

## LITTLE-KNOWN DOCUMENTS

An Alternative Ending to *Minty Alley*

C. L. R. JAMES

INTRODUCTION BY

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## Introduction

The Trinidadian social theorist and activist C. L. R. James first published his only novel, *Minty Alley*, with the London publisher Secker and Warburg in 1936, after his 1932 arrival in Britain (C. L. R. James, “Don’t Be Afraid”). *Minty Alley* follows Haynes, a young, middle-class Black man who, after the death of his mother, boards in a Port of Spain yard and discovers the bacchanal therein. The novel ends after the landlady, Mrs. Rouse, sells the yard, scattering its residents to the wind; by this time, Haynes has come of age and to class consciousness (Carby).

Decades later, on 1 September 1960, James wrote to his longtime publisher Fredric Warburg from San Juan, Trinidad, about new chapters of his life and writing. James had metabolized his commitment to mass politics through his work with Eric Williams’s People’s National Movement (C. L. R. James, *Party Politics*); after disagreements about strategy, particularly whether and how everyday people could shape the direction of the party and the nation, James left the party and turned back to his working-class novel: “I am returning to England for good. My work here is finished. Meanwhile I have rewritten *Minty Alley* for which the new public interested in literature is clamouring” (Letter). Warburg disagreed about its promise: “The revised version of *Minty Alley* . . . has not, in our view, survived the years since it was written.” *Minty Alley* would remain out of print until New Beacon Books republished the original text in 1971.<sup>1</sup>

An alternative ending to *Minty Alley*, published for the first time here, plays with the intimacy and distance among the West Indian writer, the middle class, and the working class—what James believed the reading public clamored for. It exemplifies James’s tendency to revise, from *The Life of Captain Cipriani* (1932) and *The Black Jacobins* (1936) to his later works (Douglas 2–3). Like many of James’s works, the manuscript was a product of collaboration: the Marxist feminist Selma James, who was then his wife, typed the manuscript on a manual typewriter, and he used a fountain pen to annotate it (S. James; Chetty 88). It is undated, but Selma James’s

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recollections—as well as C. L. R. James’s correspondence with Warburg (Letter)—suggest he wrote it around 1960.

The manuscript raises questions, beyond that of its collaborative production, about the place of the literary in James’s larger intellectual and political projects. As Aldon Nielsen observes, “[I]t is in the area of literary studies that [James’s] trajectory is least complete” (xxv). Others, like the historian Christian Høgsbjerg, understand *Minty Alley*’s protagonist to be only a visitor to the yard—a gesture characteristic of what Høgsbjerg understands to be James’s early “liberal humanism” (e.g., 35), from which he later developed a deeper, more explicitly Marxist politics. This brief revision, however, reveals that the literary remained a resource for James as he agitated and participated in democratic experiments.

In the alternative ending, James reconfigures the relationships between the residents of the house by embedding in its pages two genres—the family portrait and the will—that use property relations to fashion ties. Haynes takes pride of place as he stands with Mrs. Rouse in front of the house to pose for a portrait, slipping his arm into hers. Once the photographs are printed, Haynes dispenses with politesse, signing Mrs. Rouse’s copy as “son” and with his given name, Erasmus, revealed in the alternative ending for the first time. Not long after, Mrs. Rouse dies suddenly. In a scene depicting the reading of the will, Haynes learns that he will inherit what little is left after “the house was sold and all the debts were paid.” He then learns that Mrs. Rouse’s late son, whom she had birthed out of wedlock, was also named Erasmus. With these revelations and a reversal of fortunes, the alternative ending absolves Mrs. Rouse’s sin and names the perfect heir. It suggests that the problem of the novel is to be unclaimed and without an inheritance, rather than to live the instability of the late colonial West Indies with one’s neighbors.

Aside from Mrs. Rouse’s death and Haynes’s inheritance, the greatest difference between the published and alternative endings is that of Haynes’s destination. He does not simply leave the yard or migrate to Britain as his mother had

hoped, but rather plans to go “to America, to work my way through.” While “never before had the thought crossed his mind,” Haynes’s decision is symptomatic of the decline of the British Empire and the rise of the United States as a new hegemon amid West Indian struggles for independence. Though his inheritance comes from the yard, Haynes does not stay there. Instead, he seeks his fortunes to the north with Mrs. Rouse’s gift in tow.

*Minty Alley* is a meditation on the capacities of West Indian working people a century after emancipation, and James’s ongoing experiments with the novel are a reconsideration of this question on the eve of independence. But James never published this neater, more conservative ending in which an inheritance lies in the hands of one man. Rather, the original prevails, in which many “sweat and strain to build” the yard (*Minty Alley* 252).<sup>2</sup> In returning to and experimenting with *Minty Alley*’s ending, James was better able to see the original’s collective spirit: in the words of the Trinidadian novelist Merle Hodge, the people of the yard have “a robust, autonomous existence.” While readers awaited the “promised” second novel, it is the first novel and its revision—James’s effort to make sense of its form and politics—that merits a second look (Hodge 12).

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## NOTES

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1. The 1971 New Beacon Books edition is identical to the first 1936 Secker and Warburg edition.

2. See Harris’s discussion (following Marcus Rediker) of the residents of the yard as a “motley crew” (10).

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## An Alternative Ending to *Minty Alley*

It was arran[-]ged that Haynes would move at the end of they month, ~~ten days to come~~. [about a week and a half off.] The days passed, one by one, like the days before an ~~execution~~. [operation.] Mrs. Rouse said little, practically nothing, but her smile and greeting two or three times a day ~~triumphed over the neveling gloom~~. [gleamed like streaks of sunshine on a rainy day: Haynes thought what an actress she would have been. She could storm like a ~~hurricane~~ a Clytemnestra but in the moments of calm afterwards she ~~moved like the ripp~~ moved like deep water, her smile like a ripple on the surface.] Miss Atwell [on the contrary] was [seemed very] ~~preoccupied~~, [these days,] always apparently going somewhere or coming from there with great purposefulness. But it was soon obvious that there was nothing to it. Haynes's chief difficulty was the meals - they fed him as if he was being prepared for the sacrifice. Three times a day Haynes [he] laboured through the menu. What a help Maisie would have been! And she would have eaten everything.

Haynes was to leave on Tuesday. On Thursday night Mrs. Rouse came in to see him. She was not for long. ~~But~~ [, but] would Mr. Haynes mind if he took a photograph with her-[?]. She hoped he would not mind. No. Haynes would not mind. He

would be delighted. Mrs. Rouse said that she had arraged with a photographer. ~~He~~. [He] would be there in the morning at 9. ~~Near to tears she left~~.

Next morning the photographer came. Mrs. Haynes dressed in her new black mourning dress, her only ornament a heavy gold chain, retrieved for the occasion, Haynes learnt later, from the pawnshop. Her pince-nez ~~were~~ [was] on her nose and she held her head high. Haynes wore his tweed suit, three piece, coat, trousers, and the [usually discarded] waistcoat. Miss [At]Atwell was ~~xx~~ [not] ~~even~~ present-[ , whether by accident or design Hayes did not know.] The photograph was taken on the front step, and Haynes placed his arm in Mrs. Rouse's. The photograp[her] said he would send proofs the next afternoon. They came punctually and were highly approved of by the ~~three of them~~. [household.] ~~Mrs. Rouse was photogenic and~~ [Miss Atwell for once did not exaggerate when she said that Mrs Rouse] looked splendid.

On Saturday morning the photographs came. Haynes had [insisted on ordering] two, and as he was to lunch with them on Sunday ~~x~~ [it] struck him that it would be very nice to give a framed, signed picture to Mrs. Rouse. How to sign it-[?]. [As he sat uncertain, a host of memories came thronging over him, ~~and~~ his father, his mother, Maisie, Maisie and

her mother,] I[i]n a rush of feeling he sat and wrote: For Mrs. Rouse. From your loving and grateful son; and after some hesitation wrote his Christian name, Cyrus [Erasmus], the first time it had been used in the house. [To hell with it. It was his name]

Lunch which took place in Miss Attewell's room as on that distant Christmas Day, passed quietly and decorously, Haynes eating manfully, and even Miss Attewell making little attempt at sustained conversation. But ~~there~~ [T]here was no embarrassment. [need.] ~~They all~~ [The three of them] understood one another.

When [L]unch was over, Haynes asked to be excused for a moment, and slipping over to his room, brought back the signed and framed photograph and handed it to Mrs. Rouse. She gave him a wonderful smile, and asked Miss Attewell to fetch her glasses to [“]read the writing.[”] While Miss Attewell went for the glasses, she sat looking at the photograph, but xx as if her thoughts were far. Miss Attewell brought the glasses, Mrs. Rouse put them on and holding up the picture, read the inscription aloud. At the xxxx words, grateful son, she faltered, but she ~~managed to say~~ Cyrus. [got only halfway with Erasmus.] Then s[S]he [stopped and] looked at Haynes as if dazed, looked back at the picture, at Haynes again, then clutching it to her bosom, burst into such an uncontrollable storm of tears that Haynes and Miss Attewell could do nothing but sit and watch her until it worked itself out. After a while, she rose and still ho[lding] the picture[, without a word] with a faint smile went slowly down the ste[ps,] across the yard, up her own steps and disappeared into own room [the house]. Haynes ~~went away, blaming himself,~~ He (would not?) understand these people. [and Miss Atwell parted in silence. Haynes was upset, but not for long. “Not too much harm done he said to himself and repeated the phrase cheerfully.]

[And so it was.] Next morning however, Mrs. Rouse was composed and even gay. She made no reference to the episode of the day before [and helped with the packing]. Ella and Haynes finally drove away, Mrs. Rouse and Miss Attewell all smiles and waves[ing until they could no longer be seen]

Periodically Haynes visited Minty Alley, and Ella relented even to the extent of visiting them herself [and helping Mrs Rouse with the cakes]. Then late one afternoon, Haynes came home to find Miss Attewell waiting for her. Mrs. Rouse had fallen in a fit in the kitchen before her stove, and had been taken unconscious to the hospital. She never recovered consciousness and Haynes, Ella and Philomen went to the funeral, walking with Miss Attewell as chief mourners. Mrs. Rouse's relatives had remained either adamant or ignorant of her death.

Three days afterwards Haynes received a letter from Robert Murch, Solicitor and Conveyancer, asking him to call at his office at his convenience [Minty Alley at four o'clock on Monday] in connection with the last will and testament of the late [Alice] Rouse. ~~What in the name of Heaven,~~ Haynes asked himself. ~~Did Mrs. Rouse leave him a fortune? Half the night he lay and wondered,~~ the old scenes and memories t———through his mind. [Haynes knew old Murch with his perpetual elastic-sided boots, his striped pants and his black jacket: Maisie used to say that he slept in them. He was Mrs. Rouse's legal adviser, and visited Minty Alley at times to see Mrs Rouse on business. More than once Haynes had had to go and see him urgently on Mrs. Rouse's behalf. Haynes was not altogether surprised at the summons. Mrs Rouse had probably made him an executor]

~~Mrs. Rouse had not left him any fortune. Old Mr. Murch made that very clearx to him and Miss Attewell who had also been summoned.~~ [At four sharp, Haynes, Miss Atwell and Philomen were self-consciously seated] All her furniture and personal effects she [Mrs Rouse] had left for Miss Attewell. Her gold chain she had willed to Philomen. When the house was sold and all the debts were paid ~~there would be very little remaining.~~ But whatever there was, it had been left for him. [remained she had left to Mr. Haynes.]

Haynes sat silent, gripping his teeth tightly together.

“There is something else,” he heard Murch say. “She asked that this be given to you.” He handed Haynes a parcel, obviously a framed picture.

P 318 *seemed very* *on the contrary*

It was arranged that Haynes would move at the end of the month, ~~he says to come~~. The days passed, one by one, like the days before an ~~operation~~ *operation*. Mrs. Rouse said little, practically nothing, but her smile and greeting two or three times a day ~~stimulated over the travelling glass~~ *then days*. Miss Attewell was ~~occupied~~ always apparently going somewhere or coming from there with great purposefulness. But it was soon obvious that there was nothing to it. Haynes's chief difficulty was the meals - they fed him as if he was being prepared for the sacrifice. Three times a day ~~Haynes~~ *he* laboured through the menu. What a help Maisie would have been! And she would have eaten everything.

Haynes was to leave on Tuesday. On Thursday night Mrs. Rouse came in to see him. She was not for long, ~~but~~ would Mr. Haynes mind if he took a photograph with her? She hoped he would not mind. No. Haynes would not mind. He would be delighted. Mrs. Rouse said that she had arranged with a photographer. ~~He~~ *He* would be there in the morning at 9. ~~Was to~~ ~~be there~~.

Next morning the photographer came, Mrs. Haynes dressed in her new black mourning dress, her only ornament a heavy gold chain, retrieved for the occasion, Haynes learnt later, from the pawnshop. Her pince-nez ~~was~~ *was* on her nose and she held her head high. Haynes wore his tweed suit, three piece, coat, trousers, and the waistcoat. Miss ~~Attewell~~ *Attewell* was ~~not~~ *not* present. The photograph was taken on the front step, and Haynes placed his arm in Mrs. Rouse's. The photographer said he would send proofs the next afternoon. They came

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*a by her wrist - but in his moments of calm afterwards she smiled like the light.*  
*removed like deep water, her smile like a ripple on the surface.*  
*usually discarded*  
*whether by accident or design Haynes did not know.*

Fig. 1. The first page of the alternative ending to *Minty Alley*.

Haynes did not need to open it. “And she xxxx said further that Miss Attewell would explain [further]. [There were matters she did not feel to write down should be put on paper”] She was very precise and particular.”

He looked at Miss Attewell and Haynes looked at her. The tears streaming down her face [Murch paused and looked at Miss Atwell. She looked at Haynes who nodded. Thus encouraged], Miss Attewell, her volubility deserting her at last, stammered out her message.

Mrs. Rouse’s son who died had been called Cyrus named Erasmus, named after the same famous lawyer and politician after whom Haynes had been named. Hiss Attewell continued to stammer and begin sentences which never ended. But somehow she managed to convey the sense of long conversations with Mrs. Rouse. Mrs. Rouse had seen and understood what her life with Benoit had meant to her. If her son had lived she would have worked and slaved for him, to make him a gentleman and send him to England and give him a profession. She [Miss Atwell] gave the names of single women and deserted mothers who had done it and had gone down to the wharf to meet the lawyer or doctor returning home. She had had no regrets. “She had xxxxxx sinned and God had punished her,” said Miss Attewell. “But He sent Mr. Haynes to comfort her in her old age. . .” Miss Attewell could go no further.

~~Haynes rose and bade good-bye to Mr. Murch. Then taking Miss Attewell by the arm, he led her away, holding his picture in the other hand. They drove to the house in Minty Alley where Philomen and Ella were waiting. They sat in the kitchen silent, a silence broken only when Philomen rose and busied herself preparing a meal. Mechanically Haynes unfolded the cover from the picture and xx propped it on the dresser.~~

[There was a silence.]

[Murch broke it by pa beginning to pack his papers. By way of conversation he said “There will

be quite a few hundred dollars left, Mr Haynes, but it wouldn’t go very far towards a medical profession. I have a son at Edinburgh. Though I presume—” Haynes cut him short with an abruptness that startled everyone, including himself.

“I am not going to America, to work my way through” he said. And never afterwards could explain even to himself why he had said it. Never before had the thought crossed his mind.

Murch left and the three of them sat looking at each other.

“When you going, Mr. Haynes,” asked Miss A.

“As soon as I can get a passage.” Philomen rose.

“Mr Haynes, you will have something to eat before you go?”

“Certainly” said Haynes

“I’ll get it ready” said Philomen, obviously intending to xx Haynes

“Miss A, you wait here with Mr Haynes”

But Haynes rose and the three of them went into the kitchen. Haynes sat on a bench. He had entered the kitchen less half-a-dozen times and had never sat there. Philomen busied herself. Miss A was silent.

Haynes suddenly was aware of the parcel he was holding in his hand. Slowly he untied the string and unfolded the paper. He looked at the photograph and for a minute, then placed it upright against a biscuit-tin on the dresser. Miss Atwell and Philomen looked at Mrs Rouse, in her black silk, gold chain and pince-nez. They smiled at her and turned to smile at Haynes.]

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## EDITOR’S NOTE

The manuscript is held in the West Indiana and Special Collections, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, C. L. R. James Collection, box 22, folder 426. I have included text that has been struck out in the manuscript to show the revision process; handwritten insertions in the manuscript are transcribed here in brackets.