing of the information into

[98] Norris, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Contemporary Philosophy', p. 241.
[99] Irenosen Okojie, 'Logarithm', in *Nudibranch* (London: Dialogue, 2019), pp. 1-2 (p. 1).

a more logical, understandable structure as a result of interpretation, not through passive reading. Upholding the need to find order amongst the parts of the story is the fact that Okojie's 'Logarithm' ends not with narrative resolution, but with a question that functions almost like a sum. It resembles a guide for interpreting the unsystematic information of the narrative into something with syntactic meaning: 'Now, what do I do with the woman holding the reins, shrinking from reflections, the nub of a dummy? Licking Eve's rib?'[100] As such, the story mimics the shape of the mathematical logarithm, and makes the operations of logarithm relevant to the interpretative function of narrative. Just as the mathematical logarithm that makes that which is incomprehensible to the human mind understandable, narrative articulates, through ordered, sense-making form, abstract ideas and concepts that may otherwise be inaccessible.[101]

The term 'logarithm' is rooted in the Greek logos, meaning 'word' and 'reason', and arithmos meaning 'number'. It therefore recalls the syntax of philosophical realism. Logos is usually opposed with pathos, which appeals to emotion, and with mythos, which is commonly associated with the humanity of storytelling in comparison to the factuality, reality, of logos. In this way, the opening story of the collection sets up the overall dynamic of *Nudibranch*. Throughout, the idea of reality as defined by factuality and accuracy (logos, arithmos) is both staged and usurped by the narrative design of the collection – narrative design being the cornerstone of aesthetics, which is directed by art's capacity to provoke emotion (pathos, mythos). There is a duality between arithmos and logos versus pathos and mythos throughout the collection. This is most evident in the way that scientific and mathematical concepts and facts are imagined with human attributes, around which the plots of the stories are organised. For example, the titular story, 'Nudibranch' reimagines the mating rituals of the nudibranch,

[100] Okojie, 'Logarithm', p. 2.
[101] I am referring again here to the suggestion, above, that myth is the 'penultimate truth.'

creatures which are 'soft-bodied, marine gastropod molluscs, which shed their shells after their larval stage. They are noted for their often extraordinary colours and striking forms.'[102] Okojie's 'Nudibranch' envisages the molluscs as 'goddesses': 'soft-bodied women emerging through the soil, the whites in their eye sockets morphing into irises of every hue'.[103] The goddesses have the power to turn men into eunuchs, paralleling the genital biology of the molluscs in human form, making them characters with motivations and desires that dilate the plot. Similarly, 'Dune Dunelm' creates a narrative out of the idea of 'a moving fossil' which is anthropomorphised.[104] Another story, 'Mangata', transforms the namesake's phenomenon of a road-like reflection of the moon on water into a human experience, by telling the story of an albino man who walks amongst the black population of Mozambique.

The stories of *Nudibranch* take matters of philosophical realism – mathematical sums, scientific phenomena, biological facts – and transform them into literary experimentation. When the idea of the factual is presented as the subject of stories, it is subjected to the forces of narrative, to elements such as causality, voice, consecution, and sensibility. As such, Okojie's collection collates the reliance on factuality in realism with the antirealist claim that truth lies in the human capacity to perform discovery procedures, rather than in the fact itself; or, as Norris summarises, the fact that for the antirealist, '"reality" *just is* what is knowable to our best methods to hand or whatever we can justifiably assert to fall within the scope of our proof-procedures'.[105] In other words, *Nudibranch* uses the defining features of narrative as devices which stand in for the methods of proof – the scrutiny of human comprehension – that are central to antirealist ideology. Facts are at the centre of the stories and are subsequently exposed to the kind of filtering through logic and experiment that human discovery procedures

[102] Irenosen Okojie, 'Nudibranch', in *Nudibranch* (London: Dialogue, 2019), pp. 99-113 (p. 99).
[103] Okojie, 'Nudibranch', pp. 100-101.
[104] Irenosen Okojie', 'Dune Dunelm', in *Nudibranch* (London: Dialogue, 2019), pp. 239-260.
[105] Norris, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Contemporary Philosophy', p. 247 (original emphasis).

use to prove the truth of such facts. Narrative, storytelling, as the apparatus through which humans understand their place in the world, is representative of discovery procedures in Okojie's collection.

In 'Dune Dunelm', for example, a fossil is centred and anthropomorphised, with the effect of emphasising its significance in the processes of archaeology. An object that has formed or been preserved over billions of years, a fossil is the material result of deep time. The story indicates the physicality of the object, its formation into being from 'layers [of] stones and broad leaves'.[106] However, this description of the creation of a fossil is not directly ascribed to the fossil of the story, but is instead offered as a fleeting moment in the narration of the causal plot of 'Dune Dunelm'. That is, the process of fossilisation is signalled and mirrored by the protagonist's actions in building a fire, not through direct description of the fossil. Other moments in the plot also perform such indirect reference to fossil formation: when the protagonist is digging – 'obtained by digging' being the Latin etymology of the term 'fossil', he thinks of 'alchemy', of a transmutation of substances that is suggestive of recrystallisation and carbonisation.[107] The force of gravity in preserving and creating fossils is obliquely indicated when the protagonist feels the demands of the 'outside world'. He reflects upon 'how the pressure to adhere to the rules of that world [grind] away at the core of you'.[108] This can be read in two ways: in terms of how the social world necessitates a repression of certain impulses and desires, in keeping with the plot and narration of 'Dune Dunelm', its storytelling properties; or in terms of logos, of the 'rules' or laws of nature, Newton's law of gravitation that explains the culmination of fossils from the remnants of material on earth. The implications of the formation of fossils are drawn into the bounds of the story not through direct description and reference, but through narrativisation, which detaches them from a status of anterior truth.

[106] Okojie, 'Dune Dunelm', p. 242.
[107] Okojie, 'Dune Dunelm', p. 242.
[108] Okojie, 'Dune Dunelm', p. 256.

Instead, they are realigned with the human processes of comprehension – with the humanity with which storytelling or mythos is concerned. Antirealist ideology would hold that the value of a fossil for understanding and perceiving the prehistory of the planet is not merely in the object itself, but in the human discovery of it and ability to realise its worth. This location of value in human discovery and comprehension is bolstered by 'Dune Dunelm' through its anthropomorphising of the fossil. The story positions fact within humanity by ascribing social behaviour, a body, and a voice to the object.

As the example of the anthropomorphised fossil suggests, narrative offers a speculative space to experiment, to explore ideas that defy rationality or logic in order to discover truths that cannot be addressed directly; this is fundamental operation of mythos for deliberating upon the properties of human nature.[109] In another example, the saudade of the title in 'Saudade Minus One (S-1=)' is represented through the image of mothers mourning their stillborn babies. Robot children are distributed to the mothers in batches from the government to treat their melancholia. As such, S denotes the circumstance of a grieving mother and -1 signifies the negation of this grief with replacement children. The calculation of S-1= is subsequently enacted in an abstract manner through the story itself. The open sum of S-1= equates to the narrative discourse of the story, which figures as an exploration of what happens when an attempt to negate the grief is made. S-1 equals, according to the events of the story, an ultimately destructive rather than advantageous outcome. The mothers' grief is not consoled by the presence of the robot children: the particular mother that the story follows, Elmira, is plagued by a 'vision of a cornfield of sons strangling their mothers' from the moment she meets her stand-in child, Houdini.[110] The robot child's threatening presence over the equilibrium of the narrative is constructed into the frame of the story. Houdini's interactions with other

[109] According to Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2004), p. 2.
[110] Irenosen Okojie, 'Saudade Minus One (S-1=)', in *Nudibranch* (London: Dialogue Books, 2019), pp. 75-97 (p. 76).

animate beings are merciless and violet: Elmira 'combines […] nature and scientific engineering' to reanimate her stillborn children, but Houdini 'make[s] the sound of gunshots' to frighten them; and when he milks the cows at the ranch where Elmira resides, he 'tug[s] until blood spurt[s] out'.[111] These indications of violent impulses from an otherwise 'blank'[112] mechanical child prime the atmosphere of the story for its ending. The robot children detonate across Midwestern America and leave their foster mothers more 'bereft'[113] than they had been upon the birth of their still-borns, this time mourning the land of their home as well as the loss of their children. By constructing a speculative world in which the sum 'S-1=' can be addressed via elements of narrative, the story assumes the function of working out a problem, testing its possible outcomes. This figuring of the narrative as a space in which to test theories, work out solutions, and experiment corresponds with the theme of technological advancement that runs throughout the story. That is, the imagery of mechanical children and the speculative process enacted by narrative form come together to bolster the ultimate effect of 'Saudade Minus One': its offering of an open mathematical sum that is subsequently calculated within and by the narrative itself. On a thematic level, the scientific and mathematical discovery procedures that advance technology to the point of human-like machines are contextually relevant to interpreting the plot; on a formal level, these procedures are mimicked by the idea of what a story can do to 'work out' ideas and issues, in literary rather than mathematical or scientific form. As such, the narrative assumes the function of discovery procedures – the working out of a calculation – by exchanging the characteristics of the mathematical field for those of literary form. In other words, the finites and absolutes of mathematics are replaced by narrative elements such as plot, imagery, and metaphor.

[111] Okojie, 'Saudade Minus One (S-1=)', pp. 83-84.
[112] Okojie, 'Saudade Minus One (S-1=), p. 81.
[113] Okojie, 'Saudade Minus One (S-1=), p. 96.

The effect of having discovery procedures enacted by resolutely narrative elements in the shadow of mathematical formulae is that this technique enables alternative purposes for the literary field to be realised. Alternative, that is, to the reflective function of literary realism in representing sociopolitical realities. When the narrative abstractedly becomes a space for working out a sum, for interrogating the factuality of a hypothetical statement, this has the concurrent function of reasserting narrative, specifically storytelling, as a medium for the exploration of ideas and reflection upon the extent of exacting truth and fact. Literary realism may aim to depict the material and social world as it truly is – a feature that has unequivocally supported the important affirmation of a marginalised and neglected black British history and culture. However, this reflection of immediate reality is not the only function or purpose of storytelling, and is potentially limiting for the future of the field. According to Karen Armstrong's definition of storytelling, myth 'force[s] us to go beyond our [everyday] experience' because it addresses the 'unknown'.[114] It is the parallel positioning of storytelling to reality that allows it to 'help us glimpse new possibilities by asking "what if?"', discovering what could be by reflecting upon what is or is not.[115] Armstrong suggests that asking 'what if?' through storytelling 'has provoked some of our most important discoveries in philosophy, science, and technology'. As such, modernity's advancing of rationality and reason does not override this fundamental propensity of storytelling.[116] Okojie's collection blurs distinctions between mathematics, science, and literature to position narrative form as a type of discovery procedure. It utilises the very matter of modernity's pursuit of scientific reason to detach literary form from the realism that embodies the ideological framework of modernity. Storytelling is realigned with its ability to ask, 'what if?'.

[114] Armstrong, *History of Myth*, p. 3.
[115] Armstrong, *History of Myth*, pp. 8-9.
[116] Armstrong, *History of Myth*, p. 9.

Nudibranch ultimately sustains an interest in the mathematical and scientific realm of philosophical realism. It also demonstrates the extent to which literary form could be used to engage with these fields in ways that exceed the limits of realism, primarily through the speculative properties associated with storytelling, with mythos. Summarised by Becker, there is a consensus that realism's objective and observational qualities coincide with scientific thinking.[117] *Nudibranch*, however, finds the speculative potential of narrative to be more akin to the operations of scientific advancement, with experiment, than the reflective properties of realism. Rather than 'demand[ing]' the 'abandon[ment]' of a 'host of conceptions about […] the role of art',[118] Okojie's writing suggests that storytelling is apt for the kind of discovery that characterises the scientific field. *Nudibranch* supports Armstrong's claim that in storytelling as well as in science, 'we entertain a hypothesis, bring it to life by means of ritual, act upon it, contemplate its effect upon our lives, and discover that we have achieved new insight into the disturbing puzzle of our world.'[119]

Nudibranch, like the other collections explored in this chapter, sustains an interest in the characteristics of realism – in this particular case, philosophical rather than literary realism – with the effect of suggesting that the aesthetic is lacking or limiting in some way. *Nudibranch* problematises the relationship between realism and the scientific ideology from which the aesthetic derives; the collection evokes a sense that the role of art rejected by the realists is more formally reminiscent of discovery procedures than the form of literary realism itself. Similarly, but through alternative techniques, Babalola's *Love in Colour* considers realism in conflict with myth. The collection emphasises how myth's overt assertion of its own storytelling procedures, its fictionality, better equips it for social and collective representation than realism's immediacy and accuracy. Okojie's *Speak Gigantular* also demonstrates how

[117] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[118] Becker, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[119] Armstrong, *History of Myth*, p. 10.

realism is too concrete in its depiction of the material world to fully imagine the possibility of sociopolitical change beyond the text. Ross's collection affirms the need for 'singing', for pathos, to confront callous structures. In this way, *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* indicates that realism's illusory simulation of the material world is incomprehensible without sensibility and subjectivity. Even Smith's text, which works within realism, turns to the narrative alterity and plurality of the short story to subvert the expectations of realism in black British literature. Furthermore, in publishing contexts where longform realism is expected to depict immediacy and objectivity, these collections embrace the fragmentary quality of the short story as a means of exploring multiple non-realist frameworks. If longform realism depends on the needs of causal plot and rationality, the fragment can instead offer antirationality, unorthodoxy, and disorder in defiance of the requirements of causality. Each of these texts reveals the limits of literary realism by imagining what could be beyond it. They embrace the otherworldly, the implausible, the speculative, and the unknowable to confront the demands of omniscience, objectivity, rationality, logic, and concreteness that border realism. I contend that these short story collections welcome the antirealist whilst retaining realist tropes in order to scrutinise, through fictional form rather than essay or documentation, the predominance of realism in the twenty-first-century landscape of black British literature. The way in which these collections recall realism to imagine what is beyond its scope of perception disrupts the dominance of the aesthetic in the field. Antirealist, as these collections demonstrate, does not mean antireal. On the contrary, the stories certainly address sociopolitical realities, but this is achieved through asking 'what if', by reaching beyond the reflective limits of realism and occupying the realm of the speculative.

I close this chapter by suggesting that the reach beyond realism demonstrated by single-authored black British short story collections ultimately signals alternative purposes for the literary in the field of black British writing. Alternative, that is, to the assumed purposes of this

field according to the ideology of the industry responsible for publishing its literature. Moving beyond realism also signals a development away from the 'immigrant narratives' that reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes in order to meet publisher expectations of accuracy and authenticity.[120] Like postmodern antirealism, these collections reject the limited view of realism for capturing and representing reality. Reality, as witnessed by Ross's affirmation of the lens of subjectivity, or by Okojie's reflection on the experimental potential of narrative form, struggles to fit into the confines of realist representation. However, these collections do not discard realism altogether as too simple or no longer useful, as is the case with postmodern antirealism. Rather, they intently focus on characteristics of realism – objectivity, observation, reflection, positivism, authorial self-effacement – in order to demonstrate the ways in which such characteristics are now lacking in some way. Given the position of realism in the history of black British literature, its important role in uncovering a neglected black British past and marginalised black British present, to reject it outright would be to dismiss its significance in advancing the field. But to reject its *limits* resonates with a rejection of the limiting nature of metropolitan publishing. Moving beyond realism signals potential purposes of the literary in terms of discovery, of considering what is next for black British writing, rather than reflecting on what has been. To consider what is past realism, while sustaining awareness of its centrality to the field, signals an ambition to evolve from rather than dismiss the literary history of black British writing.

[120] Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente, 'Finding and Acquiring Writers of Colour', in *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* (London: Goldsmiths and Spread the Word, 2020), pp. 12-15 (p. 14).

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The Potential and Place of a Marginalised Narrative

I have argued throughout this thesis that the black British short story is a narrative form of alterity, an alternative prose form to the novel which is therefore able to circumvent the strictures imposed upon black British writing by the operations of metropolitan publishing. The formal approaches of such narrative alterity can be summarised as the effects of indeterminacy, laterality, and aperture. It is significant that the short story can demonstrate these effects of narrative from within its own boundaries, rather than via alternative literary or artistic forms. This is because, as I explore further in this conclusion, narrative is also the form through which black British writing is historicised and moulded into a field for analysis. It is useful to differentiate between these two roles of narrative as the micro, the singular narrative within a literary or cultural text, and the macro, that which organises, historicises, and exists outside of the individual text – the context surrounding such texts which brings them together as a field. The macro and micro narrative share similar qualities, and the subversive effects of the micro narrative – the short story – can be interpreted as having a profound impact on how the macro narrative is constructed and read. Now, I turn to consider the ways in which these formal qualities of narrative achieved by the black British short story (laterality, indeterminacy, aperture) resonate with the recent activities of narrativising the history of black British literature and identity. Specifically, I explore the turn in the field away from linear and neat categorisation, chronology, and canonisation and towards intersectionality, plurality, decentralisation, and future-orientation.

In the introduction to their edited volume of essays, *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (2020), Susheila Nasta and Mark Stein argue that narrative has taken priority in studies of black and Asian British writing – 'writing' is a term which they use to encompass a range of textual forms from orality to 'visual culture and new media'.[1] As a twenty-first-century historicising volume with a wide-ranging, comprehensive-though-not-exhaustive, scope of material from the eighteenth century to the present, I approach Nasta and Stein's text, particularly their editorial introduction, as paradigmatic of the landscape of the contemporary macro narrative of the field of black and Asian British writing. Nasta and Stein imply that in black British writing, narrative holds something of an undergirding and undercurrent status as the de facto form to be analysed, and to analyse through, whether this takes shape as testimony, history, fiction, or document. Furthermore, this status of narrative has resulted in the subjugation of other cultural forms, and has also limited consideration and discussion of how these forms have become available or visible for study:

> the precedence frequently given to explorations of narrative has happened at the expense of sustained analyses of drama, poetry, and other cultural forms. The material conditions of book publishing and reviewing, of literary networks and prizes, of organisations and conferences, all critical to the evolution of this field, are therefore still in need of systematic archival exploration.[2]

Here, Nasta and Stein draw into focus two significant points, both of which their volume intends to address in order to revise and redirect the field for the twenty-first century: firstly, the dominance of narrative in black and Asian British writing and in academic studies of the field, and secondly, the turn in scholarship towards considerations of the placement and organisation of black British cultural forms when historicising the field. These two points are not as separate from one another as they may initially seem to be – Nasta and Stein position

[1] Susheila Nasta and Mark U. Stein, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing*, eds. Susheila Nasta and Mark U. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 1-22 (p. 11).
[2] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 13.

them as relevant to one another through the conjunction 'therefore' – and both have to do with the forces of narrative.

The precedence of explorations of narrative in the field indicates that the microstructure most frequently analysed is narrative, but here Nasta and Stein relate this to the workings of the macro narrative: they reflect upon the need to consider the networks and circuits involved in placing literature into a position that makes it accessible to public and academic audiences. The implication is that narrative is precedent for analysis because the role of material conditions for positioning black and Asian British writing is yet to be adequately considered. A further implication is that these conditions are both a text in themselves worthy of exploration as well as the means by which narrative has become predominant in the field. For the purposes of the evolution of the field, Nasta and Stein mark their text as 'unique' because of how it

> set[s] crucial historical, political, and material contexts alongside an in-depth examination of the emergence of aesthetic movements, forms, and genres, focusing on cross-cultural exchange, experimentations with voice and style, and specific spheres of influence.[3]

The element that distinguishes this *History* from those which have come before it is, therefore, a matter of narrative structure. This is because the cross-examination – horizontal positioning – between the political and the aesthetic is a movement away from the 'perhaps overly comfortable retrospective narrative of reclamation': the narrative of migrant settlement since 1945, which is, in comparison to their own approach of historicising, a '*grand récit*' of black Britain.[4]

Differentiating their approach from this *grand récit* which places Windrush settlement as a pivotal and central moment around which concepts of the black British past, present, and future are orientated, is the shift in the formal frameworks through which black British writing,

[3] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 14.
[4] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', pp. 15-16.

identity, and culture are interpreted. Though this particular temporal framework is problematised by Nasta and Stein, the originality of their volume is not to do with a rejection of historicising. Rather, their innovation is in the fact that the developmental, linear line of the *grand récit* is exchanged for 'a series of *petits récits*' which encourage a decentred approach to interpretation, across and between rather than onwards.[5]

The decentred approach is reflected in the way that Nasta and Stein highlight not only the market conditions of producing and placing black and British Asian literature, but also that these are networks and circuits rather than neat, singular, or linear organising principles. The erratic movement involved in their own historicising is deliberate because it formally echoes the kind of networks of political, cultural, theoretical, and material intersections that the field of black and Asian British writing comprises. In their terms:

> The title of [the] volume is not meant to suggest one single history because, significantly, we are *not* dealing with a singular, unified historical object. […] Instead, this *History* represents and constructs a heterogeneous history in a comparative, panethnic, and panoramic fashion: a "messy" history that cuts across a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but without downplaying meaningful distinctions between them. […]This *History* traces the *plural* history of black and Asian British writing, an intertwined and polymorphous literary field characterised by both overlap and distinction. […] As a history which has evolved from the intersection of the multiple pathways which continue to criss-cross the various constituencies of the republic of letters – whether through conventional genres, the influence of orature, performance poetry, the influences of contemporary cultural theory, the wider networks of literary culture which determine reputation, visibility, and taste – it is inevitably also a work in progress.[6]

I include this lengthy quote because it is telling of three major areas of consideration. Firstly, the note that the field itself, the historicising of this field, is a 'work in progress' signifies that Nasta and Stein intend to evade any sense of closure for their task, deliberately suggesting that the intersections or network of the field command continuous evolution rather than ending in

[5] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 16.
[6] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', pp. 7-8 (original emphasis).

the present moment – a sense that the future is as much a part of this network as the past. Secondly, the way in which they highlight the need to cut across, to trace 'messy' lines of connection and distinction rather than 'neat evolutionary chronologies'[7] constructs the field and its historiography as fundamentally lateral, signifying that no single line of development can encompass its movement. The third point of consideration is closely related to the other two, because the lateral movement between different temporal, spatial, material, and theoretical contexts circumvents a reading of the field as developmental or reconciliatory. Rather, it intends to encourage 'interrogation and dialogue'[8] through adjacent placement. Ultimately, any sense of closure is eschewed. This third point is about the positioning of black and Asian British writing in the literary marketplace and subsequently in the academic sphere: 'the wider networks of literary culture which determine reputation, visibility, and taste'. It is about the need to historicise such writing with alertness to its place and placement in the marketplace, to bear this placement for the act of historicising, rather than draw texts together for the purposes of artificial or premature conclusions or reconciliation.

Such concerns for the writing of the macro narrative overlap with the elements that I have identified with the formal qualities of the micro narrative of the black British short story. Firstly, Nasta and Stein's evasion of closure speaks to the indeterminacy created by the short story in, for example, the anthology *Closure*, where the future is present in the text via the dialogue between editor (future publishing and reception) and narrator (retrospective telling of events). In the fourth chapter, I considered the ways in which *Closure* refutes the expected reconciliation of its title, with the effect of revisiting and revising rather than delimiting and demarcating. The anthology is resistant to the metanarrative of anthologising, and instead cuts across time, space, cultures, and contexts, rather than offering development between beginning,

[7] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 7.
[8] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 16.

middle, and end. Similarly, the macro narrative that Nasta and Stein construct for the history of black and Asian British writing provides a 'vertical and largely linear chronology' which incongruously contains discrete texts and contexts that challenge the demarcation of this chronology.[9] The dynamic between this one vertical line and the many intersecting lines that cut across it 'opens up [now realised to be] false dichotomies and reconfigures established boundaries'.[10] In other words, it forestalls closure, the *petits récits* always diverging from the onwards momentum of the *grand récit*. In both cases, it is the tension between the horizontal movement of individual texts and contexts and the largely linear frame which contains them that reveals and subverts the implicit impulse towards closure in narrativising. In the *History,* the ability to 'fully embrac[e] […] diverse and distinct components in one place' realises the 'potential to shape and transform the future of the nation'.[11] In *Closure*, the interventionist function of anthologising is made overt, as a means of forestalling the closure that the end of the text demands: the underlying awareness that the anthology itself must come to a close, that it must set boundaries that are cultural, formal, and physical around its material, even if the text is not intended to be exhaustive and all-inclusive. The same applies to the *History*. Nasta and Stein are aware that they must set boundaries – a temporal frame, some sort of loose cultural and formal categorisations, a definition of 'writing' – that will inevitably exclude certain material or contexts to some degree. However, their attentiveness to their own 'unavoidable omission of materials'[12] positions their boundaries as preliminary rather than conclusive. Again, this circumvents the imposition of closure upon their *History*, establishing instead the sense that there is more out there than can be contained within a single volume, and that this

[9] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 14.
[10] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 14.
[11] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 21.
[12] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 1.

conscious omission of material 'imagin[es] a future, [one which] will be unstable but productively and creatively so.'[13]

Conscious omission, whether because what is omitted is a matter of future possibility, or because what is included at the surface level must compel alertness to the boundlessness of abstract significance, has been a matter of importance to my theorising regarding the potential of the black British short story throughout. This brings me to the second point of parallel between Nasta and Stein's *History* and my own work here: the horizontality, decentrality, the 'messy' lines of the *petits récits* that structure the volume, are parallel to the laterality of the short story, its ability to compel readings between or across points of reference. These cross readings variously involve interpreting what is included in a given narrative through the lens of what has been excluded, or between the certainties expected of narrative and which of these a text manifests or omits. What I call here cross reading, or the laterality of the short story, can be likened to Ernest Hemingway's theory of omission in the short story, where the 'omitted part would […] make people feel something more than they understood'. Or, in other words, that which is given form commands deeper awareness of that which is silenced by it.[14] Omission, therefore, can be associated with laterality because the included is always directly related to and informative of its parallel, the excluded.

This is the case in, for example, the short stories of *Race Today*, which I discuss in chapter one. The stories invite cross-reading because of their positioning within the magazine, but also because of what they share in their omission of material. The aspect that binds each individual story together is not common themes, characters, or effect, but that which pre-exists the events of the story, which is not included directly within the narrative but is its overall

[13] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 20.
[14] Ernest Hemingway, quoted in Paul Smith, 'Hemingway's Early Manuscripts: The Theory and Practice of Omission', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 10.2 (June 1983), 268-288 (p. 271).

reason for being: the experience of postcoloniality after empire. Interpreting these discrete texts as a united whole involves reading across the particulars of the individual narrative to find the general significance that underlies each one and the whole. Given the magazine's agenda to establish a black British identity across diverse national, ethnic, and racial groupings, the general significance across the stories is not so much the actualities of empire. Rather, these are excluded from narrative attention in order to allow space for the shared experiences of postcoloniality to come to light via diverse narratives which allude to this past, their common history. Black British identity is found in and by *Race Today* not in the nation or place of the contemporary moment, but in this collective history that now only exists as the predeterminate factor that is empire and its decline. This achieves a similar effect to that of Nasta and Stein's reproduction in their historicising of the intersections of the *petits récits*, the effect being the assertion of a 'multidirectional memory' which emphasises 'points of connection as well as distinction', in order to establish whole-yet-'porous' *History*.[15] Like Nasta and Stein's multidirections that pass over, interact with, and contradict the common nexus that is a history of black and Asian British writing, the short stories in *Race Today* form a black British identity across various and conflicting narrative and historical lines.

Another example of the laterality of the black British short story includes the construction of a collective creative legacy for black women writers in *Don't Ask Me Why*, which I explored in chapter three. The anthology engages with laterality through the short story in two connected ways. Firstly, black British identity is a political signifier in this text, characterised as fluid, heterogeneous, and inclusive of diverse racial, national, and ethnic backgrounds – an expanding rather than restrictive signifier. The intersections between Caribbean, African, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and South American heritages in Britain, and the subsequent intersections between these backgrounds and the diverse experiences of

[15] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 10.

womanhood, are illustrative of the lateral form of *Don't Ask Me Why*. The anthology is composed across various identities which are drawn together by a text which positions them under the umbrella of black women writers. Black Britishness is presented as decentred by the form of this anthology, because such various identities remain distinct from one another even while they are placed side-by-side; the similar as well as the conflicting experiences of these writers are preserved by the anthology, and thus they remain lateral, a set of horizontal intersections, as opposed to a reconciled whole.

The only way in which these experiences and identities are reconciled with one another is through their shared form of expression, the short story, and this is the second way in which *Don't Ask Me Why* engages with laterality. This second point retains something of the relevance of the horizontality, decentrality, and intersectionality of the first point, but emphasises the meaning of lateral in terms of thinking otherwise, against the grain, in innovative ways. That is, the diverse identities of the authors of these stories are reconciled through what the editors consider to be the potential for creative, stylistic, and thematic freedom, via the tools of the short story compared with the 'limited stereotypes of what are considered "appropriate" issues for black women to write about.'[16] Laterality here is about innovation in theme and form, about approaching subject matter – in this case, the experiences of black womanhood – from an alternative angle to that which has become the standard. This example of laterality retains the horizontality of conscious omission because it commands parallel awareness between the standard and the innovative; the creativity of these stories is apparent because of how they interrupt the androcentric narrative of black British writing in the period. What prevails as the standard is therefore consciously omitted from the text at hand but remains spectrally present in the shape of what can be interpreted as creative and innovate in comparison to this standard.

[16] Black Womantalk Collective, 'Introduction', in *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women*, eds. Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse (London: Black WomenTalk, 1991), pp. v-vi (p. v).

This kind of lateral conscious omission can also be traced in the treatment of realism which I explore in chapter five – the way in which the certainties and history of realism haunt antirealism's speculative, non-realist narrative structures. Or it can be traced in, as explored in chapter two, the way in which Jennifer Johnson's manipulation of the expectations of the genre and platform bestowed upon her must be approached through 'hidden, mystified form.'[17]

Nasta and Stein's conscious omission is something that they harbour to bolster the sense that their volume is 'marked not by closure but by *porosity* – [the categories delineated by the volume] differentiate as much as they affiliate.'[18] Such porosity indicates horizontality, the multidirectionality of the network of black and Asian British writing that they at once trace and recreate in their own structure of historicising. The preliminary borders around their definitions of concepts such as 'black', 'Asian', and 'writing' allow such concepts to become deictic, to expand or contract throughout the volume as connections and disparities are made between the chapters. However, such a porous structure also focuses attention on holes or silences, on the gaps in the construction, the inevitable omission of material that assembling a narrative, historical or literary, involves.

Nasta and Stein build on Michel-Rolph Trouillot's work on the silences created by writing history to indicate the parallels between narrative and historicising, to demonstrate how the 'writing of any history is not a given but a process of construction.'[19] Trouillot's contention is that silence is telling of the production of a history, because such silence is revealed 'at four junctures' of this production process: 'fact creation (the making of *sources*); assembly (the making of *archives*); fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and retrospective significance

[17] Selma James, 'Sex, Race, and Working Class', in *Race Today*, January 1974 (GB 2904 JOU 1/1/55), pp. 12-15 (p. 12).
[18] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 10.
[19] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 4.

(the making of *history* in the final instance)'.[20] At each of these junctures, elements are included and excluded in order to form a history 'in the final instance'. The subsequent silence that is created by the excluded – intangible as this may now be given its omission from the record – reveals the process of narrative that undergirds a written history, the telic motion that requires the organisation of certain events through a particular focaliser, the present moment. In narratological studies, the organisation of events through time and their focalisation – story and narration – are presented as the cornerstones of narrative.[21] According to John Tosh, the writing of history is a form which uses narrative as its 'main technique', specifically its defining characteristics established by the field of narratology: time and space, characterisation/humanisation, the chronicling of events, narration, and the craft of storytelling.[22] It is this parallel between historical records and narrative that Trouillot's elucidation of silence evokes, and which Nasta and Stein intend to indicate when they refer to Trouillot's work.

The informative qualities of silence in narrative have been a feature of my theorising on the black British short story throughout this thesis. I have largely argued that, as a narrative of alterity, the short story is able to give form to that which is usually silenced by the dominant aesthetic of realism in the field. Furthermore, I contend that the silences within a short story are telling of the oppression and marginalisation of certain voices within the field at different points in its history. Gaps in linearity, ellipsis, diversion on the page within and between stories and frames of reference, the silencing of the narrator as focaliser: these have all been points of examination and interrogation, supported by various theories on the short story. Now,

[20] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 26 (original emphasis).
[21] For more detail on this, Steven Cohen and Linda Shires are particularly illuminating: Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (London, New York: Routledge, 1988). Their focus is on narrative fiction, but throughout the text they also offer examples of how non-fiction material, such as historical narratives, interact with fictional narratives, through both cultural impact and shared or common narrative qualities.
[22] John Tosh, 'History as Narrative', in *The Pursuit of History*, 5th edition (Harlow: Longman, 2010), pp. 50-51.

considering the historicising process as a device of narrative, the kind of aperture facilitated by the short story can be a useful way to think about the conscious omission, the porous structure, that Nasta and Stein feature in the composition of their volume. To explore this, it is productive to consider Sarah Copland's suggestion of the dynamic between narratology and short story theory.

In her multiple readings of the story 'Passion' by Alice Munroe, Copland finds that longform realist narrative structure commands a 'gap-filling impulse' which is neither applicable to this specific story, given its implications of Romanticism, nor proper to the short story in general, due to this form's tendency to 'generate new stories beyond the scope of those scripted'.[23] Copland ultimately suggests that the short form carries the gap-filling, closure-seeking impulses of longform narrative structure, but ultimately opposes them with 'productive tensions, instabilities, and gaps.'[24] To draw this conclusion, Copland investigates a number of narratological theories[25] on this short story, which position 'Passion' as indicative of the short form more generally. As such, the silences left by the short story, a feature commanded by its brevity and resulting lack of space for development, are always subjected to a reconciliation process that the form itself contests through the deliberateness of its gaps. A 'productive tension' is therefore created between the anticipation of reconciliation and its negation via narrative silence, a device which indicates aperture where closure is expected. The short story achieves this tension because of its subversion of narrative certainties from within the

[23] Sarah Copland, 'To Be Continued: The Story of Short Story Theory and Other Narrative Theory', *Narrative*, 22.1 (January 2014), 132-149 (p. 147).
[24] Copland, 'To Be Continued', p. 147.
[25] Michael Toolan, 'Entanglement via Emotional Heightening in "Passion": On the Grammatical Texture of Emotionally-Immersive Passages in Short Fiction', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 210-25; Susan Lohafer, 'The Stories of "Passion": An Empirical Study', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 226–38; Charles E. May, 'The Short Story's Way of Meaning: Alice Munro's "Passion"', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 172–82; Michael Trussler, 'Pockets of Nothingness: Metaphysical Solitude in Alice Munro's "Passion"', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 183–97; Per Winther, 'Munro's Handling of Description, Focalization, and Voice in "Passion"', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 198–209; Per Winther, Michael Trussler, Michael Toolan, Charles E. May, and Susan Lohafer, 'Dialogues', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 239–53.

boundaries of narrative. In narratological studies, however, the short form is positioned as other, not applicable to the conclusions drawn out by this theory; in Copland's terms, the form is granted a 'special-case status'; it is analysed through multiple other, story-specific theories rather than under the wider spectrum of narratology.[26]

According to Copland's reading, there is something about the short story's tendency towards gaps and indeterminacy that make it appear somewhat incompatible with the dominant understanding of the operations of narrative, despite its standing as a narrative form. Such incompatibility is echoed by the definitions of narrative according to narratology. Steven Cohan and Linda Shires, for instance, define narrative as a 'closed structure', discordant with indeterminacy because of the central 'importance of closure as a means of containing the movement of narrativity which the syntagmatic structure produces.'[27] Syntagmatic relations within a closed container signal inferred connections and unity, not gaps which open themselves up to what is beyond the narrative. Cohan and Shires also argue that the 'distinguishing feature of narrative is its linear organization of events into a story',[28] a definition that conflicts with the hypothesis of laterality in the short story that I have sustained throughout this thesis. Such proposed defining features of narrative all clash with the short story's tendency towards aperture, its forestalling of closure, its eschewing of linearity. Significantly for my purposes in this conclusion, these defining features of narrative also conflict with the 'porous structure' of Nasta and Stein's *History*. Nasta and Stein disclose from the outset that their volume is not closed or contained, that it does not intend to organise through linearity. However, both the short story and the *History* are narrative forms, and the subversive potential of the black British short story against the strictures of metropolitan publishing is actuality facilitated, rather than hindered, by its ability to retain-yet-challenge these certainties

[26] Copland, 'To Be Continued', p. 135.
[27] Cohan and Shires, *Telling Stories*, p. 52; p. 64.
[28] Cohan and Shires, *Telling Stories*, pp. 52-53.

of narrative. Something akin to this potential of the black British short story is implied by Nasta and Stein's resignation of the linearity, chronology, and developmentality of historicising, in favour of tracing multidirectionality, conscious omission, networks of placement, and material conditions. Ultimately, they position the future and the yet-to-be known within the historicising process. Given the similarities between what I have defined as the potential of the black British short story and the alternative structure of historicising enacted by Nasta and Stein, why is narrative positioned within their introduction as a dominant and somewhat problematic form for sustaining their desired structure?

To begin to answer this question, I reiterate the parallels between my own contentions in *Publishing Black British Short Stories*, and the concerns raised by Nasta and Stein. Thus, I demonstrate the similarities between the qualities of the micro narrative of the black British short story and the overall concerns of structuring the macro narrative in the twenty-first century. The impressions made by the short story upon the potential of narrative in black British contexts could have a profound effect on the historicising of the field more generally, given the ways in which the postwar short story as I have defined it has been alert since the mid-twentieth century to antilinear, closure-resisting, and gap-exposing qualities. Such qualities are now becoming considerations of the field in the twenty-first century, as reflected by Nasta and Stein's volume. As a marginalised narrative form, the black British short story has offered alternative formal approaches to those of more dominant narratives, formal approaches which have been somewhat overlooked at the micro level, but are now being regarded as alternative structuring forces for the macro narrative. Interpreting the historicising of black and Asian British writing through the lens of the short story, or vice versa, can illuminate how it is not narrative per se that is dominant at either the micro or macro level, but a particular kind of linear, digestible narrative. The black British short story offers a means of considering the potential of narrative qualities beyond those that dominate from *within* narrative rather than via

some other means detached from it. Nasta and Stein, though, even while presenting an alternative narrative for the historicising of black and Asian British writing, still position the precedence of narrative generally as subjugating other cultural forms. I suggest that it is not narrative that is problematic in itself (indeed narrative is unavoidable for historicising black British writing), but instead, the kind of narrative that superimposes upon the field a sense of closure. The formal approaches of narrative applied by the black British short story could be a source of stimulus for the kind of structure of historicising which Nasta and Stein undertake; like their composition, it also opens itself up to interrogation and dialogue through resisting closure, (re)presenting lateral movement, and staging a sense of aperture. But it is still a narrative form, albeit a marginalised one in the field of black British writing.

As a *History*, the structure of narrative is implicated in the composition of Nasta and Stein's volume because of its form – narrative and the writing of a history are entangled constructs. According to Eva Ulrike Pirker, 'history and historiography are inevitably intertwined', and it is 'narrative choices [which] determine the subject matter "black British history"'.[29] Pirker stresses the centrality of historicising in the field of black British literature and culture since the 1990s, and the associated magnitude of narrative across both factual and fictional cultural forms which write this history. These are not restricted to fictional narrative forms, but are inclusive of visual art, poetry, and documentation, among others. The fact that non-narrative forms become weighted by the forces of narrative is connected to the ways in which the 'grand narrative' of black British history remains a point of reference for the analysis of such texts, even if it is not visualised within the text itself.[30] This 'grand narrative' invokes Windrush settlement as its beginning, and the assurance of harmonious race relations of the future for its close: there is 'a moment of arrival, the idea of a new beginning, harsh times but

[29] Eva Ulrike Pirker, *Narrative Projections of a Black British History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), p. 5.
[30] Pirker, *Narrative Projections*, p. 4.

enduring efforts and a strong sense of community, leading to eventual success.'[31] Narrative is 'projected' onto the history of black Britain, and onto the cultural texts used to historicise the field.

History and narrative are entangled constructs more broadly, though, beyond the context of black Britain. For narratologists, when events are presented with minimal input of the narrator, it is called 'historical narration' because 'order, frequency, and duration […] narrate themselves regardless of who tells them.'[32] Putting aside for a moment the question of whether or not a verbal medium can achieve such objectivity as this – which is a debate itself in the field of narrative theory – the fact that the minimising of the character of the narrator to allow events to speak for themselves is delineated as history even in fictional texts, is informative as to the ways in which narrative and history are intertwined. According to this narratological theory, history – a temporal framework which demands a beginning and end – underlies the story elements of narrative and is therefore the undergirding structure of narrative. Narration, comparatively, is humanisation, and it is this that completes the narrative. For the historian, the 'primary concern [is] with the passage of time', and it is only through narration, therefore through humanisation or through 'conveying what it felt like to observe or participate in past events', that such temporality can be shaped into historiographical form.[33] For narratologists, temporality is required to realise narration, and for historians, narration is required to realise the passing of time. Narrative and history are therefore interwoven, and Nasta and Stein, by drawing into focus the question of how history is written, foreground awareness of the force of narrative that structures the *History*.

[31] Pirker, *Narrative Projections*, p. 4.
[32] Cohan and Shires, *Telling Stories*, p. 93.
[33] Tosh, 'History as Narrative', p. 50.

In the case of Nasta and Stein's *History*, therefore, narrative is not only that which they find to be the dominant object of analysis in black and Asian British writing, but also an organisational force that provides a form through which cultural objects should be analysed, according to the structure of historiography. They are alert to the need for a decentred framework of analysis, one which enables considerations of the circuits of market conditions and the positioning and organisation of writing within public and academic spheres. This could potentially be the reason as to why Nasta and Stein mostly avoid defining their *History* as a narrative. Instead, they use terms such as 'historical continuum',[34] which evades the narrative tropes of defined beginnings and endings, syntagmatic relations, and focalisation; or 'promiscuous genealogy', a term 'coined […] as a way of avoiding the pitfalls of reading […] discrepant histories through a single developmental narrative and of enabling connections realised by what [might be called] "multidirectional" readings'.[35] Despite their efforts to sidestep the term throughout the introduction, it is not narrative per se that Nasta and Stein are interested in circumventing, but rather the linearity, developmentality, and singularity that border the 'perhaps overly comfortable narrative of reclamation' that surrounds the historicising of black Britain.[36]

When Nasta and Stein seek to offer 'porosity', 'multidirectional memory', 'pluralisation', and 'entanglements'[37] in their *History*, to counteract the reductivity of hitherto histories of black and Asian British writing, they do so in the name of narrative. They suggest that, as organisational or compositional principles for the volume, these qualities 'enabl[e] a more fluid horizontal and thematic narrative of predominant "tropes" and "preoccupations" to emerge.'[38] However, there is a slight slippage in their introduction between narrative and

[34] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 14.
[35] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 16.
[36] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[37] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 10.
[38] Nasta and Stein, 'Introduction', p. 14.

linearity, singularity, and developmentality in historicising black and Asian British writing. The slippage is apparent when Nasta and Stein choose to define their *History* through terms other than 'narrative'. Such slippage is echoed within narratology itself, as demonstrated by Cohan and Shires's remarks on the closed, linear structure of narrative. But, as established above, the short story and the theory surrounding it both illustrate the ways in which narrative form is not ultimately defined by these properties and can tend towards formal approaches which actually undermine such definitions. When Nasta and Stein indicate the potential for a horizontal narrative that is porous, multidirectional, and entangled, they touch upon the qualities of narrative that I have argued are firstly neglected in black British writing by the industry's expectations and strictures, and secondly, demonstrated through the various formal approaches of the black British short story.

In short, Nasta and Stein must defend their own narrativising of black Britain against the uses to which narrative has been put in black and Asian British contexts. Thus, they strive to reinstate narrative as a form capable of subverting its own linear-directing, gap-filling, and closure-seeking forces. This is exactly what I have argued throughout for the short story, that it can reclaim the potential of narrative to etch laterality, aperture, and indeterminacy against its own impulses. So, the subsequent question is why, in black British contexts, does narrative need to be defended against its distillation of linearity, developmentality, closure, and singularity? To a certain extent, this can be explained by the ways in which narratology positions and defines narrative. It is reasonable to assume that narrative in black British contexts has come to be associated with elements such as closure and developmentality, given that the theory of narrative also bolsters these qualities and overlooks the alterity achieved by the short story. However, I argue, based on the conclusions drawn from this thesis, that there is more at play for narrative in the context of black Britain which makes such elements favourable and desirable for commercial purposes, and which has a profound and, perhaps

given Nasta and Stein's rejection of such elements, unsolicited impact upon the sociopolitical functions of black British writing.

My arguments on the connections between narrative and sociopolitical contexts have taken place through the lens of the dominance of realism in black British writing. Throughout, I have theorised the ways in which realism has become prominent in the field, a process that has taken place through analysis of the subversive impact of the short story against the dominance of this aesthetic. I have considered arguments, such as James Procter's, that the literary and the political 'need to be encountered "intertextually", as part of a dialogic relationship',[39] in order to investigate the connections between realism and black British writing. Arguments such as these imply that black British writing is unavoidably linked to qualities of verisimilitude, the foundation of realism, because of the significance of the document to the literary, of author identity to the meaning of a text when categorising black British literature. This sentiment is echoed in a considerable number of academic texts which reflect upon the relationship between marketing forces and postcolonial or black British literature, but here I wish to focus on two examples in particular which elucidate the relationship well. I do so in order to highlight the significance of the audience and its expectations within this dynamic. The texts are Mahlete-Tsigé Getachew's essay, 'Marginalia: Black Literature and the Problem of Recognition' (2005) and Sarah Brouillette's monograph, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007).

As Getachew discusses, black British literature is inevitably tied to some extent with sociopolitical concerns, because, as a category, author identity is implicated in definitions of black British writing, even if such definitions are destabilised under the scrutiny of the aesthetic

[39] James Procter, 'General Introduction: "1948"/"1998": Periodising Postwar Black Britain', in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998*, ed. James Procter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1-12 (p. 10).

principles which shape the category.[40] The 'principal narrative' of black British literature is often considered to be the 'experience of racial oppression that comes with being Black', or simply the 'Black experience', a narrative which commands interaction with autobiographical form.[41] However, as Getachew also illuminates:

> This kind of re-presentation [of sociopolitical realities] through literature is admirable but it does not necessarily entail literary merit or even the appropriateness of *literary* recognition. And when the representation of the Black community is seen as the 'duty' of authors writing about Black characters, the danger is that literary considerations will come second to political duty.[42]

Categorising black British writing as centred around the narrative of black experience is also a form of '*controlling* representation of the Black community' which 'restrict[s] goal and content' and 'constrain[s] the literature's artistic potential.'[43] As such, defining the category through a text's representation of sociopolitical realities can become limiting in terms of the field's fulfilment of its aesthetic potential. Getachew's remarks here imply that constraints exist over the creative freedom of black British literature because of its connections to sociopolitical realities, but she does not specifically draw literary realism into consideration. I have turned to sources outside of the discourses of academia to survey the extent to which the dominance of realism is indeed limiting. I have been attentive to the opinions of black writers in the public sphere to demonstrate the constrictive nature of marketing attention on realism. I have considered, for example, Shola von Reinhold's comments about the neglect of black modernists in the study and reception of black British fiction, as well as Zadie Smith's frustration over identity politics and her commanding of creative freedom for the future of the

[40] Mahlete-Tsigé Getachew, 'Marginalia: Black Literature and the Problem of Recognition', in *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sessay (Hansib: Hertford, 2005), pp. 323-345.
[41] Getachew, 'Marginalia', p. 331.
[42] Getachew, 'Marginalia', p. 328.
[43] Getachew, 'Marginalia', pp. 329-330 (original emphasis).

field. However, it is the connection that Brouillette traces, between the presence of sociopolitical realities in postcolonial texts through author identity and the audience expectation of knowledge and education through such texts, that has been most directive for the conclusions that I have drawn about the dominance, as opposed to prevalence, of realism in black British writing.

Brouillette explores the circuits of disseminating postcolonial literature in the global literary marketplace, considering the dynamic between market appeal, the positioning of the target audience and the assumed expectations of this demographic, as well as the operations of the publishing industry. A certain cosmopolitan, white, English-speaking reader is targeted for the sale of postcolonial texts in the global marketplace. As such, 'a growing consensus holds that celebrated postcolonial writers are most often those who are *literary* in a way recognizable to [such] cosmopolitan audiences.'[44] What makes these writers 'eminently marketable' is this audience's desire 'to be educated to a certain degree about "other" realities' and, in the case of publishing black British literature, this results in writers 'feel[ing] the effects of a certain ghettoization, as a largely white industry forces them "to write about multicultural issues."'[45] The literary, for postcolonial writers and their texts, is tied to knowledge of cultures, experiences, and locations which are unfamiliar to the cosmopolitan audience, but are attractive to such an audience for educational purposes. 'Authorial personae' is therefore realised as a promotional technique, because these writers 'are expected to act as interpreters of locations they are connected to through personal biography'.[46] As in the case of Getachew's discussion, creative freedom is restricted by the assumption that sociopolitical realities underly these texts. However, Brouillette highlights the position of the reader in how this assumption comes to

[44] Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 59.
[45] Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, p. 60; p 56.
[46] Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, p. 70.

light. The presence of sociopolitical realities within fictional texts enables the reader to feel as though they have increased their knowledge of the black or postcolonial experience by the end of the text, a text which has packaged up such experience into digestible form. The fulfilment of this expectation that the reader brings to a text is dependent upon the forces of narrative which may impose upon the expression of experience a sense of closure or total knowledge which is desirable to the reader's search for knowledge, but is ultimately not in keeping with the complexity of postcolonial realities.

Brouillette does not explore the role of literary realism in this audience expectation and market appeal of knowledge; her emphasis is on postcolonial writers rather than the form(s) of their literature. However, if the conclusions of my third and fifth chapters are taken into consideration, literary realism has a particular connection to the illusion of total knowledge and closure that this audience expectation of education commands. As I discuss in chapter five, the antirealist structures and other worlds created by twenty-first-century single-authored collections function to interrogate literary realism's association with the age of reason from which it developed in the west. Thus, the texts scrutinise the imperial ideology of the epistemology carried by the aesthetic. Similarly, chapter three explored the ways in which the stories of *Don't Ask Me Why* challenge what Nicholas Robinette describes as the 'active work of knowing the world' which 'must precede the literary narrative' in mimetic representation.[47] Both chapters three and five therefore explore the central dynamic of realism according to Frederic Jameson, the tension that defines the aesthetic: the fact that '[i]f it is social truth or knowledge we want from realism, we will soon find that what we get is ideology.'[48] The illusion of total knowledge can therefore be carried across in black British contexts from interpretations of the text to interpretations of the sociopolitical realities to which the text

[47] Nicholas Robinette, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 7.
[48] Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 6.

responds and reflects upon. As such, certain properties – the delineation of a single narrative voice, a telos – create the impression that the knowledge of experience can be encapsulated into form for exchange with a consumer. In turn, such properties obfuscate the relevance of the unknown of the future, or that which has been silenced, or the plurality of experience. This obfuscation created by the closed structure of realism is akin to Jameson's point about the presentation of an ideology where social knowledge is anticipated: the *récit* of realism 'is a time of the preterite, of events completed, over and done with, events that have entered history once and for all. […] It omits, in other words, the present of time and turns the future into a "dead future"'.[49]

Getachew elucidates the prominence of narratives which sketch the 'Black experience' in the category of black British literature. Brouillette illuminates the ways in which the expectations of the target reader are implicated in the demand for sociopolitical realities to be present in postcolonial texts. Both reflect upon the fact that author identity is a constant in black British and postcolonial literatures which enforces upon them certain themes engaging with autobiographical experience. My own input here relates to the formal approaches enforced by the presence of author identity within a text: the prevalence of realisms – magical realism, social realism, utopian realism,[50] psychological realism – in black British writing is the means by which this underlying presence of author identity and biography manifests in fictional texts. Furthermore, I have, through investigation of the subversive potential of the black British short

[49] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 18.
[50] I am also referring here, though she comments on this from a different context, to Sara Upstone's work on the precedence of utopian realisms and post-racial futures in narratives about race in Britain, and how such futures are carved through form as well as theme. Upstone notes that such realist narratives 'belong to a *possible future* and *not a present reality*', which is a useful distinction to consider for my arguments about the ways in which realism instils upon black British narratives a sense of closure which conflicts with the ongoing nature of systemic racism in Britain. If, as Upstone suggests, such realisms are speculative and future-orientated rather than representations of present sociopolitical realities, there is room for slippage upon interpreting such a realist text as a model for the future or as a representation of the present. Sarah Upstone, *Rethinking Race and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 4.

story to challenge the dominance of such tropes, argued that these realisms are reliant upon certain narrative qualities – closed structures/closure, developmentality, singularity, and teleology. Ultimately, it has been my contention that such narrative qualities superimpose upon sociopolitical realities a sense of order which is not in keeping with their complexity, and that the short story challenges such impression of order when it demonstrates, through narrative, the properties of indeterminacy, laterality, and aperture. This is what I have intended to indicate throughout this conclusion, by reading Nasta and Stein's structure of historicising with reference to my own work on the black British short story. The *History* can be conceived of as a paradigm of the concerns of the macro narrative, now moving towards considerations of 'messy' lines, horizontality, market conditions and the placement of literature, and future-orientation. Where Nasta and Stein problematise aspects such as premature closure, singularity, and developmentality in the field generally, the short story can offer a way of interpreting this historicising process through narrative properties which resist closed structures and neat order. In sum, Nasta and Stein's *History* indicates that the macro narrative is turning towards historicising through the formal approaches which the black British short story, as defined in this thesis, facilitates within the micro narrative. Resultingly, the means of interpreting story structure are realised as significant instruments for interrogating established frameworks of meaning and destabilising the singular, *grand récit* of the history of black British literature, culture, and identity.

To close this conclusion, I turn to the two reports on publishing black and Asian British literature issued by Spread the Word, which I discussed in the Introduction: *Writing the Future* (2015) and *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* (2020). I do so in order to bring this theoretical notion of how narrative and formal approaches affect the interpretation of sociopolitical realities back to the level of the material. More specifically, to consider the role of the publishing industry in its positioning of black British literature, its means of satisfying the

assumed educational demands of the target audience through the acquisition and promotion of whitewashed or exoticised texts. By reading between these two reports, published five years apart, I am able to trace the development in researching the treatment of black and Asian authors and their work in the industry. I highlight the ways in which this research is also concerned with destabilising its own neat narrative and shifting towards considerations of the 'messy', decentred networks of publishing black British writing. The shift in narrative and focus can be traced in the differing methodologies of research undertaken by each report. *Writing the Future* seeks to address the lack of diversity in the workforce, and its findings result in a concluding contention that is linear and singular: that diversifying the workforce will eventually result in more creative and commercial freedom for black writers in all genres. *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, on the other hand, is interested in uncovering how the lack of diversity in the industry effects workers and writers of colour and their texts. Its findings therefore emphasise the circuit or network of acquisition and dissemination, realising that the problems are not restricted to the activities of the boardroom, but are structural and saturated throughout the culture of publishing. That is, they are active and affecting at every level, from the acquisition of manuscripts, to economic tensions which dichotomise commercial and cultural value, to the centrality of the white, middle-class target market in decision making practices.

Both reports investigate the lack of diversity in UK publishing and the effect that this has on the availability and creativity of black, Asian, and ethnic minority British fiction writing. *Writing the Future* and *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* deal specifically with the environment of publishing and marketing commercial and literary fiction in novel and/or narrative format, in comparison to preceding reports such as the poetry-focused *Free Verse: Publishing Opportunities for Black and Asian Poets* (2005). Both reports expose the monoculturalism of the workforce and how the industry's assumptions about the potential

cultural value of black British texts manifest in published works. Furthermore, they both report on what sort of expectations are placed upon such texts in order for them to be considered for dissemination. Attention is paid to how this cultural value is conflated with commercial value, and the ways in which such cultural value is determined by the assumptions of black experience held by a white, middle-class workforce and target readership. To summarise their overall findings: a certain kind of narrative is made dominant by the workings of the publishing industry and the networks of material conditions which surround it. Acquisition, comping,[51] marketing, reviewing – these are all aspects which regulate the kind of text, its form and themes, made available to readers in both public and academic spheres.

The dominant narrative deals with particular themes through formal approaches which make black British experience accessible and the realities of systemic racism palatable to white readers. In the terms of *Writing the Future*, black and Asian minority ethnic writers must 'confine themselves to reflecting White perceptions of their culture', because of the 'risk-averse culture in publishing that focuses on the most obvious aspects of an author's life for marketing and publicity.'[52] Here, expectations of theme – the reflection of non-white cultures – are stressed and are placed into the context of commercial concerns, of author identity as a saleable product alongside the text. Elsewhere in the report, findings suggest that the accepted formal approaches through which these themes can be delivered are restricted to those that are compatible with literary fiction. BAME writers struggle to enter the more financially lucrative

[51] Comping is a comparative practice in the publishing industry whereby manuscripts are acquired for publication based on how likely they are to sell in comparison to the commercial success of similar texts; it is a way of predicting sales. In the case of publishing black British literature, as reported by *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, 'writers of colour are comped with other writers of colour even though they may share nothing in common other than the same racial background'. Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente, 'Rethink: The Art of Comping', in *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, eds. Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente (London: Spread the Word and Goldsmiths, 2020), pp. 18-19.

[52] Danuta Kean, 'Authors: Plus ça Change', in *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Writers and Publishers in the UK Marketplace*, ed. Danuta Kean (London: Spread the Word, 2015), pp. 13-17 (p. 13).

genre fiction market because of such expectations.[53] In her introduction to the report, Danuta Kean recounts that

> Black and Asian minority writers complained that they were expected to portray a limited view of their own cultures or risk the accusation of inauthenticity if their characters or settings did not conform to White expectations. Failure to comply, many felt, limited their prospects of publication.[54]

This introductory statement highlights a few significant points of attention for *Writing the Future* more generally.[55] Firstly, representations of culture are limited by and dependent on the expectations of publishers, on the ways in which black experience and community are perceived by a largely white workforce. Secondly, some aspect of reality – author identity, cultural representation – is expected to be present in fictional texts by black British writers, if they are to be acquired for publication. This point underlies the demand for authenticity and accuracy, which are qualities that respond to reality rather than directly to fictional verisimilitude. Thirdly, this report concentrates on the number of ethnic minority workers in publishing, and suggests that the way to combat such limits over publication is for the industry to become 'less homogenised with editors, publicists and marketeers at all levels who have an innate understanding of the diverse communities that make up [the UK].'[56]

In interview with Kean, Raphael Mokades, who was previously in charge of diversity at Pearson, stresses the ways in which a diverse workforce could combat the assumptions of black identity and experience long held by the industry, as well as the homogeny of the writing that this industry produces. He suggests that, 'in a global market', a company should want 'to sell to everyone in the world and diversity can help with that.' Diverse companies are 'at the

[53] Danuta Kean, 'Written Off', in *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Writers and Publishers in the UK Marketplace*, ed. Danuta Kean (London: Spread the Word, 2015), pp. 8-11.
[54] Danuta Kean, 'Introduction: Why Writing the Future?', in *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the UK Marketplace*, ed. Danuta Kean (London: Spread the Word, 2015), pp. 2-3 (p. 3).
[55] These points of attention for the overall report are reiterated by the qualitative and quantitative findings of 'Written Off', in particular.
[56] Kean, 'Introduction', p. 3.

absolute cutting edge of what they do'. In other words, a diverse workforce makes for diverse products which are innovative and forward-looking.[57] Mokades continues, 'If there is someone different in the [board]room, even if she isn't radically different in terms of corporate experience and pay, what she knows and what she has experienced as a Black or Asian woman will be different to those other directors.'[58] This narrative, that the publishing industry is behind the present moment in terms of workforce and creative output, and that it can be propelled into the future via the presence of black or Asian workers is, in many ways, a fair and just observation. However, it is also problematic to a certain extent. It follows the kind of linear trajectory that Nasta and Stein challenge when it comes to historicising black and Asian British writing, but through the lens of the industry rather than its creative output. That is, this narrative positions the past as ignorant to the cultural diversity of the nation (overseas as well as in the metropole), the present as stuck in this kind of attitude of the past, and the future as a time for both creative and cultural innovation. Significantly, though, this narrative places the responsibility of change upon individual black and Asian writers and workers rather than upon the structure of the industry itself. Mokades is alert to the structural problems in the industry in terms of economics – the fact that entryways into the industry require unpaid internships which are not sustainable for the working class and, by extension, the majority of the UK's black population. However, even with attentiveness to this, Mokades still comes back to the idea that an increase in the number of black and Asian workers will give such figures the agency to change the operations of the industry. This may be the case in some circumstances, but what *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, published five years later, demonstrates is that an increase in the number of black and Asian workers and writers in the industry cannot straightforwardly rectify the prejudice built into the longstanding networks of acquisition, comping, marketing,

[57] Raphael Mokades, 'No Excuses', in *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Writers and Publishers in the UK Marketplace* (London: Spread the Word, 2015), pp. 4-6 (p. 5).
[58] Mokades, 'No Excuses', p. 7.

reviewing, and reading. Shifting its focus to the quality of experience rather than the quantity of workers reveals the decentred, nonlinear movement of these aspects of publishing and how they persevere despite the industry's multiple diversity initiatives.

Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing is the first academic study on trade fiction and the UK publishing industry, marking the academic field of black British literature with the increasing presence of the importance of considering the positioning of literature alongside its content. This concentration on market conditions is a matter of sociopolitical importance, because it considers the mediation between text and consumer and the ways in which politics are involved in the operations of the structural forces which bring literature to the attention of its audience. The findings of *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* reiterate the thematic, stylistic, and formal expectations uncovered by *Writing the Future*. The newer report adds detail to the type of narrative publishers are comfortable acquiring and promoting. According to one anonymous participant, whose thoughts are confirmed by the quantitative research undertaken by the report, editors and publishers expect an 'immigrant narrative […], a particular narrative that they are at ease with, and they know how to grapple with politically, and they know how they want to publish in a particular way.'[59] This restates the findings of *Writing the Future*, but Saha and van Lente also emphasise the fundamental contradiction which keeps black and Asian British writing within certain boundaries, stunting its development: while publishers want literary fiction from such writers, a genre which enables the representation of political themes, they are also wary of manuscripts which may be too 'issuey', and therefore off-putting to the mass market.[60] This is a significant finding of *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* compared with *Writing the Future*, because it compels comprehension of the strictures imposed upon black British writing as functioning in a cyclical

[59] Anon, quoted in 'Finding and Acquiring Writers of Colour', in *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, eds. Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente (London: Spread the Word and Goldsmiths, 2020), pp. 12-15 (p. 14).
[60] Saha and van Lente, 'Finding and Acquiring Writers of Colour', p. 14.

fashion, oscillating between the desire for political themes and the representation of these in a manner that is palatable to the majority audience.

To a certain degree, black British writing in metropolitan publishing is trapped between two opposing expectations – the representation of political turmoil, but only through an affable aesthetic; as such, it is confined to certain formal and thematic principles. This is a result of the lack of diversity in the publishing workforce, but also because of commercial interests. Audience expectation is the major focus of *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, where *Writing the Future* is more directed towards the monoculturalism of industry than of its target market. It is this centring of audience that utmost differentiates the two reports. By investigating the quality of experience for black and Asian writers and workers in UK publishing, *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* is interested in unveiling the operations of the industry, 'to make visible where the structural problems are' beyond the discernible need for more workers of colour. The general findings can be summarised as three major points. Firstly, perceived audience expectations direct publisher decisions, and the fact that the industry is set up to cater for a white, middle-class readership means that books are either whitewashed or exoticised to appeal to this market. Secondly, there is a consensus among high-profile publishing houses that more diverse audiences are harder to reach, and thus there is a reluctance to invest in these markets. And thirdly, black, Asian, and working-class audiences are undervalued by publishers. All three major findings of the report therefore relate to audience, locating readership and the targeting of this readership as a central force in the positioning of black British literature. This echoes findings such as Brouillette's, that the marketing of postcolonial literature is centred around a specific image of its target reader, and that this has a significant impact on the kind of texts which comprise the categories of black British and postcolonial literature.

The focus on audience underscores the report's more specific findings. The results focus on three intersections of the network of production in particular. Firstly, acquisition: the networking involved in ensuring that a manuscript is read by an editor is 'not inclusive of the whole spectrum of writers', with Oxbridge graduates and middle-class writers being the most well connected.[61] By extension, the concept of quality or meritocracy is shaped by class and education – the white, western canon defining ideas about the quality of black and postcolonial writing. Furthermore, comping in metropolitan publishing means that texts with multicultural themes or about the black experience are more likely to be taken on for publication than more radical themes and forms, because pre-existing texts have found commercial success through these aspects in the past, making them a safer financial choice. Secondly, promotion: traditional media channels such as newspapers and national radio are used for marketing, and other avenues such as social media are overlooked, meaning that audience awareness is kept within the bounds of these more traditional routes. Moreover, publishers are not particularly proactive in attempting to engage BAME audiences through alternative routes. Thirdly, sales and retail: chain bookstores are to some degree subject to the decisions made by publishers, rather than vice versa, meaning that while independent stores specialise in the promotion and availability of black writing, chain stores tend to cater largely for white, middle-class audiences. Furthermore, mainstream retail such as supermarkets have the capacity to reach more diverse audiences, but only tend to stock bestsellers and thus reinforce the decisions of publishers.[62]

To summarise these findings, the operations of the complex networks of publishing black British literature are to a certain degree centred by commercial interests and the associated target reader. The image of this reader as white, middle-class, and interested in

[61] All quotes and paraphrasing in this paragraph are taken from Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente, 'Executive Summary', in *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, ed. Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente (London: Spread the Word and Goldsmiths, 2020), pp. 2-3.
[62] Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente, 'Executive Summary', in *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* (London: Spread the Word and Goldsmiths, 2020), pp. 2-3.

reading about political realities, but only through approachable form, arrests the creativity of published black writing. *Writing the Future* is aware of the commercial motivations behind publishing a certain kind of black British narrative, but it ultimately contends that diversity initiatives and calls to action in the workforce will inevitably lead to change. For *Rethinking 'Diversity'*, on the other hand, the way that the industry targets a white readership reveals the cultural and ideological biases built into the structure of the industry; more black and Asian workers and writers may broaden the industry's workforce, but diversity initiatives will not effect change until the less tangible ideological structures of the industry are also addressed. Therefore, the report calls for publishers to '[r]eflect upon your practices and assumptions (audience, authors) and change your organisational culture *(behaviour, yes, but mindset, too).*'[63]

Given the focus of these two reports on novels, I believed that examining the short story would be a productive way to trace the extent to which the dominance of narratives of the 'Black experience' is determined by the industry which publishes these texts. Specifically, I would investigate whether or not the alternative prose form of the short story faced the same thematic and formal limitations as novel publication, given its alternative routes to publication. If it came to light that the black British short story tends towards formal experimentation and thematic innovation where the novel is limited to the strictures outlined above, then this would suggest that the publishing industry, rather than or at least as well as author agency, influences the creation and maintenance of the standards and norms for black British writing. The ultimate finding of this thesis, based on the analysis of various short stories throughout the five chapters, suggests that this is indeed the case. This finding is supported by the ways in which black British short stories exist alongside, interacting with but somewhat removed from, the hyper commercialised environment of novel publishing. This fact is reflected by this thesis through

[63] Saha and van Lente, 'Finding and Acquiring Writers of Colour', p. 15 (my emphasis).

its structure, with chapters organised around platforms of publication specific to the short story. The formal approaches of the short story are historically associated with its economic and material conditions of publication, because of the marginal platforms of publication available to the short form, a marginality which exceeds the context of black writing in Britain.[64] Therefore, examining the themes and aesthetic design of black British short stories could reveal the limits and strictures placed upon novel writing, if the short form appeared to be less restricted in terms of its thematic and formal approaches beyond those of the 'Black experience'. In view of my findings, that the black British short story demonstrates approaches to narrative which resist closure, realism, and linearity, it indeed appears to be the case that the expectations of the publishing industry over what black writing can and should achieve majorly impacts upon what kind of narratives are acquired for publication.

These findings, when positioned alongside Nasta and Stein's alternative approach to historicising, as well as alongside the shifting focus of research into publishing black British writing, highlight above all the intersections of structural forces, the networks and circuits of producing and positioning black British literature. These structural forces are decentred, involving audiences, editors, publishers, marketing teams, points of retail, commercial sales, academic organisations, and the narrative forces of the text itself, as these agents interact with one another. This is what *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* especially highlights in comparison to *Writing the Future* – the 2015 report is alert to such structural intersections, but it creates the impression of a linear path of production through its suggestion that more workers of colour in the industry can redirect its future and bring more diverse texts to the forefront of commercial success. In *Writing the Future*, there is an implication that the change that the industry exists in the offices at a publishing house, that if black and Asian workers can gain

[64] Paul March-Russell offers a good explanation of the ways in which the narrative qualities of the short story are tied to the form's economic position: Paul March-Russell, 'Economies of Scale: The Short Story in England', in *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 43-52.

access to this space then change will inevitably ensue. In *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*, there is more of a sense that the monoculturalism of the industry exists everywhere, at all stages of the production process, in ideological networks that are decentred and need fundamental, structural change.

Reading between these two reports, I find that the structural forces of narrative, exemplified by the black British short story's subversion of the standard formal shape and thematic focus of black British fiction writing, are significant elements of the decentred network of production. These narrative structural forces are the 'writing' which historicising black Britain is ultimately determined by, and they offer a framework of reading that transcends the parameters of the fictional text, apposite to the interpretation, not reflection, of sociopolitical and material realities. The reports' overall findings reveal that the shape of published narrative fiction is determined by the agents responsible for its dissemination, and thus narrative structure is weighted by the material forces which position it for its reading and interpretation. The reason why I close this conclusion with a reading between these two reports is to highlight the shift in thinking about the industry, away from seeing it as a linear path of production and towards comprehension of the complex networks and circuits through which it operates. This shift echoes the same movement of Nasta and Stein's historicising, the way that their composition resigns linear chronology in favour of constructing a decentred framework. It seems that for the field of black British writing, consideration of the structures through which texts are made available for reception and analysis is becoming increasingly imperative for interpreting the fictional text, and for shaping the future of the field. The black British short story occupies alternative publishing routes, generates self-reflexivity over its own formal approaches and market conditions, and subverts the closure-seeking, gap-filling, linear-moving impulses associated with narrative. It is a model for thinking about the ways in which structural forces are present within a text, and concurrently direct its place(ment) and potential.

CODA

Single-Authored Collections: Interpretation, Not Reflection – Helen Oyeyemi's Short Stories

As discussed by Jenni Ramone in 'Strange Metaphors' (2020), novelist and short story writer Helen Oyeyemi has, until recently, resisted categorisation as a black British writer.[1] Natalya Din-Kariuki, in her essay for *Telling it Slant: Critical Approaches to Helen Oyeyemi* (2017), suggests that the writer's 'challenging [of] the current labelling of her literature and biographical readings of her work' involves her literary attempts to undermine 'fixed categories and enclosure'.[2] I do not disagree with Din-Kariuki's findings, but while indeed biographical categorisation could potentially be restrictive, I suggest that Oyeyemi's literary resistance to the label is a challenge to the strictures of the marketplace. In Oyeyemi's terms:

> I'm wary of – how do I put it – "getting tagged," I guess, but I also understand the need to try and do that. When I try to think about my favourite books, I'm still not quite sure how I found them. There needs to be something you can say to people that lets them know that they might like this book, but I sometimes worry that the kinds of things that people say about what I write would not help my books find the readers I intend.[3]

[1] Jenni Ramone, 'Strange Metaphors: Contemporary Black Writing in Britain', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Literature*, eds. Richard Bradford, Madelena Gonzalez, Stephen Butler, James Ward, and Kevin De Ornellas (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), pp. 793-805 (p. 798).
[2] Natalya Din-Kariuki, '"Nobody ever warned me about mirrors": Doubling, Mimesis, and Narrative Form in Helen Oyeyemi's Fiction', in *Telling it Slant: Critical Approaches to Helen Oyeyemi*, eds. Chloe Buckley and Sarah Ilott (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017), pp. 59-71 (pp. 70-71).
[3] Helen Oyeyemi, quoted in Ainehi Edoro, 'How not to talk about African fiction', *Guardian* (2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/06/how-not-to-talk-about-african-fiction> [accessed 29th November 2021].

It is not simply a question of biographical categorisation, but of the positionality of literature, of how a text might be overlooked or dismissed based on its placement in the public sphere. To close this thesis, I suggest that reading Oyeyemi's short story collection, *What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours* (2016), under these terms of positionality can elucidate the arguments made throughout about the short story's potential to challenge the strictures imposed on black British writing by its market and publishing conditions.

When asked if she writes through symbols and images for the purpose of educating the reader, Oyeyemi's retort reveals something of her attitude towards the positioning of black British texts. She replies:

> No way, no. And I think actually that the writing resists that. I really don't like the aspect of reading something where it's not enough that it's a story and doing all of the things that it does, but you have to say that it "deals with" or it "treats" or it "tackles" such and such issues. I'm like "No, people – human beings – tackle those issues living their lives. The story is doing something else." And it's not something that I deliberately do, but I think in their weirdness, the stories kind of challenge those interpretations.[4]

Oyeyemi does not mean that stories have no place in reality, no interaction with the ways in which human beings 'tackle' issues, or no part in distilling meaning from lived experience. On the contrary, Oyeyemi's discussion of the role of fairy tales in a different interview suggests that stories have a central function in the way that human beings find meaning in their lives: 'I write and retell fairy tales because I am convinced they are real, they are talking about our lives as we live them. Not idealized or fantastic. They are talking about truths that we sometimes want to look away from.'[5] For Oyeyemi, there is no separation between meaning found in a fairy tale and meaning etched from life; a fairy tale is real because it gives form to truths that

[4] Helen Oyeyemi in interview with Rae Nudson, 'Helen Oyeyemi on *Gingerbread*, Fairy Tales, and What Self-Branding is Doing to Childhood', *Longreads* (2019), <https://longreads.com/2019/03/06/interview-with-helen-oyeyemi/> [accessed 4 May 2021].
[5] Helen Oyeyemi in interview with Heather Akumiah, 'Bookforum Talks with Helen Oyeyemi', *Bookforum* (2016) <https://www.bookforum.com/interviews/bookforum-talks-with-helen-oyeyemi-16190> [accessed 4 May 2021].

are difficult to articulate, comprehend, and come to terms with. A story is an 'engine of meaning'[6] – it is not what it 'deals with', 'tackles', or the reflection of some external reality overlaid upon the story that gives it significance. Rather, the forces at work in the story itself, the way its parts interact with one another to create tension and motion, are what make the story real. That is because the story 'assert[s] its own order', it 'take[s] form, even as you're pushing it out of shape.'[7] The story is a process of producing and distilling meaning from the chaos of its parts, not of relaying a meaning that is separate from the activities of construction and interpretation.

A story can therefore be described as a framework of interpretation, a means of giving form to the process of finding meaning and order amidst otherwise disordered and complex data. The framework of interpretation or 'engine of meaning' operates through the short story in a particular way, according to Oyeyemi in her introduction to Silvina Ocampo's collection of short fiction. In other literary forms – poetry, for example – 'we half expect to lose our footing and find something startling in the gap between verses […], no matter how precise or orderly the poem's technical form'. In the short story, comparatively, 'certain structural assurances are demanded, some guarantee that if and when an event or idea throws us off-balance, by the end that balance will be restored, or at the very least the tools for its restoration will be within reach.'[8] Oyeyemi does not indicate that a short story must follow these rules to be effective. Rather, such expectations of orderly, restorative form frequent the reception of stories, and are therefore present to be tested, challenged, and subverted. The tools for restoration are not, on their own, the operative device of what I am calling a framework of interpretation, guided by Oyeyemi's 'engine of meaning.' It is the tension between such tools

[6] Oyeyemi in interview with Heather Akumiah.
[7] Oyeyemi in interview with Rae Nudson.
[8] Helen Oyeyemi, 'Introduction', in Silvina Ocampo, *Thus Were Their Faces*, trans. Daniel Balderston (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2015), pp. ix-xv (p. ix).

– structural assurances – and the less restricted movement of narration that stimulates the framework of interpretation. Somewhere between the 'search for kindly, tidy wisdom' and the realisation that 'we'll be led astray', the 'relentless determination' of finding meaning through interpretation is grasped as the motivation for reading; the desire fulfilled by reading a story is in its staging of 'the everyday traffic (outgoing) between the mind and the world.'[9] The act of interpretation commanded by a story is where fiction intersects with reality; both require the search for order, logic, and meaning when faced with an assemblage of information, and reading a story offers a model for interpreting the world.

In Oyeyemi's short stories in *What is Not Yours is Not Yours* (2016), the contrast between order and chaos is intensified, so that what ultimately remains by the end of the text is this framework of interpretation, an extended continuity of the task of finding meaning amongst a series of images and symbols which resist determinacy and reduction. The 'structural assurances' which supply the order expected of the short form are present in the collection, but these are met with diversions and entanglements in the shape of representations of textual exchange – plays, letters, books, emails, fairy tales, oral stories, poetry, and YouTube videos feature throughout the collection, other texts which interrupt the momentum of each narrative. The first story opens the collection with 'Once upon a time',[10] therefore introducing the collection through the form of fairy tale – recalling its harmony between beginning, middle, and end, or the undergirding presence of its 'tools of restoration'. Thus, the opening of 'Books and Roses' anticipates the role that Oyeyemi believes the structure of fairy tales fulfils in deciphering meaning in the real world. However, this inaugural story does not fulfil the expectation of harmony between its parts set up by its opening; it does not end in a state of reconciliation, a 'happily ever after.' Instead, it closes with a secondary story in the form of a

[9] Oyeyemi, 'Introduction', p. x.
[10] Helen Oyeyemi, 'Books and Roses', in *What is Not Yours is Not Yours* (London: Picador, 2016), pp. 1-43 (p. 1).

letter. Moreover, the entire collection is concerned with textual, specifically narrative, exchange, meaning that it is not just the character of fairy tales that is evoked by *What is Not Yours is Not Yours*, but the very act of communicating through stories. 'Freddy Barrandov Checks… In?' features a 'government-sponsored literary award that pose[s] as a prize sponsored by a company that made typewriters', a prize that none of the shortlisted writers wants to accept.[11] The value of a text determined by such an award is problematised by the collection's other references to narrative and textual exchange, through which books and narratives function to 'unlock worlds',[12] to divulge secrets even when they are 'locked'.[13]

The function of stories in *What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours*, in opposition to the positioning and value imposed upon them by the kind of literary prize depicted in 'Freddy Barrandov', involves their confining, securing, and locking of meaning into form. Such meaning is 'unlocked' when the text is read by another figure. The confined material is released from the ownership of the author and imparts its significance upon the reader, ultimately impacting the reader's perception of the world, and usually themselves, too. This function is enacted in, for example, 'A Brief History of the Homely Wench Society', when the recurring question posed throughout the story, 'who is a homely wench?' is eventually answered by an exchange of texts. Rival society, the Bettencourters, learns what defines a homely wench by gaining access to the books on the shelves of the society's headquarters. The women of the Homely Wench Society execute a secret book swap with the long-standing misogynistic Bettencourt Society, which changes the way in which the latter society perceives its rival group and its own creed. Upon reading the exchanged books, the ideology of the Bettencourt Society

[11] Helen Oyeyemi, 'Freddy Barrandov Checks… In?', in *What is Not Yours is Not Yours* (London: Picador, 2016), pp. 224-248 (p. 224).
[12] Helen Oyeyemi, 'A Brief History of the Homely Wench Society', in *What is Not Yours is Not Yours* (London: Picador, 2016), pp. 177-209 (p. 183).
[13] Helen Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked There's Probably a Good Reason for That, Don't You Think', in *What is Not Yours is Not Yours* (London: Picador, 2016), pp. 249-263.

is ‘smashed to pieces’ and ‘put back together again, in a wholly different order.’[14] Thus, the ideas and actions of the Bettencourt Society are challenged and changed by the exchange of books which ‘unlock’ a new world of harmonious relations between the two societies, through the interpretation of text. The symbolism of locking and unlocking surfaces throughout *What is Not Yours is Not Yours*. The images of locks and keys evoke a sense of protected spaces opening up, inviting outsiders into their bounds. Furthermore, the suggestion of unlocking and unpicking meaning resonates with the notion of the framework of interpretation, of complex ideas becoming comprehensible through narrative. The events of ‘A Brief History of the Homely Wench Society’, specifically the changing of attitudes and actions stimulated by textual exchange, can illuminate the implications of such imagery and symbolism. The concern of the collection with what is contained within and taken from stories evokes a sense that the recurring images of locks and keys signify the ‘engine of meaning’, the way that meaning may be concealed and secreted, but reveals itself to the kind of reader who perseveres with ‘relentless determination.’

The aligning of imagery of locks and keys with the act of textual exchange is illustrated firstly in the opening tale, ‘Books and Roses’. The story is largely set in a secret, private, and locked library for which the protagonist finds a key. In the library, she learns about her own history through the stories left to her in letters, and acquires the skills needed to ‘wonder about […] this world’ through books – ‘Books on sword-swallowing and life forms found in the ocean, clidomancy and the aurora borealis […].’[15] Books teach Montse – the protagonist – not only about the world, but also how to interpret it, how to ‘wonder.’ Furthermore, the form of ‘Books and Roses’ enacts the process of learning how to wonder through text for the reader. Monste’s history is presented at the start of the story as a mystery, and a letter detailing the

[14] Oyeyemi, ‘The Homely Wench Society’, p. 206.
[15] Oyeyemi, ‘Books and Roses’, p. 28.

events of her birth closes the story, meaning that this letter is expected to provide answers to the questions posed by the mystery. The letter, however, reveals that its sender, Monste's mother, does not have the answers which Monste and the reader desire; she is unsure of 'the true order of it all.'[16] How exactly the contents of the letter interact with the narrative is therefore left open for interpretation, encouraging a sense of 'wonder' for the reader similar to that which Monste experiences through her own reading. Uncertainty reaches past the close of the story, meaning that closure and reduction are denied and what persists instead is the significance of the process of interpretation, of trying to find the meaning locked within texts.

It is, therefore, not only the textual exchange depicted by the collection that has this effect of establishing a 'different order' and encouraging 'wonder', but also the exchange performed between Oyeyemi's stories and their reader. Like the characters in 'A Brief History of the Homely Wench Society', whose worldview is changed by not only reading, but by the process of interpretation, *What is Not Yours is Not Yours* encourages its reader to trace the connections between the 'tidy wisdom' imparted by stories and the deciphering of meaning from lived experience. And, like Monste's realisation that she will be left in a state of wonder, the collection positions its reader on the cusp of uncovering meaning, of unlocking some hidden truth that is not directly accessible. The reader is 'led astray', arrested in the process of interpretation. The collection, by making textual exchange a recurrent theme and formal device, emphasises Oyeyemi's argument about how the veracity of storytelling exists in its provision of a framework of interpretation which exceeds the bounds of a narrative – the status of a story as an 'engine of meaning' which makes it a part of reality rather than something overlaid upon it. However, it is the closing story of the collection, the way that the convention and safety of its narrative structure hides or locks away potential secret significance, that consolidates the

[16] Oyeyemi, 'Books and Roses', p. 43.

ultimate impression that Oyeyemi's collection is above all interested in the process of interpretation.

The story, 'If a Book is Locked There's Probably a Good Reason for That, Don't You Think', is fairly orthodox in terms of its narrative structure. The narrative is constructed around a mostly linear set of events whose beginning is relational to its end, made ordered and logical via the action and dilation of the middle. The narrative begins with new employee Eva arriving for her first day on the job at a centre for 'the interpretation of data.'[17] Eva's effortless 'thrift store' style marks her as different from the rest of the team, yet enigmatic.[18] The new employee is quiet and keeps to herself, meaning that the workers at the office are increasingly intrigued by her, wondering about her history and character. Meanwhile, the unnamed focaliser of the story shares in her colleagues' intrigue, but distances herself from their 'preening' over Eva and remains an introverted 'loner'.[19] The narrator follows the focaliser's thoughts during a day at work, as she wonders about Eva's possible secrets and her potential reasons for keeping them from her new colleagues. This wonderment takes shape in the text as the focaliser's recollection of a memory of her unforthcoming grandmother. The memory reveals that the grandmother worshipped 'St John of Nepomuk, who was famously executed for his insistence on keeping the secrets of the confessional, and St John Ogilvie, who went to his death after refusing to name those of his acquaintance who shared his faith.'[20] The grandmother has a secret past of her own, which she '*will* not' divulge to her family. Her response to her kin's requests to learn more about her mysterious history echoes throughout the enveloping story of Eva's resistance to opening up: '*What's the point of me saying any more than I've said … is it eloquence that*

[17] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 250.
[18] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 249.
[19] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 250.
[20] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 253.

makes you people believe things?'[21] This question posed by the grandmother, as justification for her own reserve, also addresses Eva's reluctance and privacy as the story develops.

Eloquence, something more likely to be found in written word than in the kind of conversation – chitchat and gossip – which occurs in this office, is drawn into the story by the introduction of Eva's 'leather-bound diary with a brass lock on it.'[22] This object is the locked book of the title, and it is not merely a personal recording of events, but a communicative device intended to stop Eva's 'voice [from] falling silent.'[23] With no information about Eva delivered via the narrative, the locked diary is the only record of her past and present. Eva's character, therefore, is enclosed within and made up entirely of written text, a text that is hidden from the agents of interpretation both within and outside of the story. As the narrative progresses, Eva's popularity continues to escalate until a woman visits the office with her son to confront Eva; the implication is that Eva has had an affair with this woman's partner. At least, this is what her colleagues take from the interaction. The office turns against her; she becomes the victim of a different kind of gossip, no longer of intrigue and wonder, but malicious and designed to force her to resign. Someone steals the diary from Eva, with a ransom note stating: 'RESIGN & GET THE DIARY BACK.'[24] Eva resigns, and the focaliser is left with the responsibility of returning the diary to her colleague.

The focaliser picks the lock of the diary in order to find the information that will enable her to return it to its owner. Upon opening, the diary does not offer text, but a physical experience:

> it's sitting upright on your tabletop and seems to fill or absorb the air around it so that the air turns this way and that, like pages. In fact, the book is like a hand and you, your living room and everything in it are pages being turned this way and that. You go towards the book, slowly and reluctantly – if only you could close this book remotely

[21] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 253 (original emphasis).
[22] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 256.
[23] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 257.
[24] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 260.

> – but the closer you get to the book the greater the waning of the light in the room, and it becomes more difficult to actually move; in fact it is like walking through a paper tunnel that is folding you in, and there's chatter all about you: *Speak up, Eva,* and *Eva, you talk so fast, slow down* and *So you like to talk a lot, huh?* […] It's mostly men you're hearing, or at least they sound very male. But not all of them. Among the women Eva can be heard shushing herself. […] You recite verse, whatever's good, whatever comes to mind. This is how you pass through the building of Eva's quietness, and as you make that racket of yours you get close enough to the boom to seize both covers (though you can no longer see them) and slam the book shut.[25]

The act of interpreting Eva through text is made tangible by the representation of this book as an animate object. The focaliser is transported into Eva's past, and the question of why she is so coy is answered by the voices contained within the book. It physically affects the focaliser, taking on a life of its own and forcing her to use her voice where Eva's has been silenced, in order to close the covers and return the words to their pages. Such a conclusion to the story provides the kind of satisfactory 'restoration' which Oyeyemi describes in her discussion of the 'structural assurances' of the short form: while the animation of the diary indeed 'throws us off-balance', the 'tools for restoration' are supplied – the mystery of Eva's quietness is satisfied by the revelation that she has been silenced, and that others have spoken over and for her. The voices suppressing Eva's are 'mostly men['s]', and Eva can be heard 'shushing herself'. The focaliser battles the resulting quietness by finding her own voice, thus disrupting the silence. And so 'tidy wisdom' is imparted because the focaliser is 'led astray'; opening the diary forces this figure to confront the potential reasons for her own introversion when the book becomes animate, and the effect of interpretation is enacted by the story's climax.

The enactment of interpretation for the focaliser is not the only way in which 'If a Book is Locked' distils the short form's status as an 'engine of meaning.' Oyeyemi also contends that few writers can apply 'abstract mischief to narrative without stripping it of its human flesh.'[26] However, I suggest that this is exactly what Oyeyemi's closing story achieves. Such a

[25] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', pp. 261-262 (original emphasis).
[26] Oyeyemi, 'Introduction', p. xi.

sense of mischief is generated precisely because it is hidden beneath the neatness of the structural assurances of the story. Where, on the surface, the mystery is solved when the story closes, aspects such as setting (the interpretation of data), character (thrift store style and historical figures taking secrets to their death beds), voice (silencing and speaking for others), and the cultural and symbolic value of texts (literary 'eloquence' versus social reality) produce a sense of 'abstract mischief' which unsettles such a neat close. The story's offer of reconciliatory closure is ultimately misleading, a distraction from the irresolute framework of interpretation that the story sustains. Specifically, the focaliser is addressed in the second-person, meaning that when the story's closes on a question responding to this figure's declaration that Eva's past will remain a secret – 'So you still think that's why I locked it?' – this question is not only posed to the focaliser, but also directly to the reader. Reframing the summary of the story provided above by positioning the focaliser as 'you', in the way that the text does throughout, an alternative reading is offered – one which commands reflection upon the process of interpretation itself, on why the reader is compelled to read in the first place. By addressing the focaliser as 'you,' any slippage between author and character is evaded. Instead, when the reader is ultimately, conclusively faced with the question of why the diary has been locked (and why what is not yours is not yours), the responsibility of (re)constructing the meaning of text is projected onto the this figure. The diary in the story is representative of textual exchange in the absence of other types of communication – this is established by the fact that Eva's voice is contained within her journal ('*is it eloquence that makes you people believe things?*'). However, the intrigue around what is actually written in the journal is presented as almost dangerous. Afterall, 'there's probably a good reason' for a book to be locked, and, like the focaliser's grandmother, it is not that Eva '*cannot*' talk about herself, but that she '*will*' not.[27]

[27] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 253 (original emphasis).

Eva's colleagues want to know more about her to satisfy their own intrigue, and the focaliser – the reader – is also guilty of the same prying eye. The focaliser wishes the door to the office was 'made of glass'[28] so that she could assess Eva before her entering of the building, an image that recalls the expectation of affable, transparent form through which one may learn about the 'black experience'. The story's introduction of Eva focuses on the fact that her attire, representing her character in lieu of her voice, is from 'thrift stores', 'charity shops'[29] – it is second-hand, and her character is filtered through 'eloquent' literary form, thus implicating the significance of narration as 'an act of reading', of interpretation, of retrospectively rendering the events of a story into narrative.[30] Furthermore, the focaliser, in her profession of interpreting data and 'attaching cold hard monetary to the efforts of individual employees', 'would like a bit more context to the numbers.'[31] In the absence of such context, the focaliser – the reader ('you') – 'tampers' with the data that she is interpreting, forcing false conclusions, and wonders why she does so for 'a random string of letters and numbers that could signify anybody, anybody at all'.[32] This idea, that letters and figures are the only things available for the focaliser to interpret, and that she attaches to these letters some sense of humanity because of what they represent, echoes the ways in which black British writing is positioned to speak for communities and individuals beyond the reach of the narrative. The focaliser's actions are well-intended, but they have a significant, and perhaps even detrimental, impact upon the purposes to which the data will be put. She cannot exact the reception of her findings once they are exchanged, once they are out of her control. A change in the 'chain' of operations that structures

[28] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 249.
[29] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 249.
[30] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 4th edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), p. 56.
[31] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', pp. 250-251.
[32] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 252.

the business would be more constructive, but as an individual employee, the focaliser does what she can with her agency. [33]

All of these inferences transcend the bounds of the narrative and implicate the reader, the target audience, within the story, through the use of the second-person. More specifically, the reader's motivation for reading the story – itself a string of letters – and forging interpretations between the narrative and the activities of human beings, becomes a theme of the story, rather than something that occurs outside of the text. When the focaliser tells Eva that '*I* didn't read [the diary]', she is telling the truth.[34] By switching the pronoun here from 'you' to 'I', and the fact that the emphasis is on the '*I*', the story reveals that it is in fact the reader who read the journal despite Eva's wishes and despite the restrictions posed by the lock. The reader opened the collection regardless of its positionality, its warning that what is not yours is not yours. Indeed, the focaliser experienced what was contained within the covers of the diary – an experience not of reading, rather of animation – but it is the reader who comprehends this via the exchange of letters. And so, when Eva asks the reader at the very close of the collection if she still thinks that Eva locked her diary merely to keep her secrets, my answer is no. It is not secrecy that compels Eva to lock away her past. What is illustrated instead by the tale is that even the 'structural assurances' of narrative give way to the indeterminate activities of interpretation, which, upon textual exchange, are no longer a matter of authorial intent, but of generating meaning. It is not only what is contained within Eva's diary that channels significance, but also how it is positioned by the story's broader structural forces. It is *positioned* as an object of intrigue that represents secret, insider knowledge, regardless of what it actually details. Despite the story's presentation of reconciliatory closure when the diary is opened, the operations of the structural forces of and beyond narrative

[33] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 252.
[34] Oyeyemi, 'If a Book is Locked', p. 263 (original emphasis).

continue to impact the framework of interpretation, revealing the positioning of the text to be just as significant as that which is bound between its covers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival Sources

The George Padmore Institute catalogued material: Journals, UK and Caribbean Collection:
Race Today (GB 2904 JOU/1/1/1-137)

The George Padmore Institute uncatalogued material:
Artrage
Okike
Shakti
Staunch
Third World Women's News

Bibliography

Anon, *Breaking the Silence: Writing by Black and Asian Women*, ed. Centreprise Publishing Project (London: Centreprise Trust, 1984)

Anon, 'Mas Movement', in *Touch in Association with Time Out Magazine: Guide to Carnival* (1996), pp. 4-10

Anon, *The Map of Me: True Tales of Mixed Heritage Experience*, ed. Penguin Books (London: Penguin, 2008)

Anon, *Black Lives*, ed. Nottingham Writers' Studio (Nottingham: Big White Shed, 2021)

Achilles, Jochen, and Ina Bergmann, eds., *Liminality and the Short Story: Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014)

Adi, Hakim, ed., *Black British History: New Perspectives* (London: Zed Books, 2019)

Ahmad, Aijaz, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 2002)

Allen, Sheila, *New Minorities, Old Conflicts* (New York: Random House, 1971)

Allfrey, Wakatama Ellah, ed., *Flamingo Land and Other Stories* (London: Flight Press, 2015)

Antoine, Patsy, ed., *Afrobeat: New Black British Fiction* (London: Pulp Faction, 1999)

Arana, Victoria R., ed., *'Black' British Aesthetics Today* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007)

Arana, Victoria R., and Lauri Ramey, eds., *Black British Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973)

Armstrong, Karen, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2004)

Arndt, Susan, 'Migration, Rhizomatic Identities, and the Black Atlantic in Postcolonial Literary Studies: The Trans-Space as Home in Pauline Melville's Short Story "Eat Labba and Drink Creek Water"', in *Contested Communities: Communication, Narration, Imagination*, ed. Susanne Mühleisen (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 219-235

Aughterson, Kate, and Deborah Philips, eds., *Women Writers and Experimental Narratives: Early Modern to Contemporary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021)

Awadalla, Maggie, and Paul March-Russell, eds., *The Postcolonial Short Story: Contemporary Essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Babalola, Bolu, *Love in Colour: Mythical Tales from Around the World, Retold* (London: Headline, 2020)

Bal, Mieke, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 4th edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017)

Ball, John Clement, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004)

Bell, Michael, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Beaumont, Matthew, ed., *Adventures in Realism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007)

Becker, George Joseph, ed., *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967)

Benjamin, Ionie, *The Black Press in Britain* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1995)

Bhanot, Kavita, Courttia Newland, and Mend Meriwany, eds., *Bare Lit* (Green Bay: Brain Mill Press, 2017)

Boehmer, Elleke, *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st Century Critical Readings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

Boehmer, Elleke, and Erica Lombard, 'Publishing, the Curriculum and Black British Writing Today', *Wasafiri*, 34.4 (2019), 115-121

Bowers, Maggie Ann, *Magic(al) Realism (The New Critical Idiom)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004)

Braddock, Jeremy, *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012)

Brennan, Timothy, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989)

Brooks, Peter, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992)

Brouillette, Sarah, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Bruner, Jerome S., 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1991), 1-21

Buckley, Chloe, and Sarah Ilott, eds., *Telling it Slant: Critical Approaches to Helen Oyeyemi* (Eastbourne: Sussex University Press, 2017)

Bunce, Robin, and Paul Field, *Darcus Howe: A Political Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

Burford, Barbara, *The Threshing Floor* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1987)

Burkitt, Katharine, '*Blonde Roots*, Black History: History and the Form of the Slave Narrative in Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots*', *JPW*, 48.2 (2012), 406-417

Burrs, Angela, '"The Freedom of the Slaves to Walk the Streets": Celebration, Spontaneity and Revelry versus Logistics at the Notting Hill Carnival', in *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds*, eds. David Picard and Mike Robinson (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2006)

Cain, Sain, 'Black Writers' Guild calls for sweeping change in UK Publishing', *Guardian* (2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/15/black-writers-guild-calls-for-sweeping-change-in-uk-publishing> [accessed 21st December 2021]

Campbell, Joseph, with Bill Boyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991)

Chaterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986)

Choong, Da, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker, and Gabriela Pearse, eds., *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women* (London: Black WomanTalk, 1991)

Cobham, Rhonda, and Merle Collins, eds., *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain* (London: The Women's Press, 1987)

Cohan, Steven, and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (London, New York: Routledge, 1988)

Copland, Sarah, 'To Be Continued: The Story of Short Story Theory and Other Narrative Theory', *Narrative*, 22.1 (January 2014), 132-149

D'Aguiar, Fred, 'Against Black British Literature', in *Tibisiri: Caribbean Writers and Critics*, ed. Maggie Butcher (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1988), pp. 106-144

Dabydeen, David, and Nina Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (London: Hansib, 1997)

Dawes, Kwame, ed., *Red: Contemporary Black British Poetry* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2010)

Donahue, James, ed., *Narrative, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017)

Donnell, Alison, 'Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing', *Wasafiri*, 17.36 (2002), 11-17

Dummett, Michael, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978)

Dhondy, Farrukh, *East End at Your Feet* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1976)

Dhondy, Farrukh, *Poonah Company* (Uttar Pradesh: Harper Perennial, 2008)

Eagleton, Mary, 'Moving Between Politics and Aesthetics in Zadie Smith's Shorter Forms', *Journal of the English Association*, efaa013 (2020), 1-21

Eddo-Lodge, Reni, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Edoro, Ainehi, 'How not to talk about African fiction', *Guardian* (2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/06/how-not-to-talk-about-african-fiction> [accessed 29th November 2021]

Edwards, Brent Hayes, 'Race and the Modern Anthology', in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003)

Edwards, Peter, and David Dabydeen, eds., *Black Writers in Britain 1760-1890* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)

Evans, Diana, '*Queenie* by Candice Carty-Williams review – timely and important', *Guardian* (2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/apr/12/queenie-candice-carty-williams-review> [last accessed 20 January 2021]

Evans, Lucy, Mark McWatt, and Emma Smith, eds., *The Caribbean Short Story* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2011)

Evaristo, Bernardine, quoted in 'Report Finds UK Books World has Marginalised and Pigeonholed Ethnic Minorities', *Guardian* (2015) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/15/report-books-world-ethnic-minorities-london-book-fair> [accessed 13 July 2018]

Evaristo, Bernardine, and Daljit Nagra, eds., *Ten: New Poets from Spread the Word* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2010)

Field, Paul, Robin Bunce, Leila Hassan, and Margaret Peacock, eds., *Here to Stay, Here to Fight: A Race Today Anthology* (London: Pluto Press, 2019)

Ferdinand, Nicole, and Nigel L. Williams, 'The Making of the London Notting Hill Carnival Festivalscape: Politics and Power and the Notting Hill Carnival', *TMP*, 27 (2018), 33-46

Fowler, Corinne, 'A Tale of Two Novels: Developing a Devolved Approach to Black British Writing', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43 (2008), 79-94

Fry, Northop, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963)

Fryer, Peter, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2018)

Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980)

Genette, Gérard, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993)

Gilroy, Paul, *There Ain't No Black un the Union Jack* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002)

Godden, Selena, *Mrs Death Misses Death* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2021)

Goodyer, Ian, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009)

Goring, Paul, *Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008)

Gossman, Lionel, 'Anecdote and History', *History and Theory*, 42.2 (2003), 143-168

Gunning, Dave, *Race and Antiracism in Black British and Asian British Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Hale, Dorothy J., 'Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel', *Narrative,* 15.2 (2007), 187-206

Hale, Dorothy J., 'Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century', *PMLA*, 124.3 (2009), 869-905

Hall, Stuart, 'New Ethnicities', in *Black Film/British Cinema*, ICA Document 7 (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1998) pp. 27-31

Hall, Stuart, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978)

Harper, Graeme, ed., *Comedy, Fantasy, and Colonialism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002)

Head, Dominic, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979)

Hegerfeldt, Anne C., *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magical Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005)

Hinds, Donald, *Journey to an Illusion: The West Indian in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1960)

Huggan, Graham, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York:

Routledge, 2001)

Hunter, Adrian, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Ilott, Sarah, *New Postcolonial British Genres: Shifting the Boundaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

Innes, Catherine Lynette, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Jameson, Frederic, *Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013)

Jansen, Bettina, *Narratives of Community in the Black British Short Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

Joyce, James, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (London: Cape, 1950)

Kay, Jackie, *Why Don't You Stop Talking* (London: Picador, 2002)

Kay, Jackie, James Procter, and Gemma Robinson, eds., *Out of Bounds: British Black and Asian Poets* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2012)

Keen, Suzanne, *Narrative Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

Kean, Danuta, ed., *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the UK Marketplace* (London: Spread the Word, 2015)

Kuipers, Christopher M., 'The Anthology/Corpus Dynamic: A Field Theory of the Canon', *College Literature*, 30.2 (2003), 51-71

Leibowitz, Judith, *Narrative Purpose in the Novella* (Paris: The Hague, 1974)

Levenson, Michael, 'The Avant-Garde in Modernism', in *Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 12-54

Levin, Jack, and Arnold Duke, *Gossip: The Inside Scoop* (New York: Springer, 1987)

Lohafer, Susan, and Jo Ellyn Clarey, eds., *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989)

Lohafer, Susan, ed., *Reading for Storyness: Preclosure Theory, Empirical Poetics, and Culture in the Short Story* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003)

Lohafer, Susan, 'The Stories of "Passion": An Empirical Study', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012),

226–38

Low, Gail, ‘The Pleasures of Exile: Publishing Anglophone Caribbean Writing in Postwar Britain’, in *Publishing the Postcolonial: Anglophone West African and Caribbean Writing in the UK 1948-1968* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 93-120

Gail Low, ‘Cultures of Print in the Caribbean’, in *The Novel in Africa and the Caribbean since 1950*, ed. S Gikandi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 20-36

Low, Gail, and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds., *A Black British Canon?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Lowe, Hannah, ‘“Remember the ship”’: Narrating the *Empire Windrush*’, *JPW*, 54.4 (2018), 542-555

Luscher, Robert M., ‘The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book’, in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellen Clarey (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 148-167

March-Russell, Paul, *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)

May, Charles E., ‘The Short Story’s Way of Meaning: Alice Munro’s “Passion”’, *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 172–82

McLeod, John, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004)

McLeod, John, ‘Diaspora and Utopia: Reading the Recent Work of Paul Gilroy and Caryl Phillips’, in *Diasporic Literature and Theory - Where Now?*, ed. Mark Shackleton (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008), pp. 2–17.

McLeod, John, ‘Extra Dimensions, New Routines: Contemporary Black Writing of Britain’, *Wasafiri*, 25.4 (2010), 42-52

Mellas, Natalie, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality at the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007)

Mercer, Kobena, ‘Black Art and the Burden of Representation’, in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 233-258

Meretoja, H., *The Narrative Turn in Fiction and Theory: The Crisis and Return of Storytelling from Robbe-Grillet to Tournier* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Naidu, Sam, ‘Diaspora and the Short Story’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story*

in English, eds. Paul Delaney and Adrian Hunter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), ebook edition

Nasta, Susheila, and Mark U. Stein, eds., *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Newland, Courttia, and Kadija Sesay, eds., *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000)

Newman, Sarah, *The Celebrity Gossip Column and Newspaper Journalism in Britain, 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Research Archive, 2014)

Ngcobo, Lauretta, ed., *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* (London: Virago, 1988)

Okojie, Irenosen, *Speak Gigantular* (London: Jacaranda, 2016)

Okojie, Irenosen, 'When Music Reflects the Truth of Black Life, We Should Celebrate, Not Condemn', *Guardian*, (2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/13/when-music-reflects-the-truth-of-black-life-we-should-celebrate-not-condemn> [accessed 21 June 2018]

Okojie, Irenosen, *Nudibranch* (London: Dialogue, 2019)

Okri, Ben, *Incidents at the Shrine* (London: Vintage, 1986)

Osborne, Deirdre, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Owusu, Derek, ed., *Safe: Twenty Ways to be a Black Man in Britain Today* (London: Trapeze, 2020)

Oyeyemi, Helen, 'Introduction', in Silvina Ocampo, *Thus Were Their Faces*, trans. Daniel Balderston (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2015), pp. ix-xv

Oyeyemi, Helen, *What is Not Your is Not Yours* (London: Picador, 2016)

Oyeyemi, Helen, in interview with Heather Akumiah, 'Bookforum Talks with Helen Oyeyemi', *Bookforum* (June 2016) <https://www.bookforum.com/interviews/bookforum-talks-with-helen-oyeyemi-16190> [accessed 4 May 2021].

Oyeyemi, Helen, in interview with Rae Nudson, 'Helen Oyeyemi on *Gingerbread*, Fairy Tales, and What Self-Branding is Doing to Childhood', *Longreads* (March 2019), <https://longreads.com/2019/03/06/interview-with-helen-oyeyemi/> [accessed 4 May 2021]

Pearce, Lynne, Corinne Fowler, and Robert Crawshaw, *Postcolonial Manchester: Diaspora Space and the Devolution of Literary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)

Patea, Viorica, 'The Short Story: An Overview of the History and Evolution of the Genre', in *Short Story Theories: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective*, ed. Viorica Patea (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012)

Phillips, Mike, and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Harper Collins, 1998)

Pirker, Eva Ulrike, *Narrative Projections of a Black British History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011)

Poe, Edgar Allan, 'The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale', in *The Short Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*, ed. Ann Charters, 5th edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), pp. 1531-1552

Prentoulis, Marina, 'The Construction of the Black British Community in *The Voice* and *New Nation*', *Journalism*, 13.6 (2011), 731-749

Procter, James, ed., *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Procter, James, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)

Procter, James, 'New Ethnicities, the Novel, and Burdens of Representation', in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. James F. English (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 101-120.

Ramone, Jenni, *Postcolonial Theories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Ramone, Jenni, *Postcolonial Literatures in the Local Literary Marketplace: Located Reading* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

Ramone, Jenni, 'Strange Metaphors: Contemporary Black Writing in Britain', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Literature*, eds. Richard Bradford, Madelena Gonzalez, Stephen Butler, James Ward, and Kevin De Ornellas (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), pp. 793-805

Reinhold, Shola von, 'What happened to Britain's black avant-garde fiction writers?', *Guardian* (2019) <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/black-writers-books-publishing-diversity-bame-racism-margaret-busby-jacaranda-

a8909461.html?fbclid=IwAR3FU3wN6Fm9rSf0kwLP4aT8Mhr8LAen2CfdId3GAAoWCo3T7KrVeuy0JvE> [accessed 01 Feb 2020]

Riffaterre, Michael, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990)

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983)

Rizzuto, Nicole, 'Realism, Form, Politics: Reading Connections in Caribbean Migration Narratives', *Comparative Literature*, 63.4 (2011), 383-401

Robinette, Nicholas, *Realism, Form and the Postcolonial Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Roffey, Monique, *The Mermaid of Black Conch: A Love Story* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2020)

Ronen, Ruth, 'Philosophical Realism and Postmodern Antirealism', *Style*, 49.2 (1995), 184-200

Rosenberg, Leah Reade, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Ross, Jacob, *Tell No-One About This* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2017)

Ross, Jacob, ed., *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2015)

Ross, Leone, *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2017)

Rutazibwa, Olivia U., and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ebook edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2018)

Sacido-Romero, Jorge, 'Stranded in a Border Zone: Traumatic Liminality in Black British Short Stories', in *Borders and Border Crossings in the Contemporary British Short Story*, eds. Barbara Korte and Laura Ma Lojo-Rodríguez (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 115-131

Saha, Anamik, *Race and the Cultural Industries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018)

Saha, Anamik, and Sandra van Lente, *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* (London: Goldsmiths and Spread the Word, 2020)

Sanchez-Arce, Ana Maria, ed., *Identity and Form in Contemporary Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014)

Sander, Reinhard W., ed., *From Trinidad: An Anthology of Early West Indian Writing* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978)

Sander, Reinhard W., 'The Thirties and Forties', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 38-49

Selvon, Sam, *Ways of Sunlight* (Abingdon: Hodder Headline, 1987)

Selvon, Sam, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006)

Sesay, Kadija, ed., *Burning Words, Flaming Images: Poems and Short Stories by Writers of African Descent* (London: SAKS, 1996)

Sesay, Kadija, ed., *Write Black; Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature* (Hertford: Hansib, 2005)

Shaw, Valerie, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Longman, 1983)

Shinebourne, Janice, 'Rose Hall', in *Reimagining the Guyanas*, eds. Lawrence Aje, Thomas Lacroix, and Judith Mirashi-Barak (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2019), pp. 53-60

Simpson, Hyacinth M., 'Patterns and Periods: Oral Aesthetics and a Century of Jamaican Short Story Writing', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 12.1 (2004), 1-30

Sissay, Lemn, ed., *The Fire People: A Collection of Contemporary Black British Poets* (Edinburgh: Playback Press, 1998)

Shukla, Nikesh, ed., *The Good Immigrant* (London: Unbound, 2016)

Smith, Paul, 'Hemingway's Early Manuscripts: The Theory and Practice of Omission', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 10.2 (June 1983), 268-288

Smith, Zadie, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000)

Smith, Zadie, *Changing My Mind* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009)

Smith, Zadie, *Feel Free* (London: Penguin, 2019)

Smith, Zadie, *Grand Union* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019)

Smith, Zadie, quoted in '"Identity is a pain in the arse": Zadie Smith on Political Correctness', *Guardian*, (2019)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/02/zadie-smith-political-correctness-hay-cartagena> [accessed 01 Feb 2020]

Squires, Claire, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Squires, Claire, *Publishing's Diversity Deficit: CAMEo Cuts #2* (Leicester: CAMEo, 2017)

Stein, Mark, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2004)

Thomas-Corr, Johanna, '*Grand Union* by Zadie Smith review – wisdom, heart… but an uneven collection', *Guardian* (2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/14/grand-union-zadie-smith-review-short-stories> [accessed 1st January 2022]

Toolan, Michael, 'Entanglement via Emotional Heightening in "Passion": On the Grammatical Texture of Emotionally-Immersive Passages in Short Fiction', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 210-25

Tosh, John, 'History as Narrative', in *The Pursuit of History*, 5th edition (Harlow: Longman, 2010), pp. 50-51

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)

Michael Trussler, 'Pockets of Nothingness: Metaphysical Solitude in Alice Munro's "Passion"', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 183–97

Upstone, Sara, '"Same Old, Same Old": Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*', *JPW*, 43.3 (2007), 336-349

Upstone, Sara, *Rethinking Race and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017)

Upstone, Sara, 'Black British Fiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, eds. Daniel O'Gorman and Robert Eagleston (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 125-135

Victoire, Stephanie, *The Other World, It Whispers* (Norfolk: Salt, 2016)

Walmsley, Anne, ed., *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary and Cultural History* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1992)

Warnes, Christopher, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Winter, Per, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei, eds., *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004)

Winther, Per, 'Munro's Handling of Description, Focalization, and Voice in "Passion"', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 198–209

Winther, Per, Michael Trussler, Michael Toolan, Charles E. May, and Susan Lohafer, 'Dialogues', *Narrative*, 20.2 (2012), 239–53

Wisker, Gina, 'Black British Women's Writing', in *Postcolonial and African American Women's Writing* (London: Palgrave, 2000)

Wyatt, Jean, and Sheldon George, eds., *Reading Contemporary Black British and African American Women Writers: Race, Ethics, Narrative Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020)

Ziethen, Antje, '"Space Probe": Science Fiction across the Black Atlantic', *JPW*, 57.6 (2021), 827-840