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## The Legacy of Colonialism: Existential Crisis in Garth St. Omer's *Another Place, Another Time*

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### Abstract

This article examines Saint Lucian author, Garth St. Omer's *Another Place, Another Time*, which depicts Derek Charles, the protagonist, and other minor characters, as exiles due to colonial education and/or the colonial experience and mentality that were passed down from their enslaved ancestors. As a result, the characters suffer from a pervasive existential crisis. They question their existence and suffer anguish, bad faith, somnambulism and a number of other issues. But St. Omer indicates that the only way to overcome such psychological and emotional turmoil is to negate what was taught before and choose a different kind of life.

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*Another Place, Another Time* is set in the 1960s, a period when political independence in Saint Lucia, Garth St. Omer's birthplace, was being discussed but the residues of colonialism still deeply impacted its inhabitants. St. Omer's characters who are representative of himself and his wider society are portrayed as bearing the legacy of a history of exile: a history of ancestors being transported from Africa and forced to work on the Caribbean islands, a history of others, indentured labourers, who arrived on the islands willingly (given the promise of a better life) but were unable to leave. This history of forcible exile haunts each of his characters who feel alienated in their own space. They suffer a pervasive sense of unbelonging and rootlessness in their homeland, feeling somehow as if they do not belong to the islands to which their ancestors were brought. St. Omer depicts this pervasive exile as the norm for Caribbean colonial subjects and he indicates in *Another Place, Another Time* that as colonials experience themselves as exiles, they suffer numerous existential crises. According to Lewis Gordon in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy* (1997), before the terms 'Existential/Existentialism' were coined: "slaves [...] wonder[ed] about freedom; suffer[ed] anguish; notice[ed] paradoxes of responsibility; [had] concerns of agency, tremors of broken sociality, [and] a burning desire for liberation" (7) and these specific experiences have been passed down through generations.

Therefore, the descendants of former slaves, the exiles consistently experience anguish, *mauvaise foi*, inertia, inferiority complex and egotism and St. Omer exemplifies these crises in his fiction.

St. Omer describes Derek Charles, the protagonist of the narrative, as an exile because he is made to feel unwelcome in the society in which he was born. Derek and his mother were the only ones left after his father's death and she had little choice but to iron and cook for others to make extra money. Derek states that "[h]e would have willingly forgone the occasional coin from Mr Chetty for the security of leftovers everyday in the week" (144). From this, one can assume that Derek's family is poverty stricken and the fact that "his mother could [not] vote [because] she was too poor" (121) further exemplifies this. The society apparently gave no support to poor people. If they were not in possession of wealth or power, they could not be included in making decisions about who could best run their country. The rich were the ones making the decisions and those who could not afford to make those choices had to live with them. In this kind of colonial society, one sees what Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* refers to as "compartments" (37) – a clear and inviolable distinction between the haves and the have nots. For the poor, their poverty became a culture that they each yearned to escape, a kind of prison. Heidegger, in his *Being and Time*, states that as Dasein, which literally translates to 'being there,' human beings have a way of being-in-the-world and the way people become 'in the world' is by assimilating the norms, mores, laws, and so on, of the group into which they are born (245). Derek, who has been brought up in this culture of poverty, has assimilated his role in the underclass group: poor, low or no-income blacks. Although he attends College, he feels compelled to associate with the friends he had known from childhood. But when he becomes a student at the College, a Catholic secondary school in Saint Lucia, he assumes another role, that of 'College boy' or 'educated one,' which forces him outside the role he has played all his life. Derek explains that he goes up to his friends and Lindberg asks "[w]hat you want here? You a college boy now. We don' want you here" (171). Derek's 'friends' have literally pushed him out of their group and deemed him an outsider. Yet they place him in a group that will never accept him as their equal. William Tell Gifford, in "Garth St. Omer's Existential Parlance," contends that Derek has been physically placed in a state of exile. He regards Derek as a "body in exile" (111) which suggests that Derek's exile is not only a psychological one but a physical one as well. John R. Lee in the *Saint Lucia Weekend Voice* proposes that the education system imposed in the colonial Caribbean by whites created within blacks a form of psychopathology because it was not created to cater to or for blacks but for the resident whites. As a result, the education system created a kind of "self-contempt" among blacks and a high level of friction between those who were fortunate enough to go to school and those who were not (6). This depiction of Derek as being exiled from his own clique indicates the tension that colonial education created. This

is a theme that recurs in most of St. Omer's fictions, specifically since most of his protagonists are educated males and this particular subject is explored by many other Caribbean writers. Indeed, what St. Omer shows is that although education seemed like the step in the right direction for the poor, it created a rift between the members of the community and it created a break in individuals' psyche. St. Omer indicates that colonial education imposes an imported way of being and seeing the world and this creates fragmentation and even a pervasive inferiority complex. This is a poignant evocation of colonial education as nothing more than a tool used by the colonisers to further control the colonised. St. Omer indicates that colonial education does have a negative impact on the individuals living in the colonial Caribbean and it exists simply to further the cause of colonisation. St. Omer consolidates his point by demonstrating the effects of this education as Derek is pushed out of his 'home' and made to wander around in search of a 'new place.'

In this regard, he has to reject the old role he has played since childhood that is, crab catcher and one of the 'boys on the block' and assume the role of educated other: a more refined role, a more 'civilised' way of performing. He explains that "over the years he had behaved as if he really had belonged to that race apart he had moved with [...]" (171) but he did not feel like the rich, entitled students who attended the College. This points to the colonial subjects' need to masquerade as something other than themselves. Derek behaves like a 'College boy' and attends school every day yet "always, he had returned to his home on the street where none of them [the other College boys] lived [...]" (171). His complete alienation and difference from the other students is obvious as he lives in a space that they would find contemptible: "even after he had been going to college he had continued to walk the streets, with his twine and his mango skin attached to it, but in soft shoes, and avoiding houses that face the street or in which he knew college boys or convent girls lived" (129–130). St. Omer portrays Derek living in a state of *mauvaise foi* [bad faith], which in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre defines as "a lie to oneself" (109). Derek exemplifies this state by pretending to be one thing while experiencing himself as something else. Sartre posits that most people who suffer from this are aware of the truth within themselves but present a different face for society. His argument is that because some people are unwilling to explore their own psyches to ascertain a complete knowledge of self, they allow others to define them. They assume the roles set aside by others, what Sartre identifies as "being-for-others" (130), even though they are aware that the role is false. Kierkegaard, in *The Sickness unto Death*, refers to a similar state as despair. He suggests that there are three types of despair and one of them is an individual's failure to be himself (340). Although Derek wears the uniform of the College boy, he is not a part of the world of the wealthy students for he literally eats other people's leftovers. Freud proposes in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* that when an individual represses his or her id, it consistently

threatens to surface and so even if a person believes his or her inner life to be hidden, unconsciously, people are always influenced by it (45).

Thus, even though Derek has consciously repressed his underclass self to play the role of 'College boy,' his other 'self' still rears its head; the desire to catch crabs is symbolic of an activity that would only be undertaken by a poverty stricken boy. St. Omer is portraying the absolute difficulty of this state of bad faith – the energy that one has to exert to enact a role that is not one's own. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre contends that each individual is free and should choose to be whatever he or she decides. A person's character or place in society should not be imposed upon him or her. Derek's 'educated boy' status was forced upon him because he chose to attend College, but was never able to be like the other pupils because of his very different class background. One of the most important principles of Existentialism is freedom and although 'freedom' may not mean the same thing for a European Existentialist as it does for a Caribbean Existentialist, St. Omer portrays colonial education as impinging upon this particular character's liberty. St. Omer is critiquing his own society's difficulty in being 'free' for he recognises in his fellow Saint Lucians, a need to assume whatever role they have been given rather than create a role for themselves. He indicates that the roles that are forced upon people not only create *mauvaise foi* but they further exacerbate a sense of outsidership. African-Caribbean people cannot go back to Africa, nor can they be American, and they should not aim to replicate British systems of government because no matter how good the colonial subjects may be at imitating, they are not part of any of these societies. Like Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse*, St. Omer suggests that Caribbean exiles at home confront the propaganda and distortions offered as truth by colonial powers. His writing indicates that the Caribbean subjects stop seeing themselves as inferior and negate the desire to reflect other people's cultures in favour of constructing an identity all their own: what Glissant recognises as an amalgamation of rich cultures, ethnicities and races. This is the authenticity, what Sartre describes as a recognition and an expression of one's own freedom, that St. Omer is searching for in his characters, a uniqueness that is all their own.

Moreover, in "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" (1894), Freud's view on why people develop coping mechanisms is that these people want to avoid facing certain trauma that may have happened in their past or that is happening in their present (50). In an attempt to deal with negative emotions, they create ways of avoiding or escaping them. Derek's neglect of his friendship with Celia, his childhood friend, in *Another Place Another Time* seems a response to his own exiled state, a way to escape his own situation. This escape is an avoidance tactic that could be viewed as a form of somnolence, for Derek rejects his own exile and shame by projecting it onto another person. Derek assumes a negative attitude when he finds out that Celia was not as beautiful as he initially thought: "it was at college he discovered she was ugly, too black and that her hair was short and

hard. He heard his new friends laugh often at her, say unpleasant things about her. And he was ashamed of, and thankful no one knew what she had been to him” (143). It is at College that he learns that Celia is not good enough and it is there he becomes an outsider among both the rich college students and the paupers on the block. To quote George Orwell in *Animal Farm*, he comes to the realisation that “some are more equal than others” (32). This equality on this Caribbean island that resembles St. Omer’s own island is what has made Derek an outsider. His response is to make others feel like outsiders.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon argues that a black man, if he has sexual relations with a white woman, vicariously becomes white himself. In Derek’s case, by associating with the College students, he feels he is somehow superior to Celia. St. Omer is positing that association with a specific class of people does not automatically place an individual in that same class. Thus, he portrays this condition as a kind of somnolence, a fantasy. Césaire states, in *Discourse on Colonialism*, that no one colonises innocently and for me, what he means is that everything that the ‘masters’ have offered the exiles in the Caribbean is to further their own cause (11). In “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” Sylvia Wynter notes that the Ethnoclass, which she recognises as the colonisers, is self-serving: nothing they do is in the best interest of the so-called underclass, the colonised (260). It seems, then, that colonial education existed simply to further black people’s inferiority complex and to intensify the level of tension among them. Karl Marx states in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, that the only opportunity that the proletariat will have to overthrow the Upper Class is when they realise their common goal and the “overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy [will lead to] conquest of political power by the proletariat” (13). To prevent such solidarity among the oppressed, the colonisers have realised that the only way to keep exiles at bay is to create one of many institutions (colonial education in this case) that will automatically cause friction amongst black exiles because they cannot all afford the same opportunities. The production of tension will inhibit progress, growth and authenticity and so, St. Omer writes to expose the colonial agenda and to invite his society to escape the grips of colonialism.

Another important way that Derek seems to cope with exile is through violent sex and in that regard, he could be identified as St. Omer’s Don Juan figure: one who uses sex as a form of ultimate gratification in the present. However, although his Don Juan figure is a sexual being, he differs from the Don Juan figure Camus discusses in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: a figure who is conscious and performs sexual acts for the sole purpose of gratifying his physical needs. Derek uses sex to stir away from consciousness. He is a character in exile and the only way he appears to be able to attain some element of ‘power’ and ‘stability’ is through sexual violence. He explains that, initially, the first sexual act with Berthe, his girlfriend, was one of care and affection but after he learns of her rape, he begins to feel even more powerless. He feels that nothing can be sacred, that Berthe, whom he thought

belonged to him, was tainted and he attempts to avenge her rape and every negative thing that has happened to him by having violent sex with her: “He was hate. And revenge. And a compelling desire to hurt her. To hurt her more than she had hurt him. Reduce her more than she had suddenly reduced him, to a contemptible and incompetent idiot who could see no farther than his nose” (163). Derek is an outsider in most parts of his society and he sees Berthe as a place to feel at ‘home’ until the truth about her rape rips his sense of comfort away and in that instant he begins to use her, to express his rage through her and in her in order to attain a semblance of power. Sex for Derek is symbolic of the achievement of power and each time Berthe fights him, he feels superior, empowered when she finally gives in to him. Simone de Beauvoir in *History of Sex* maintains that the very act of sex provides the male with an element of power because the act forces a woman to be submissive, even when she is willing to perform the sexual act:

Even when she is willing, or provocative, it is unquestionably the male who *takes* the female – she is *taken* [...] through superior strength, the male seizes her and holds her in place; he performs the copulatory movements; and [...] he penetrates her. In this penetration her inwardness is violated, she is like an enclosure that is broken into [...]. Her body becomes, therefore, a resistance to be broken through [and] in penetrating it the male finds self-fulfillment in the activity. His domination is expressed in the very posture of copulation – in almost all animals the male is *on* the female. (43–44; original emphasis)

The act of coitus is providing Derek with the fix he needs to go on living as an exile in his society even though he has to victimise Berthe for him to attain this power. St. Omer critiques this need for men to treat women as a thing, an object in order to feel better about themselves. De Beauvoir suggests that women have the choice as to whether they want to continue to be looked at as playthings, alienated objects or whether they want to transcend their situation because, according to her, women are much more than objects of desire (72).

St. Omer represents this idea by presenting Derek in a particularly negative light. Derek admits that “Berthe became habit, subordinated her body entirely, did only what he willed. He became arrogant and ruled her body as though it were his own” (164). In his mind, if he were not able to take charge of his own life, he would take charge of Berthe’s body. Derek’s sexually violent acts are a reaction to his exiled state, his placelessness. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains that although humans are beings-for-itself, that is, conscious beings, being self-aware is difficult for most. People prefer to be identified as what others believe them to be or they simply hide in the embrace of ‘human nature’ (233). Derek represents the man who is so fearful of looking at his ‘self’ directly in the face that he chooses to bury himself. Between Berthe’s legs therefore becomes a burial ground – a place where he can stuff his recurring sense of unbelonging and escape consciousness/reality. But St. Omer states that “in the depths between Berthe’s legs

[...] he pushed to hurt, and returning always to push ever more deeply, seeking for a calm and a release he should never find" (175). What he is attempting to find between her legs does not exist there and so sex becomes a crutch for him: "his habit of her enslaved him [...] completely [...]" (174), which is ironic since Derek makes Berthe his sexual slave only to become enslaved himself. St. Omer displays a society consistently plagued by a sense of rootlessness, unbelonging and unwantedness who attempt to escape the nausea that results by becoming "enslaved [...] completely [...]" (174) by alcohol, by sex and by any other method that will keep them perpetually anaesthetised. But according to de Beauvoir in *Force of Circumstances*, "[s]elf-knowledge is no guarantee of happiness, but it is on the side of happiness and can supply the courage to fight for it" (23). Camus claims that the only way an individual can achieve any form of happiness is to be completely lucid and de Beauvoir makes a similar claim since lucidity in itself is self-knowledge and it is only when members of this Caribbean archipelago debunk their unconscious state that they can truly begin to live, to find a home. St. Omer is very much concerned with the misogynistic actions of colonial men. He portrays Derek as one of his most detestable characters in order to demonstrate the negative attitude and behaviour of men toward women. St. Omer is implying that self-knowledge will assist in Caribbean colonial people recognising their folly against women and thus assist in their decision to change their attitudes.

St. Omer is not only concerned with the way women are treated by males but the manner in which women, specifically mothers, see themselves and the way in which the society sees them. In discussing his own view of what he refers to as the "Master-Slave relation" (237), which is a kind of analytical discussion of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Sartre explains that one becomes a 'slave' to the other because "he appears to himself as non-essential" (237). This idea of 'non-essentiality' seems an apt description of the mothers who sacrifice themselves in order to ensure their sons are educated. The mothers St. Omer portray in all of his novellas and his short stories appear to be almost Christ-like. They have no concern for themselves, only for the sons who will one day acquire "new Phoenix wings" (121) to rise out of the ashes of poverty. John Lestrade in St. Omer's *A Room on the Hill* felt his mother's absolute disappointment since he suggests that she lived only to see her son happy. In a similar vein, Derek's mother rejects her son's offer to work because she feels that their life would be much better if he were educated. When discussing Congolese women in her "Otherness and Female Identities: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*," Ngwarsungu Chiwengo proposes that although the women were informed that they were emancipated, they were still restricted by the prison walls set around them by colonialism. She contends that within Congolese society, women were not free because "[h]er [women's] emancipation was [...] limited to and defined by material possessions and social status and her selfhood acquired through the realizations of her more meritorious spouse" (167). Though Chiwengo's discussion is focused on

Congolese women, it is very applicable to colonial Caribbean women whom St. Omer portrays as other or outsider in his fiction. Derek's mother has descended into poverty because her husband dies suddenly and in order to regain her social status, she gives herself fully to her son. Her selfhood is now defined, not by her meritorious spouse but the probability of her son becoming successful.

The women in those colonial societies have assimilated the fact that a man is required for them to survive or arise from poverty and because of this they see themselves as non-essential. But through Derek, St. Omer comments on the absolute absurdity of this self-sacrificing nature of the mothers in this Caribbean community: "It had suddenly become absurd that she should have suffered and struggled merely that he should qualify for a clerkship in the Service and for the slow promotion within it over the years until he died" (171–172). It seems rather ridiculous to St. Omer that one gives up so much in life simply to see a son live as an automaton. He questions the point of such struggle and self-sacrifice because to him, there is no profit in living in such a manner except to amplify absurdity. St. Omer suggests that Derek's mother's sacrificial nature only places a burden upon him: "he felt, with his mother, responsible. Only more so. He had merely inherited, grown suddenly into an awareness of the responsibility and attitude that chained him now, and would perhaps forever chain him, to his mother. He can only regret that she should have inflicted this upon him" (174). According to Derek, his mother's need to see herself as non-essential and her need to be a sacrificial lamb will forever chain her to him: a weight he must carry as long as he lives. This image of being chained or shackled seems to not only indicate Derek's hardships but it points to a society that is still in shackles despite emancipation.

Nevertheless, St. Omer illustrates the mother-son relationship not only to symbolise the master-slave dialectic but to critique the manner in which women are perceived in Caribbean colonial societies and the manner in which they have been forced to see themselves. The sociologist, Charles Cooley, in discussing the 'looking glass self' argues that a person's self-image is shaped by how he or she is perceived by others or by the wider society. St. Omer implies that in most instances women are marginalised in the societies that he portrays and because of this they have come to accept themselves as marginal. St. Omer is unveiling this aspect of womanhood to indicate the absolute absurdity in recognising women as other when many of them are the ones running the households when the men have reneged on their responsibilities as fathers and care-givers. St. Omer indicates that women will perpetually exist in a state of absurdity if they do not shun those colonial ideas that they have assimilated and that are consistently blinding them to the truth. Woman's role is not that of other or of a non-essential being. They have proven that they can be multiple things while the men die away or run away. St. Omer's point is that somehow, women have been reduced to the role of mother or wife. They have been forced into a Sisyphean prison where they repeat the roles that society has forced upon them, not realising that they can be so much

more. St. Omer reveals Caribbean women as leading non-essential lives in order to encourage a re-evaluation of roles. He wants to reveal to the Caribbean as a whole, the importance, the necessity of women and in that regard, he may hope that women will no longer be marginalised and exiled within their own societies.

St. Omer does not only want the women to evaluate their roles but he is also suggesting a similar re-evaluation for the males, specifically fathers, within the society. Camus, in *The Stranger*, represents his protagonist's relationship with his mother but never refers to a father. Such silence in the text could suggest that Meursault, the protagonist of the story, is fatherless and perhaps this state also furthers the character's outsider status within his society. Camus does not explain whether, like his own father, Meursault's died or whether he deserted his son on his own accord. St. Omer who has been influenced by Camus seems to be filling in the gaps in Camus' narrative by focussing on the father in many of his novellas. Derek was left fatherless because his father died prematurely; leaving him with memories he could not know for certain whether they were fantasy or reality. Derek's fatherless situation has placed him in a dreaming state where he finds difficulty in differentiating between reality and fantasy. Although his father's desertion was not purposeful, many of the other members of his society are suffering from a similar fatherless state. Sybyl, his friend, is impregnated and in order for her not to lose her job, her boyfriend marries her only to escape the island, deserting both her and their son. This desertion has resulted in John, Sybyl's son, being confused about what the word 'father' really means. Despite a photograph, his mother insists that he has no father and so, he states that "Uncle Derek is my daddy" (156). This implies a young man's yearning for a father figure in the household.

Freud's argument is that the father figure is pertinent in a young man's life because with a present father, the male child is able to successfully establish his gender role. St. Omer explores fatherhood within colonial Caribbean society and through minor characters like Florence, Clarita, Babsy and Sybyl, he portrays a society suffering from a kind of deficiency because of man's lack of responsibility within the household. Sartre's belief is that people are responsible for themselves and by extension, the entire world and the fact that these men are avoiding their responsibilities is an act of inertia and even anguish. Anguish, that is the fear of being and of doing, causes an individual to remain in a state of quietism or inaction and so, Frank chooses to avoid Babsy after her abortions and the other males choose to ignore their children because of fear perhaps or because they do not feel that sense of responsibility that is supposed to be in every human. Martin Henry, when exploring the fatherless state of Jamaican children, suggests that the Caribbean: "[has] the loose visiting relationship starting early in life, with multiple sequential partnerships over the prime childbearing and child-rearing years, [and it] is a main feature of man-woman-child relationship here" (1). St. Omer depicts most of his male characters as having a distorted perception of masculinity and

based on that, they recognise neglect, infidelity and a lack of commitment as acceptable and most of the men in *Another Place Another Time* epitomise that distorted perception. Even Derek's uncle reneges on his responsibility by disowning Cecil as his child. St. Omer chooses to write about this aspect of society to unveil the lack of commitment, lack of responsibility and lack of family values that exist in his society. St. Omer indicates through John that if something is not done, this disregard for responsibility will extend from generation to generation. Each young man who is raised fatherless will continue this cycle of fatherlessness and the society itself will begin to rapidly decay. St. Omer is bringing this problem to his society's attention in order to encourage the colonial subjects to make a different choice when it comes to rearing their children.

It is clear then that the Caribbean colonial history is pertinent in St. Omer's writing and it is a subject that he repeatedly examines and re-examines and Berthe's mother's dialogue demonstrates this. While discussing Sybyl and Babsy, Miss Eliane states: "[t]hey don' have no family at all. Nobody. All their family in Antigua. Thats where their father come from" (117). She is insinuating that Babsy and Sybyl are in a state of unbelonging because of the fact that they were not born on the island on which they now reside. This idea is both ironic and revealing. The journey from Antigua to this new place is a metaphor for the journeys that were taken during and after slavery. Sybyl and Babsy's family echo that of the indentured servants who left their native lands desperately seeking employment and ended up trapped in exile on the Caribbean islands. But Miss Eliane's desire to show the Antiguan family's state of unbelonging also sheds light on those of others. Derek and Paul have known each other for a while. They have fraternised on multiple occasions and neither was aware that they were related. After he is introduced to his new cousin: "Derek wondered how many cousins he passed by on the street without knowing and how, in this small town, it could have been possible for him to have even one relative and not know about him" (131). The reason Derek is unaware of his relatives is because he is unaware of his own history which makes him an outsider to his past:

He had had no time to stop and listen to the stories she [his mother] wished to tell him, nor any wish to know about the past. He was too taken up with his own life in the present. As though that life and the present he lived in, did not spring out from, had no connection with the past nor with the lives of his forbears who had lived in it. (118)

St. Omer's writing reveals our state of disconnection from our individual and collective histories. He is implying that in spite of the difficulty and the ugliness of the past, that is, of forcible transplantation, the past is important in establishing a self. Camus's "A Growing Stone" illustrates the influence of the past on the present when a cook who vows not to engage in African rituals due to the fact that he had to perform a Christian promise the next day, is swept away by the

music and the chants and is compelled to participate. The character's participation in the dance portrays the difficulty in shunning history. Camus indicates that the past is important in an individual's decision to 'become' in the present. St. Omer illustrates a similar idea in his fiction. He indicates that in spite of being exiled from their 'homelands,' his characters, symbols of his own society, can still access their collective unconscious. Simply because there is no physical connection with their 'homes' does not mean that the memory of it cannot influence the present. Dionne Brand, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, depicts forgotten history as haunting. The reason why it haunts the Caribbean people is because it longs to be remembered; it longs to find a place, a home in Caribbean people's psyches. In remembering the past, Caribbean people will slowly begin to be re-membered and therefore heal. Kierkegaard, in *The Sickness unto Death*, states that in order for man to avoid the paralysis of despair, he requires some degree of self-examination or man will live perpetually exiled from himself (13). In this regard, St. Omer shows his society the importance of a remembered history because remembering will help in the healing of their psychic rift.

If history is not remembered, if people do not choose to live conscious, lucid lives, they blame others for their actions and they refuse to take responsibility for themselves and others. In a sense, they become sleepwalkers. In the text, Derek claims that his decisions are not his own. He suggests that it was his mother's decision for him to pursue education not any desire of his. When he realises after a terrible city fire that his mother might have required assistance, he states that "[h]e should work" (170), as if taking a passive stance towards the decision itself. Although he claims that he did not choose to pursue his education, the mere thought of working terrifies him: "after a while he had started back to the house, afraid of that thought which already looked like a decision, seeing plainly the necessity for it, but also, even more clearly the consequences of its implementation would have for him" (168). Derek's Sartrean anguish is clear as he stares work (life) in the face and becomes very unwilling to act. In fact, a wall in the city becomes a safe haven for him: a place where he remains on the side lines and refuses to act, "[h]e felt inviolate in the wall's warmth, incapable of causing anxiety or harm, incapable too, of being harmed or made anxious by anyone. The wall symbolized serenity, uninvolvedness" (174). The wall therefore becomes representative of Derek's absolute nausea and somnambulism. In this respect, he resembles Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea*; a man who could not bear to face the everyday decisions in his life. The nausea, the anguish was too much for him to endure and so he opted for inertia.

St. Omer portrays Derek as "mesmerised" (169) and during the fire St. Omer describes him as if he were in a dreaming state:

Following the flames like one mesmerized, watching the sparks burst and soar, hearing the crash of structures as they fell, the whistles and shouts of firemen, the

confusion all about him, of those who watched no less than of those who fought the flames, himself calm, uninvolved, hearing the noises and watching the flames [...]. (169–170)

Derek experiences the burning of the city as a dream which sheds light on his actual state of somnolence. He is so terrified to choose a life for himself that he recoils in somnambulism and as a result, he leaves the decision to work for his mother to make rather than choose for himself: “his offer to help by working, which had surprised him when he uttered it, had elicited a response he had not only expected but had wished for. He was saved [...]. He was saved, chained from now on to the need to make up to his mother for the further struggle he was sentencing her to” (168–169). Most people who fear the unknown are fearful of change and they find solace in habit but what good is such solace if the colonial subjects still seem to be in chains, they are still enslaved by their indecision. Derek is a character who is paralysed by the fact of changing the direction of his life. He is fearful of working; fearful of choosing a life for himself separate from the path of education. Since he is paralysed with fear he becomes inactive and “[h]is inactivity pleased him” (173). He suggests that the decision to work is a decision he should have made based on his present circumstances but not something he wanted. When his mother declines his offer to work, he feels that the option of choosing is taken away from him, but, like Daru in Camus’s “The Guest,” in his not choosing, Derek chooses. He chooses to pursue an education rather than go out to find a menial job. Derek’s apparent somnolent state and his reaction to the destructive fire are very important to note. The fire, which is representative of an actual fire that occurred in Castries in Saint Lucia, causes utter and complete havoc because Derek, who is a somnambulist, is unable to see the danger. St. Omer portrays Derek’s reaction to the flames in this manner to indicate the obscure vision of colonial subjects. They are not able to see the danger of colonialism, they are not able to see the danger of mimicry and most importantly they are not able to come to terms with their own decaying condition because they have slipped into purposeful unconsciousness.

After Derek finishes school, he appears to have overcome his somnambulism. However, he comes to a questionable conclusion: “He was no saint, no martyr, could be no patriot. He had no cause nor any country now other than himself [...]. He sought comfort, solidity, esteem [...].” (190). As an exile, Derek chooses personal achievement over helping others because according to him, he has no people to whom he is obligated to be loyal and therefore, he does not want to sacrifice himself and his personal gain for the same people who placed him in this state of unbelonging. In this respect, although St. Omer avers that Derek becomes “aware of deficiencies he had not known nor wished to know existed in him” (174) and he becomes conscious of “his responsibility for Berthe [...]. And it was himself he blamed” (174), it is questionable whether he has truly

become lucid or whether in making this egoistic choice, he has chosen to live in a perpetual somnambulist state.

Derek's choice becomes St. Omer's critique of the people living in the colonial Caribbean: an exiled people who choose to 'save' self through education and then appropriate the master's way of thinking. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, explains that the encounter between the coloniser and the colonised had to be a violent one because colonisers valorised personal gain/wealth above all and so in order to attain their desires, it was necessary to break the colonised down, to make them subordinate and weak. Derek has clearly assumed a similar worldview and by making that selfish confession, *it* awakens one to the fact that the colonial Caribbean appears to be a selfish, self-involved, individualistic place and because of this, the poor can never be saved, society can never be built up. St. Omer's fiction indicates that if Caribbean people have to overcome their acute malaise and inferiority, they have to help each other. Every man is not an island. According to Sartre, human beings should all choose a life that will influence a greater good; a life that they desire for themselves as well as future generations (25). The way in which Caribbean colonial subjects can get to this point is to break the shackles that have been placed around each of them by colonialism.

Consequently, Garth St. Omer's fiction illustrates that colonialism, transplantation and slavery created a sense of inferiority in the colonial subjects which resulted in psychic fragmentations, class and gender divisions and other tensions in colonised territories. St. Omer suggests that Caribbean colonials have been cut off from their history and the colonial education they have received, formal or informal, influences an individualistic, egocentric behaviour, which exacerbates common existential feelings of anguish, bad faith, somnolence, disconnectedness and outsidersness. Thus, St. Omer's portrayal of Derek serves as a lesson to his society, suggesting that the only way it can move forward and begin to heal is to cease looking outward, to awaken from their somnambulism and to establish a lucid connection with the self as well as others.

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