

A Struggle Between Literary and Self-Cannibalisation

The Brontës' Reversal in V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas*

Alessia Polatti

(Università degli Studi di Verona, Italia)

Abstract This article discusses the after-lives of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) as they have been rendered in V.S. Naipaul's tenth novel *Guerrillas* (1975). Following the concept of 'literary anthropophagy' theorised by Oswald de Andrade in 1928 and then adopted by several postcolonial writers as a metaphor of reverse appropriation, this article argues that Naipaul's novel can be read as an extreme form of literary cannibalism. Naipaul's violent appropriation and 'digestion' of the Brontëan works are exemplified by the ironic interconnections among the characters of the novels, their gender role reversals, the peculiar reshaping of the colonial subtext, and the trope of rape. In particular, by means of these strategies, the author subverts the Victorian assumptions of order and creates a chaotic world in which the Brontëan references become the tools for a postcolonial 'cannibalisation' of 19th century fiction. In this light, literary cannibalism is not a mere rewriting of English literature, but Naipaul's personal way of interrogating and 'cannibalising' himself through the reversal of the English canon.

Summary Introduction. – 1 What is Literary Cannibalism? A Postcolonial Definition. – 2 Literary Cannibalism in *Guerrillas*: Naipaul's Assimilation and Digestion of the Brontës. – 2.1 Differences and Similarities Among the Characters. – 2.2 Eating the Past: Chaos and the Ironic Reversal of the Victorian Subtext. – 2.3 The Reversal of the Rape Trope as an Act of Self-literary Cannibalism. – Conclusion.

Keywords The Brontës. Hybridity. Intertextuality. Literary Cannibalism. Naipaul. Postcolonial Literature.

Introduction

In his fundamental essay *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Frantz Fanon wrote, "there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place" (Fanon 1963, 39). V.S. Naipaul's tenth novel, *Guerrillas* (1975), sets out to enact this assertion. It is a story of violence centred on the rape and murder of the female protagonist Jane and on the passivity of her partner Peter Roche, who cannot (or does not want to) save her from the cruelty of her murderer, the mixed-race activist Jimmy Ahmed. But *Guerrillas* is also a novel of (supposed) revolt, or a sort of dramatic play-acting of a revolt, in which the unhealthy balance of relationships that connect the characters ambiguously appeals to the reader.

According to this brief summary, the novel may be read as one of the numerous postcolonial texts set in the Caribbean and meant to denounce its colonial past. Thus, it has often been studied in relation to the life and death of the Trinidadian activist Michael X.¹ Nevertheless, the aim of this article is to propose another standpoint, according to which *Guerrillas* can be read as an extreme example of ‘literary cannibalism’ that leads to a form of self-cannibalisation on the author’s part. Indeed, it can be argued that through the re-writing of some Victorian texts, such as Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Naipaul tries to consume the English canon (and himself) by questioning the authority of Victorian English literature and adapting it to both the postcolonial context and his personal experience as a racially and culturally hybrid subject.

1 What is Literary Cannibalism? A Postcolonial Definition

By the expression ‘literary cannibalism’ I am referring to the theory of ‘literary anthropophagy’ elaborated in Oswald de Andrade’s *Manifesto Antropofago* (1928). In his essay, de Andrade plays on the modernists’ interest in primitivism and cannibalism and uses the latter as a metaphor to explain the Brazilian custom of assimilating other cultures. In this light, “anthropophagy appears as yet another modernist attempt to offer a symbolic answer to the questions and anxieties posed by both cultural influence and the asynchrony of Brazilian modernity” (Jáuregui 2014, 24). The concept was later applied in postcolonial discourse to the practice of re-reading and re-writing colonial literature and culture. It was also used by postcolonial novelists as a trope to deconstruct and renegotiate identity, explain cultural processes and draw new boundaries between the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’. As Silvia Albertazzi (2000) points out, this cultural and theoretical framework influenced the thought and work of scholars such as Glissant, Mariátegui, Fanon and Vieira, who later distinguished three

1 Michael X was a Black activist who started an agricultural commune, inspired by the black movement, in Trinidad. When, in February 1972, the commune burned down in a fire, the police discovered the bodies of Joseph Skerritt, one of the young activists, and of the lover of Michael X’s cousin, Gale Benson. Michael was charged with their murder, found guilty and sentenced to death: during the trial, it was asserted that Benson had been shown an open grave and was then pushed in it and hacked on the neck by Michael X’s machete. He was hanged in 1975. Scholars and critics, such as Michael Neill in «Guerrillas and Gangs: Frantz Fanon and V.S. Naipaul» (1982), Maria Grazia Lolla in «V.S. Naipaul’s Poetics of Reality “The Killings in Trinidad” and Guerrillas» (1990), Neill ten Kortenaar in «Writers and Readers, the Written and the Read: V.S. Naipaul and “Guerrillas”» (1990), Anne Zahlan in «Literary Murder: V.S. Naipaul’s “Guerrillas”» (1994), Ankhi Mukherjee in «The Death of the Novel and Two Postcolonial Writers» (2008), and many others, have highlighted the similarities between Michael X and Jimmy Ahmed. Naipaul’s interest in the life and death of the Trinidadian activist is also shown in his work *Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad* (1980).

different moments in the postcolonial literary production: copy, rejection and anthropophagy (50).

The metaphor of anthropophagy as the act of eating and assimilating European culture is clearly connected with the ancient rituals of indigenous people who used to eat the flesh and/or drink the blood of a sacrificial victim in order to absorb its strength or power. In the postcolonial field the act of 'devouring' English culture or literature is transformed into an act of irreverent love and cultural resistance because "only by devouring Europe could the colonised break away from what was imposed upon them. And at the same time, the devouring could be perceived as both a violation of European codes and an act of homage" (Bassnett; Trivedi 1999, 4-5).

Fanon highlighted the importance of a similar triadic classification in *The Wretched of the Earth*. According to him,

in the first phase, the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. [...] His inspiration is European and we can easily link up these works with definite trends in the literature of the mother country. This is the period of unqualified assimilation. [...] In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is. [...] Finally in the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native [...] turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature. (1963, 222-223)

Thus, the cannibalisation of English literature can also be seen as a revolutionary act of protest and struggle that goes beyond the concept of writing back because of its aggressive and transgressive purport, often linked to a particular political moment.

Naipaul's novel, as I have already pointed out, is linked to the precise political framework of Michael X's revolutionary commune, and it can be read as an example of literary cannibalisation for its recurrent psychological cruelty and physical aggressiveness, which imply a struggle and a corporal appropriation of the Victorian canon. Naipaul realises it by reshaping the protagonists of Charlotte and Emily Brontë's novels. Moreover, *Guerrillas* is an example of literary cannibalism in the sense that cannibalism can be seen as a characteristic of the Other. It "draws our attention to the problematic relationship between real acts and the imaginary structures" (Guest 2001, 4), challenging us to reconsider the binary opposition between humanity and savagery. This opposition is exemplified in the depiction of the ambiguous and violent relationship that binds together Jane and Jimmy and terminates with the former's rape and murder. Furthermore, the Trinidadian author weaves a complex web of ironic connections between the Victorian characters and his own protagonists in order to both shake up the canon and serve his own 'cannibalistic' purposes.

2 Literary Cannibalism in *Guerrillas*: Naipaul's Assimilation and Digestion of the Brontës

2.1 Differences and Similarities Among the Characters

The first significant parallel between the Brontës' works and *Guerrillas* is related to the nature of the characters. Naipaul plays with the characterisation of his protagonists by subverting the features of their Brontëan equivalents. For instance, Roche has nothing of the Byronic hero created by Charlotte Brontë. While Rochester is described by the first person narrator as a "dark, strong, [...] stern" (C. Brontë 1974, 120) and penetrating man, virile and masculine in his massive features, Roche instead is perceived by his girlfriend Jane as a white man lacking agency. He is portrayed from the beginning as a banal and ambiguously comforting lover who seems to understand her moral weaknesses without being able to accept them: "She [Jane] had, long ago, seen him as a man of action, a doer. Later, she had seen him as an intellectual. [...] Now she saw that he was like herself, yielding and yielding, at the mercy of those events which he analysed away into his system" (Naipaul 1976, 175). Even though both Rochester and Roche represent the white male character or the coloniser who wants to subject and control the Other, be it a colonial subject like Bertha Mason or a white woman like Jane in *Guerrillas*, they differ in their real natures. Rochester, in fact, finally reappears as Jane Eyre's affectionate and still passionate lover, while Roche assumes the role of Jane's real tyrant by destroying her passport (and, therefore, her identity) and covering up her murder.² By doing so, he confirms that he is a coward and a liar.

Furthermore, Naipaul's aim of reversing the characters' roles is clearly indicated when we consider the characteristics of the two sets of lovers: the similarities between Rochester and Jane Eyre are, in fact, more evident than those between Roche and Jane who, in spite of their existential affinities, do not have a completely satisfactory relationship. On the other hand, in Charlotte Brontë's novel, despite all the trials that the two Brontëan characters have to face, their bond is finally confirmed thanks to their reciprocal love and intellectual affinities:

2 At the end of the novel, Roche decides to cover up Jane's murder in order to reaffirm his role of coloniser who imposes his will. Jane is, in fact, out of control; as Paul Theroux points out in his *The New York Times's* review of *Guerrillas*: «she [Jane] carries anxiety to the place and, without ever guessing it, intensifies the paranoia Jimmy has begun to feel. She is habituated to using people for her own drama, but in a series of reversals she herself is used, until at last she becomes a ritual sacrifice [...]. And in the end, Roche, whom Jimmy has always jokingly called "Massa", fulfills his role. The last word in the book is literal, not ironic: "Massa" - Jimmy knows what he is saying» (Theroux 1975).

“You are no ruin, sir – no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots, whether you ask them or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow. [...] Choose then, sir – *her who loves you best*.” “I will at least choose – HER I LOVE BEST. Jane, will you marry me?” “Yes, sir. [...] Mr Rochester, if ever I did a good deed in my life – if ever I thought a good thought – if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer – if ever I wished a righteous wish, – I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth. [...] I love you better now, than I did in your state of proud independence”. (C. Brontë 1974, 474)

Instead, the relationship between Jane and Roche gradually collapses because of the loss of confidence and interest in each other:

Before, she [Jane] had always been reassured by his [Roche] presence, had almost needed it, needed to feel him reacting to her. But now, though she listened for his noises [...] she began to hide from him; and he too seemed to be staying away from her. [...] They met later in the kitchen [...]. But there was no connected conversation between them. (Naipaul 1976, 173)

As far as *Wuthering Heights* is concerned, Naipaul establishes a parallel between Heathcliff and Jimmy Ahmed. As John Thieme observes, there is an ironic association between the two characters because they both have doubtful origins (1987, 172). But there is a much broader and intricate range of interconnections between them.

Firstly, the name of Jimmy’s commune is Thrushcross Grange, like Heathcliff’s mansion. Although Roche states that “I don’t think it means anything. I don’t think Jimmy sees himself as Heathcliff or anything like that” (Naipaul 1976, 10), Jimmy’s identification with Heathcliff has deep psychological roots. Indeed, Emily Brontë’s novel, which is mentioned in the text (10), has strongly influenced Jimmy, as we can see from the last letter he sends to his ex-wife Marge:

I feel death is close to me tonight [...]. **I didn’t have to hide anything from you, I didn’t have to pretend I was anybody else**, you do not know the joy. But I suffered more as a man. When I was a child I was a child, **when you made me a man I couldn’t bear being that child** [...]. **You shouldn’t have let me down Marjorie, you shouldn’t have sided with the others, I didn’t want to hate you like the others, you were my maker, you broke my heart, you made me and then you made me feel like dirt again, good only for dirt. But it’s funny how people always catch me out and let me down, so I am dying in anger** Marge as you prophesied and isn’t that a terrible way to die”. (226-229) [Emphasis added]

This pathetic farewell clearly bears out Jimmy's identification with Heathcliff. Jimmy's ex-wife has shaped his personality just as Catherine Earnshaw has done with Heathcliff's. From this perspective, when Jimmy affirms "you shouldn't have sided with the others", or "you were my maker, you broke my heart, you made me and then you made me feel like dirt again", we may easily compare Jimmy and Marge's relationship to Heathcliff and Catherine's love story.

However, Jimmy is also an inversion of Heathcliff, since the intent of Naipaul is not simply to rewrite the canon but to use and exploit it. He transforms the Brontës' characters into something contemporary and gives them a new interpretation. While Heathcliff leaves England to make his fortune abroad (E. Brontë 2002, 80), Jimmy goes to England from the Caribbean and then comes back. Furthermore, unlike Heathcliff, Jimmy's personality is portrayed as quite feminine, given his interest in the art of writing and his tendency to be subjugated. Actually, Jimmy is writing a novel from the point of view of an English woman called Clarissa who, besides recalling Samuel Richardson's heroine, seems to be Jimmy's fictional transposition of Jane. In contrast to Heathcliff, Jimmy's roots are clearly indicated: he is the son of a Chinese shopkeeper and a 'brown' mother from the Caribbean. This aspect relates him not only to the history of colonial indentured labour, but also to the character of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. They are both perceived as 'Others' and 'savages' and they both try to escape the colonisers' control by means of violence and murder. Nonetheless, as Thieme claims, while Heathcliff can actually be viewed as an allegory of the slave trade and the commodification of humans (1987, 173), Jimmy refuses to identify himself with slaves, as the poster in his bedroom suggests. In fact, the poster represents "a pen drawing of Jimmy Ahmed that made him all hair, eyes and moustache, and more negroid than he was, with roughly lettered words below: *I'm Nobody's Slave or Stallion, I'm a Warrior and Torch Bearer - Haji James Ahmed*" (Naipaul 1976, 17) [Author's emphasis].

Also, the three main female characters of these novels share many characteristics. Jane Eyre, Catherine Earnshaw and Jane are three determined women who display the obstinate temperament and self-confidence of a teenager as well as an apparent weakness that seduces the male protagonists, to the point that they become their objects of obsession. Nevertheless, they do not share the same fate, since Naipaul's intent is to reverse the Victorian morals and tropes. Thus, a dark character like Bertha can be compared not only to Jimmy but also to Jane in *Guerrillas*. They both become fetishes sacrificed in the name of an unhealthy love that has been transformed into a tainted power game.

All these intertextual references assume even more importance if we relate them to the concept of 'literary anthropophagy'. Oswald de Andrade proposes "the creative consumption of European cultural capital in the

tropics in order to produce a national culture”, as well as “utopian visions of the sexual freedom of the indigenous” (Jáuregui 2014, 25). Hence, we might argue that Naipaul tries to consume the English canon through the consumption of his characters, while he also refers to their utopian desire of sexual freedom through the impossibility of its realisation, as Jimmy’s unsatisfactory sexual coupling with Jane demonstrates. In short, Naipaul updates the Brontëan protagonists and carries them into the 1970s. At the same time he creates weak and subjugated characters like the “dirty, ragged, black-haired” Heathcliff, (E. Brontë 2002, 48) or the “clothed hyena” Bertha Mason (C. Brontë 1974, 310). Thanks to this reversal, Naipaul avoids the risk of colonial mimicry³ and provides instead a representative example of literary cannibalisation.

Naipaul’s intentions are even more evident in his personal interpretation of Victorian symbols and tropes.

2.2 Eating the Past: Chaos and the Ironic Reversal of the Victorian Subtext

In *Guerrillas* the Brontës’ colonial subtext is ironically evoked in order to cannibalise the assumptions of nineteenth century English society and ‘spit them out’ in a new and original version. In Charlotte and Emily Brontë’s novels, colonial references have a strategic role because they show the critical position of the two authors towards colonialism, but their stance cannot equal Naipaul’s personal involvement as a postcolonial writer. As a matter of fact, he transposes the Brontëan trope of the romantic triangle in the colonies in order to overturn it and come to terms with his personal condition as a postcolonial hybrid subject.

Naipaul’s reversal of the Brontës’ Victorian subtext starts with the environment, an element that can shape characters’ personalities and identities, but also conceal them. *Guerrillas*’s setting, for instance, is certainly desolate and, in fact, it foreshadows the glum fate of the protagonists:

Past the junked cars in the sunken fields, past the factories, past more country settlements, the suburbs, they approached the city, the rubbish dump smoking yellow-grey, the smoke uncoiling slowly in the still afternoon, rising high and spreading far, becoming mingled with the pink pall from the bauxite loading station, the whole shot through with the rays of the declining sun. Sunlight gilded the stilted shacks that seemed to scaffold the red hillsides. The land began to feel choked. But

³ Colonial mimicry is the process theorised by Homi Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994). It refers to a condition of ambivalence or split in the identity of the colonised that occurs when members of a colonised society imitate the culture of the colonisers with the purpose to emerge as ‘authentic’.

the shanty-town redevelopments were subdued [...]. On each fence post a black carrion corbeau sat undisturbed; others on the ground hopped about awkwardly, two feet at a time. (Naipaul 1976, 168)

In this passage the postcolonial environment has been eroded and exploited by the colonial society, just like the minds of the protagonists. The desolation of the landscape is even more marked than in the moorlands, and this is also due to the presence and action of fire:

The rubbish dump was burning: unusually thick, brown smoke, oily and acrid, which made her [Jane] turn up the window: mounds of rubbish like confetti, lorries and men and women and children blurred in the smoke, lightening occasionally into the yellow flame [...]. Fire: the smoking hills, the charred verges, it explained the words. (84)

The symbolic importance of fire is present in the three novels. As Tiffin points out, "in the landscape of *Jane Eyre* the 'red room' is the site of Jane's initial punishment, and it is Rochester who firmly associates it with hell-fire, the West Indies and his mad Creole wife, Bertha" (1993, 60); while in *Wuthering Heights* the fire in the chimney is the faithful witness of every event of the story, especially when it burns the secret letters written by Cathy and Linton (E. Brontë 2002, 197). In *Guerrillas*, fire should supposedly play a revolutionary role, as the element that destroys the constraints of the postcolonial environment. However, this revolution does not take place, suggesting that in the former colonies nothing can really change. Hence, the destructive power of fire in the two Victorian texts is completely overturned in the postcolonial world and, as a result, it loses the intensity of its symbolic meaning.

Another fundamental Victorian symbol, the mansion, is re-written with an ironic intention. If *Wuthering Heights*, *Thornfield Hall*, *Ferndean* are, as a matter of fact, described as massive and impressive, Jimmy's Thrushcross Grange, unlike its counterpart in Emily Brontë's novel, is certainly depressing and inhospitable. It can hardly be reached, hidden as it is in the tropical forest: "at some distance from the road, on this side, on a smooth brown slope there was a long hut with concrete-block walls and a pitched roof of corrugated iron" (Naipaul 1976, 13). Moreover, according to Roche, Jimmy's commune is an "anti-historical" project (204) because of the ineffectiveness of its revolutionary aims. Indeed, despite the board which claims "THRUSHCROSS GRANGE PEOPLE'S COMMUNE FOR THE LAND AND REVOLUTION" (12), the inertia of Jimmy and his commune perfectly exemplifies the stagnant postcolonial condition of the island. The same apathy is evident in the laziness of its inhabitants who prefer dallying on hammocks (137) instead of reacting to their own consumption.

In truth, *Guerrillas* may well be defined as a novel of in-agency, where

the noble and respectable Thrushcross Grange has been transformed into a supposed rebels' refuge, a strange 'mansion' the function of which is to shelter poor black boys:

They [Jane and Roche] saw, as they entered, stepping up directly from clay to concrete floor, a steel filing-cabinet in an unswept corner, an old kitchen chair, and a dusty table [...] they saw two rows of metal beds [...]. Four or five of the beds were occupied [...]. Everything was exposed, lit up, and open for the inspection: the boys, their faces, their clothes, the narrow beds, the floor below the beds. On the wall next to the filing-cabinet what had looked like a large chart could now be read as a time-table [...] ablutions, tea, field duties, barrack duties, field duties, breakfast, rest, barrack duties, dinner, discussion. (14-15)

The desolation that connotes Naipaul's description of Jimmy's Thrushcross Grange has even more ironic implications because it recalls an orphanage like Lowood, the institution where Jane Eyre grows up, rather than a dangerous and revolutionary commune.

One of the most important images alluded to in all three texts is the Apocalypse, which is represented through the metaphor of the 'coming storm'. In each novel the realization of this catastrophe is related to the figure of the outsider. As Paravisini-Gebert points out, "*Guerrillas* mirrors Brontë's text in its examination of the outsider as catalyst, and of his ultimate downfall as representative of colonial despair" (2002, 250), where catalyst could also mean troublemaker and instigator of adversities. In *Jane Eyre*, the reference to the Apocalypse is very explicit in the evening readings of St. John, when the clergyman tries to convince Jane Eyre to follow him to India through the alarming words of the Gospel:

The succeeding words thrilled me strangely as he spoke them: especially as I felt, by the slight, indescribable alteration in sound, that in uttering them, his eye had turned on me. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But", was slowly, distinctly read, "the fearful, the unbelieving, &c., shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death". (C. Brontë 1974, 444)

St. John predicts a terrible fate to Jane if she decides not to follow his warning and invocations. However, Jane Eyre's feeling is the exact contrary. In fact, she thinks she will die only if she joins her cousin in the colonies: "If I join St. John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death" (431). This is a central statement, since it anticipates Naipaul's Jane/Jane Eyre's fate at the end of *Guerrillas*.

2.3 The Reversal of the Rape Trope as an Act of Self-literary Cannibalism

The final rape and murder of Naipaul's Jane should represent the definitive consumption of the canonical order of Victorian society and English culture; however, Naipaul's subversive intent is already evident in the description of the first sexual coupling between Jimmy and Jane, when the desire of the former, who aspires to possess the white woman through the sexual act, is frustrated by her attitude and behaviour:

She was already quite remote. And when he opened his eyes to look at her, he saw that her right leg was drawn up, that the part of herself **she had forbidden him to touch** with his hand was displayed, **as though she were alone.** That drawn up leg, so slender above the knee, and held slightly to one side: **there was something masculine about the posture**, something masculine about the hand that stroked the leg now. And she was looking at leg and hand. (Naipaul 1976, 80) [Emphasis added]

Jimmy cannot assume a position of superiority over Jane: her resistance suggests that of the author who tries to resist the overpowering force of English literature and his colonial roots. Even Jimmy's illusory victory (achieved through Jane's rape) at the end of the novel takes on an inverted function. Roche's cover-up of the murder and his consequent re-appropriation of the role of the master who takes all the decisions and imposes them on the colonised suggests how difficult the consumption of the English canon can be. It also suggests the partial impotence of the postcolonial writer who has to yield to it before taking his revenge.

The perverse relationship that links Jimmy to Jane would obviously be impossible between Rochester and Jane Eyre because the Victorian heroine is too strong to be violated in such a way. She is only an apparent subaltern since, as we can see already at the beginning of the novel, little Jane has the audacity to disobey the orders of her aunt and accept and affirm her identity by looking at herself in the mirror of the red room (C. Brontë 1974, 13). She never lets herself be dominated by anybody and she is always ready to assert her autonomy. Thus, she refuses M. Rochester after she learns of his previous marriage and she decides not to succumb either to his violence (320) or to St John River's marriage proposal (432). On the other hand, Jane in *Guerrillas* lives her sexuality more freely. At the end of the novel, she becomes a sort of sacrificial element, an object that, according to Roche, can be easily eliminated without consequences. Indeed, since the beginning, Jane is a character built on absences: her "absence of doubt", for instance, appears to Roche "like an absence of self-knowledge" (Naipaul 1976, 103). In her lover's view, she seems "without consistency or even coherence" (20). Jane herself, unperturbed, admits,

“perhaps I don’t have a point of view” (25) without realising that, in this way, she condemns herself to a brutal murder.

Nonetheless, Jimmy’s final victory is only an apparent triumph of the colonised over the coloniser because of his ambiguous sexuality. He is torn between his attraction to Jane and his homosexual relationship with Bryant, one of the boys of the commune. This aspect is particularly interesting and it helps us to understand the role of cannibalisation in Naipaul’s text, because it opens up a different perspective through which we can read intertextuality in *Guerrillas*. The attribution of an equivocal sexuality to a character that can be considered as Naipaul’s Heathcliff is a means to mock the canon and denounce its hypocrisy. It is also a proof of the immense fascination that the latter exercises on the Trinidadian author who accepts to be ‘raped’ by it. Therefore, denunciation and fascination go hand in hand for the author who defines Jimmy as “a succubus” (31), a mythological demon who seduces men and has sexual relationships with them.

Naipaul’s literary strategies evoke a world of violence and express the polemical vein of his re-reading. His ironic use of the symbols and assumptions of the Victorian world has helped him to ‘digest’ them and produce something new: a sort of postcolonial sequel to *Jane Eyre* in which the Victorian heroine is transposed to a new colonial environment, tied up with the colonial life she was afraid of and an unhappy marriage with Roche(ster).

Actually, Jane’s presentiment of death in the inhospitable world of the colonies comes true at the end of *Guerrillas*, where the postcolonial Jane Eyre **does** die in the colony. Therefore, the image of the Apocalypse as a frightful ‘coming storm’ finds its concrete realisation in Naipaul’s text, and it is the result of his personal act of literary cannibalism, a sort of self-cannibalisation. According to Judie Newman, “the notion that one’s life is a text in an incomprehensible language opens the possibility that one is being placed in another’s text, interpreted as the figural realization of another’s consciousness” (1996, 174). In this light, we might argue that Jane Eyre’s final destiny has been fulfilled in *Guerrillas* through the character of Jane as a representation of Naipaul’s consciousness. The dense network of relationships between India, the Caribbean and England outlined in the three novels clearly denotes the cartography of Naipaul’s life, divided among his family origins, his mother country and his adoptive land. In this light, the Trinidadian author may have felt a strong relation and attraction to the works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, considering that, as Tiffin has claimed, “dis-identification, recuperation, autobiography, the writing of the self implies for post-colonial writers the linked manoeuvres of the unmasking of imperial interpellation of the subjectified colonial, and an interrogation of the idea of England” (1989, 44). Naipaul had to cannibalise the Victorian literary background in order to recover his own identity.

This is the result of Naipaul's literary anthropophagy: a reversal and a personal appropriation of the Brontëan texts that has pushed the author to reconsider his own predicament as postcolonial writer. His refusal to identify with the Other, both in his public and private life, is comparable to the unwillingness of both Jane and Jane Eyre to be identified as subaltern. In other words, the author's potential personal identification with his Jane could be interpreted as a sign of his interior dilemma, as well as an extreme form of cannibalisation – the cannibalisation of the self.

In the end, death is the great equaliser. It links two lands, England and Trinidad, that are geographically and culturally distant and connects the fate of the 'subaltern' lovers of the three novels: Heathcliff, the unfortunate Bertha, and Guerrillas's Jane. Nevertheless, while in *Wuthering Heights* death represents freedom and true love, in *Jane Eyre* and *Guerrillas* it symbolises chaos and injustice. The murder of Jane, who is Jane Eyre's alter ego but also, in a sense, Naipaul's, can be viewed as a sort of atonement for the author who is fighting his condition of hybridity, but is also aware of the dangers inherent to the refusal of the Other.

Conclusion

Guerrillas, *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* share a number of fundamental traits, such as a strange sense of predestination and desolation that brings about the frustration of every desire, and the impossibility to reach real happiness and pleasure. A certain degree of initial illusion gives an even more bitter taste to the subsequent thrashings of life. But, while the two Brontëan endings keep the door open for reconciliation and redemption, in *Guerrillas* there is no possibility of liberation from the 'darkness' of life. Jane's murder symbolises the definitive triumph of chaos over the order of Victorian society.

Nonetheless, assuming that Naipaul's strategy of literary cannibalism has led him to identify with Jane and not with Jimmy, this same strategy could also be interpreted as a sort of atonement for the author's personal ghosts. In this light, Naipaul's act of literary cannibalism in *Guerrillas* is an attempt to digest and appropriate the canon in order to forgive and accept himself and his hybrid identity.

Indeed, according to Naipaul, coming to terms with oneself is essential, even if the tragic ending of the novel is further proof of the fact that "the world constructed by the English books in the Caribbean and the subsequent Caribbean experience of the country itself are brought into disastrous conjunction" (Tiffin 1989, 35).

Bibliography

- Albertazzi, Silvia (2000). *Lo sguardo dell'Altro. Le letterature postcoloniali*. Roma: Carocci editore.
- Bassnett, Susan; Trivedi, Harish (eds.) (1999). *Postcolonial Translation. Theory and Practice*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Brontë, Charlotte [1847] (1974). *Jane Eyre*. New York: Carlton Publisher.
- Brontë, Emily [1847] (2002). *Wuthering Heights*. Milano: Giunti Classics.
- Fanon, Frantz [1961] (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Guest, Kristen (2001). «Introduction: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Identity». Guest, Kristen (ed.), *Eating their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity*, 1-9. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Jáuregui, Carlos (2014). «Anthropophagy». McKee Irwin, Robert; Szurmuk, Monica (eds.), *Dictionary of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 22-28. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Kortenaar, Neil ten (1990). «Writers and Readers, the Written and the Read: V.S. Naipaul and Guerrillas». *Contemporary Literature*, 31, 324-333.
- Lolla, Maria Grazia (1990). «V.S. Naipaul's Poetics of Reality. "The Killings in Trinidad" and Guerrillas». *Caribana*, 1, 41-50.
- Mukherjee, Ankhi (2008). «The Death of the Novel and Two Postcolonial Writers». *Modern Language Quarterly*, 69 (4), 533-556.
- Naipaul, V.S [1975] (1976). *Guerrillas*. London: Penguin Books.
- Naipaul, V.S (1981). *The Return of Eva Peron with the Killings in Trinidad*. London: Vintage Books.
- Neill, Michael (1982). «Guerrillas and Gangs: Frantz Fanon and V.S. Naipaul». *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 13 (4), 21-62.
- Newman, Judie (1996). «Postcolonial Gothic: Ruth Praver Jhabvala and the Sobhray Case». Sage, Victor; Smith, Allan Lloyd (eds.), *Modern Gothic, a Reader*, 171-187. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Paravisini-Gebert, Elizabeth (2002). «Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: the Caribbean». Hogle, Jerrold (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 229-257. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Theroux, Paul (1975). «Guerrillas» [online]. *The New York Times*. URL <https://www.nytimes.com/books/98/06/07/specials/naipaul-guerrillas.html> (2016-09-13).
- Thieme, John (1987). *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V.S. Naipaul's Fiction*. Hertford: Dangaroo Press and Hansib Publications.
- Tiffin, Helen (1989). «Rites of Resistance: Counter-Discourse and West Indian Biography». *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (1), 28-46.
- Tiffin, Helen (1993). «Travelling Texts: Intertextuality and Resistance in V.S. Naipaul's "Guerrillas" and Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea"». *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 6 (1), 58-66.
- Zahlan, Anne (1994). «Literary Murder: V.S. Naipaul's "Guerrillas"». *South Atlantic Review*, 59 (4), 89-106.

