Caribbean Without Borders

Caribbean Without Borders: Literature, Language and Culture

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean region can be defined as "all the islands between North America and Mexico, plus Belize and the northern South American territories of Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana."[1] Yet, the influence of the Caribbean can be felt as far away as places like Europe, Asia, Africa, and the United States. By having this evolution of an intercultural process, it is difficult to restrict the Caribbean to a simple conceptual area. Instead, the Caribbean is a complex region, "a meta-archipelago, . . . and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center."[2] This view with regard to the diversity of the Caribbean geographical boundaries also parallels the field of Caribbean Studies. According to Kevin Meehan and Paul B. Miller, "literature, functions in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, as a documentary source that reveals the cultural patterns and social history that make up a civilization."[3] As such, the areas of Caribbean literature, language, and culture overlap and construct multiple representations of Caribbean societies.

It is with this wide-encompassing range of the Caribbean as well as the emerging fields in Caribbean Studies that the "Caribbean without Borders Conference: Literature, Language, and Culture" was developed in 2007. Noted Jamaican linguist, poet, writer, and academic, Velma Pollard gave the keynote presentation and addressed the mélange of cultures, history, and languages in the texts of Caribbean writers. In her address, Pollard refers to the Caribbean ethos as a trans-continental journey where the traveler recollects instances and experiences, thus, describing the essence of the Caribbean as a conglomerate of geographical locations, literatures, languages, and cultures. Like Pollard's address, the papers presented in this collection reflect the Caribbean's various regions, social issues, migratory experiences, cultural identities, creolized linguistics, and literary landscapes. They add also dimension to the myriad of Caribbean experiences and provide a novel examination of the Caribbean in its complexity. This pioneering collection is the result of selected papers presented at the "Caribbean without Borders Conference," which was hosted by the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, on March 19-21, 2007.

In addition to discussing some prominent issues of the Caribbean, the papers in this collection examine the extensive field of Caribbean Studies

and Caribbean scholars from the Anglophone, Hispanophone, and Francophone Caribbean. This text also demonstrates the breadth of Caribbean culture by including its diverse manifestations of poetry, fiction, film, architecture, theater, music, and linguistics. In many instances, these manifestations are a testament to a transnational consciousness that permeates Caribbean borders. Essays featured in this collection like Claude McKay and Dostoyevsky and Afro-Puerto Rican music and dance performances in the United States show the fluidity and transgressive quality of the Caribbean. As such, these essays connect the worlds of Europe, the United States, Africa, and Asia with the Caribbean.

The Caribbean in its complexity is represented in this collection through an exploration of topics that are divided into three major sections. The first section, "Unveiling Constructs: Caribbean Literature, Language, and Culture," examines various themes within the emerging disciplines of Caribbean Literature, Language, and Culture. The collection of essays in this section represents an intersection of the Caribbean experience and addresses the numerous frameworks in diaspora texts by Caribbean writers. For example, the exploration of the multiple representations of ghosts in the novels of Wilson Harris exemplifies the erasure of boundaries that runs as a leitmotif in this collection. According to Suzanna Engman, Harris' ghosts "embody cross-cultural beliefs that span four continents and meet in Guyana." In addition, Harris' ghosts "disregard borders of time, space, and logic" by being permeable, fluid, and impermanent. Yasmine Shama also addresses the theme of fluidity in "Drenched: Wet Poetries of Lorna Goodison and Olive Senior." Shama explores "uprootedness and violation" in relationship to the idea of wetness and focuses on "water in its quenching power."

Karen Mah-Chamberlain in "The Caribbean Without Frames: Narrative Structure in Samuel Selvon's London Novels" shows how Selvon creates "novels which break free from the frames of European perspectives by allowing speakers and listeners to discourse directly." Mah-Chamberlain demonstrates how Selvon's diasporic novels invert "the frame of European perspectives" with a narrational style that prioritizes West Indian discourse. From a linguistic perspective, Marta Viada Bellido de Luna analyses the use of Creole in Anglophone Caribbean literature. From the basilectal expressions of Anansi characters, to the pioneering efforts of Samuel Selvon to render dialect in narration, the inclusion of Creole, according to Viada, has been pivotal to the development of a Caribbean literary discourse. Finally, Dara Green examines the relationship of religious fatalism in vodou and revolutionary action in Jacques Roumain's "Masters of the Dew."

The second chapter of this collection, "Drumming up the Nation: Representations of Caribbean Music, Drama and Dance Performance," problematizes the evolution of these quintessential Caribbean forms. The development of the Puerto Rican *bomba* costume is analyzed as directly related to the commercialization of the form, Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States, and diasporic practice in Melanie A. Maldonado's essay "Bomba Trigueña: Diluted Culture and (loss of) Female Agency in AfroPuerto Rican Music and Dance Performers." Maldonado discusses how the trope of the mammy infiltrated the *bomba* costume, converting the use of the costume into "an act of colonial mimicry" that produced a "whitening" of the genre.

Moreover, in "Bob Marley: Postcolonial Activist and (R)evolutionary Intellectual," Marley's revolutionary ideals and their subsequent evolution from strict adherence to *negritude* to a transcendence of race and nationality through universal love are examined against the commercialization of his music. Lastly, representations of the Caribbean in J. A. Robinson's "The Yorker's Stratagem; or, Banana's Wedding," a play staged in New York during the second half of the eighteenth century, are explored as a "deformation of the North American system." In the tradition of the Caliban/Prospero trope, the play aims to present the image of the adventurous white Capitalist North American that arrives in "an unidentified Caribbean island" and experiences the depravation and corruption of West Indian society. Juan R. Recondo argues that "various carnivalesque elements, such as inversion, the grotesque, and hybridization, which are diversely present in "The Yorker's Stratagem; or, Banana's Wedding," become disruptions to various markers of North American identity such as republicanism, capitalism, and race." Further, the construction of the Caribbean as "other" in "The Yorker's Stratagem" enables a discourse between dominant (North American) and peripheral (black West Indian) that perpetuates "the unstableness of identity."

"Mapping the Caribbean: Migration, Landscape and Identity" introduces the theme of Caribbean identity formation and its struggle with unsettlement, mobility, border crossings, and change. As such, the text asks whether there is a Caribbean identity that can be used as a homogenizing factor for the region. By the mere diversity of its subject matter, the studies in this chapter seem to reject the homogenization of a Caribbean identity and veer towards the heterogeneous and fluid. Fragmented selves inhabit the studies of McKay and Dostoyevsky, and Josefina Báez's performance texts. Furthermore, the study on the works of Paule Marshall, Zee Edgell, Michelle Cliff, and Elizabeth Nuñez-Harrell prioritizes their use of memory to challenge fixed identities. Memory, as

applied to the architectural environment of Basseterre, the capital of St. Kitts, further opens a discussion to conceptions of local identity. While, a close analysis of Crisina García's *Monkey Hunting* questions the homogenizing concept of nation. Finally, Tomás Gutierrez-Alea's film *Strawberry and Chocolate* initiates a discussion on the construction of identity based on binary oppositions and the necessity to deconstruct all binaries to attain a state that resembles Fernando Ortíz's notion of *Cubanía*.

Caribbean Without Borders: Literature, Language, and Culture is a pioneer compilation that highlights the perspectives and visions of emerging scholars in Caribbean studies, and paves the way for further studies that, instead of fragmenting the Caribbean archipelago in different linguistic regions, will provide a holistic view of an area that, albeit its differences, is inter-connected by a common sea and history. Benítez-Rojo expresses the region's interconnectedness thus: "within the sociocultural fluidity that the Caribbean archipelago presents, within its historiographic turbulence and its ethnological and linguistic clamor, within its generalized instability of vertigo and hurricane, one can sense the features of an island that "repeats" itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs."[4] The breath of this collection is, then, an attempt to provide a "multidisciplinary map" that bridges territories and shows the richness and variety of a region that has no boundaries.

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Notes

[1] Thomas D. Boswell, "The Caribbean: A Geographic Preface" in *Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean*, 19.
[2] Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island,* 4.
[3] Kevin Meehan and Paul B. Miller, "Literature and Popular Culture," 305.
[4] Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island,* 3.

CHAPTER ONE

UNVEILING CONSTRUCTS: CARIBBEAN LITERATURE, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE

"Unveiling Constructs: Caribbean Literature, Language, and Culture" examines various themes within the emerging disciplines of Caribbean Literature, Language, and Culture. The collection of essays in this section represents an intersection of the Caribbean experience and addresses the numerous frameworks in diaspora texts by Caribbean writers. Karen Mah-Chamberlain's essay engages the texts of the Caribbean writer Samuel Selvon in order to assess the lives of West Indian immigrants in London. By doing so, she explores the West Indian migratory experience and their narratives which move beyond traditional literary constructions. Similarly, Suzanna Engman focuses on transformative frameworks in her essay entitled "Ghosts Know No Boundaries." Engman notes that ghosts act as "as a metaphoric expression of presence in absence, repressed trauma, colonial guilt, and historical loss and recovery." Ghosts, when viewed from this perspective in *The Ghost of Memory* by Caribbean writer Wilson Harris, embody "linguistic, cultural, and literary theories," serve as the site of "collective unconscious memories," "forgotten cultures," and "alternate realities," and defy binaries. The discourse connecting literature, constructions, and boundaries is also addressed through an investigation of Caribbean poetry. Yasmine Shamma's paper analyzes the various representations of water in the poetry of James Berry, E.A. Markham, Lorna Goodison, and Olive Senior. Shamma contends that "employing water in contemporary Caribbean poetry" creates fluidity—"a banking against erosion through coating and recoating words and ideas, though actually, sometimes not moving at all, but staying still awhile." As such, water images in these texts range in form from "reflections of being wet, of feeling dry, warnings of thunder," to "the relief of bathing."Addressing the intersection of the use of Creole in Caribbean literature, Marta Viada Bellido de Luna draws attention to the sociolinguistic tendency to relegate Creole to the margins in "The Use of English Lexified Creole in

Anglophone Caribbean Literature." Her essay unites folk tales and fiction to explain the significant role of Creole in Caribbean texts and how the use of Creole "reflects the cultures and experiences of its speakers" and "asserts their Caribbean identity." Like the multiple perspectives presented in the employment of Creole, these approaches have promoted a plurality of insights into Caribbean culture. Proceeding to the aspect of the practice of the vodou religion in Haiti, Dara Green examines the use of vodou as an agent of social change in Jacques Roumain's *Masters of the Dew*. As Green's essay illustrates, "vodou plays the dual roles of being both fatalist and catalyst." Bound by the vodou beliefs, the characters in this text must weigh collective action with their consciousness of faith.

THE CARIBBEAN WITHOUT FRAMES: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN SAMUEL SELVON'S LONDON NOVELS

KAREN MAH CHAMBERLAIN

Few novels have attracted more linguistic and quasi-linguistic scrutiny than Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. The book about West Indian immigrants to post-World War II Britain has been widely praised for its innovative use of Creole language structures. Yet, the modification of Standard English morphology and syntax and the inclusion of idiomatic words and phrases is only one aspect of linguistic experimentation in the novel. The overall effect has been described by former University of the West Indies lecturer Roydon Salik in *The Novels of Samuel Selvon: A Critical Study* as "almost totally dialectical in style, episodic in structure, and minimal in plot."[1] In his introduction to *The Lonely Londoners*, Kenneth Ramchand, another Trinidadian and a pioneer in the study of West Indian literature as an academic field, takes issue with this characterization of the novel's form: "From looking at the narrator we are drawn to recognise in Selvon's literary artefact a tightness of structure (the way the parts are put inevitably together); subtlety of development and revelation of theme; linguistic cunning; and an appropriateness in the presentation and deployment of the characters.[2] Although it has received less critical comment, another of Selvon's novels, *The Housing Lark*, has a similar overall organization—a series of vignettes separated by rows of asterisks—a similar blend of Creole and Standard morpho-syntactical features and idiomatic phrases, and a similar cast of West Indian characters. The integrity of this narrative structure, which Ramchand asserts in the face of suggestions that it is loose, episodic, or generally exiled from European novelistic traditions, becomes clear when Selvon's London novels are contrasted with the overt and highly-structured organization of European frame narratives.

Form, whether in literature or conversation, is essentially a matter of whom is speaking and listening. Even the most basic communicative interaction, like that of two strangers exchanging comments about the weather, is determined by the relationship and identity of the participants.

In the Caribbean, the weather varies less than in England, and, as a result, this topic has less currency in small talk. Differences between West Indian and British meteorological discourse become apparent in a passage from *The Housing Lark*: "I mean, you think it have a lot of obeah and black magic in the West Indies, but if you listen to some of these Nordics. They say red sky is shepherd's delight, and if the dog fall asleep that mean rain coming, and if the cat start play frisk that mean sunshine."[3] Here the narrator defamiliarizes British proverbs and exposes them as superstitions, showing differences between the two forms of discourse.

In the face of this interaction between British and West Indian cultures and climates, it is interesting to pause and notice whom the narrator is addressing in this soliloquy on the weather. The implied interaction is clearly between one West Indian immigrant and another. The narrator is not speaking *to* "you Nordics," but speaking *about* "these Nordics." The addressor and the addressee share a set of experiences which separates them from the people back home: "you think it have a lot of obeah and black magic in the West Indies" and from the "Nordics" in London. The narrator of the novel and the narratee share a discursive space because they draw on a similar set of cultural knowledge and norms to communicate with one another.

This communication should not be confused with the communication between the author Selvon, who is a West Indian immigrant to London, and the reader, who may or may not be West Indian, an immigrant, or in London. The narrator is an implied, rather than an actual author, and the narratee is an implied, rather than an actual reader. The narrator and narratee communicate on a level in the text which lies between the level of author/reader and the level of most character interactions. In his framework for interpreting narrative fiction, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, Gerald Prince explores how inferences can be made about narrators and narratees based on various linguistic signs including personal pronouns, spatio-temporal markers, and evaluative utterances.[4] The character of the narrator is especially accessible in instances of first person narration, but the character of the narratee and the purpose of the narration are often harder to determine.

It is possible to learn more about the participants and the purposes of narration by examining frame narratives, stories which have one or more other stories embedded in their structure. By describing the circumstances under which an embedded or interior narrative is told, frame narratives offer information about narrators, narratees, and the communicative interactions between them. For example, communicative purposes are illustrated well by Geoffrey Chaucer's 14th century work *Canterbury*

Tales in which the pilgrims tell stories to moralize and to entertain one another. The interactions between narrator and narratee illustrate why an interior narrative is worth telling and how an audience might respond to an interior narrative at the center of a literary work.

At the same time, frame narrators, whom Prince terms "main narrators,"[5] literally frame stories by selecting the boundaries of representation. For example, the frame narrator in Joseph Conrad's early 20th century novel about the disturbing effects of the ivory trade in colonial Congo *Heart of Darkness* could have constructed the story of Kurtz, the European ivory trader who "goes native", from Kurtz's own writings, could have chosen a different sailor's yarn, or could have listened for the voices of Congolese slaves in order to portray the *Heart of Darkness*. Instead the unnamed frame narrator relates the tale told by Marlow, a steamboat captain who brings Kurtz out of the Congolese interior, and interprets Marlow's story, perhaps in order to place the perspective from which the story is told closer to the sensibilities of an audience which Conrad assumed to be middle class and British. Kurtz's voice of warning and alteration becomes embedded beneath the voices of both Marlow and the frame narrator, reduced to a mere echo in layered quotation marks:" 'The horror! The horror!' "[6] The African characters in this text are even more silenced, than the European who sympathizes with them, because their voices are represented only as part of Kurtz's story not as active perspectives or participants in the Congolese drama. The power of the frame narrator to control the interior narrative is clear in the frame narrator's choice of which interior narrator to represent.

The main narrator not only frames the interior narrative through the selection of the narrator, but also exercises control over the interior narrator by representing the language of the interior narrative. In Emily Brontë's 19th century novel *Wuthering Heights* the frame narrator Lockwood says of his representation of the interior narrator Nelly Dean: "I'll continue in her own words, only a little condensed. She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator and I don't think I could improve her style."[7] The main narrator may claim to transcribe the interior narrative faithfully, but transcription itself involves numerous decisions about what to include and exclude. If an interior narrative is written, for example in a letter, then the main narrator need only make editorial decisions about whether to include the interior text in its entirety and perhaps correct a few misspellings. However, when interior narratives are spoken, it is up to the main narrator to convey the pronunciation, intonation, volume, gestures, and expressions of the interior narrator. In general, the accuracy of scribal representations of oral language relies on the language attitudes and

experiences of the writer.[8] In frame narratives, part of this responsibility is passed on to the frame narrator.

In written representations of oral narrative, quotation marks often serve as the boundaries between voices, and Standard English frames literary dialect. For example, in Joel Chandler Harris' 19th century fictional portrait of an emancipated slave in the southern United States *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, a standard English writing narrator records in literary dialect a series of stories told by a former plantation slave: "This is what 'Miss Sally' heard: " 'Bimeby, one day, atter Brer Fox bin doin' all dat he could fer ter ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bein doin' all he could fer ter keep 'im fum it.' "[9] This contrast between the language of the frame narrative and the language of the interior narrative reinforces the sense that the frame narrator is needed as an interpreter between the dominant discourse and the subordinate discourse, between England and Africa in *Heart of Darkness*, between London and the moors in *Wuthering Heights*, and between the white metropolis and the black plantation in *Uncle Remus*. The use of eye-dialect, such as the apostrophes indicating the elision of "h" and "g" sounds which would be pronounced in Standard English, in addition to the frame created by the quotations marks, distances the narrator from speech which is not rendered according to middle class British and North American norms.

The technique of the frame narrative is related to other metanarrative devices such as the epistolary novel or pseudo-autobiography. Quoted speech, letters, and memoirs are forms of mimesis in that they imitate and illustrate the discourse of the characters rather than simply reporting or summarizing it (diegesis). Although he is primarily interested in the concepts as they relate to the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, David Lodge provides a good discussion of mimesis and diegesis. He points out how these techniques create layers of narration in a novel: "making the narrative discourse a mimesis of an act of diegesis, diegesis at a second remove."[10] The imitation of oral storytelling in frame narratives serves two almost contradictory functions. It estranges the reader of the novel from the world of the interior narrative by inserting an additional narrator and narratee into the process of interpretation, but it also makes the mechanisms of narration and the manipulations of subjective narrators more transparent.

Whereas traditional storytelling and oral communication more broadly occur in familiar social contexts with the possibility of interaction or at least non-verbal communication between the speaker and the listener, novels are almost by definition abstracted from the surrounding reality. In his discussion of the transition from orality to literacy, Walter Ong in

Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word describes the need for transition: "The nineteenth century novelist's recurrent 'dear reader' reveals the problem of adjustment: the author still tends to feel an audience, listeners, somewhere, and must frequently recall that the story is not for listeners but for readers, each one alone in his or her own world."[11] Frame narratives might play a particularly important role for readers who are still growing accustomed to more abstract forms of communication. Yet contrary to this possibility, most frame narratives work to orient a literary audience to an oral story world, rather than working to orient readers more familiar with oral traditions to the literary world. The subtle implication is that the interior narrator cannot communicate directly with the reader because of differences in culture or social status (as represented by literacy) which are mediated by the frame narrator.

Frame narration works as more than a technical device for introducing a story. The types of stories embedded in frame narratives in the nineteenth and early twentieth century are generally removed from a genial English middle class sensibility. To some extent, authors like Harris, Brontë, and Conrad should be commended for including the voices and stories of marginalized people in their novels, as Taylor Hagood commends Thomas Nelson Page for using a frame narrative structure similar to that found in *Uncle Remus* to create a dialogue between the white, metropolitan North and the black, plantation South in which the latter answers back to the former.[12] The inclusion of marginalized voices in cultural discourse is a corollary to representing their interests to people in power and seeking equity and justice in society. However, it is important to recognize that the decision to write about alternative perspectives is separate from the decision to delimit these perspectives in a frame narrative structure which empowers the frame narrator with the last word. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", an article about the dangers of mainstream academics claiming to represent the position of marginalized subjects, Gayatri Spivak, points to the affinity between artistic representation and political representation and argues that in both cases the interests of the people being represented are subordinated to the perspectives of the more powerful members of the society who create the representations.[13] Spivak also explores the significance of interpolated narratives in the chapter on literature in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*.[14] When the voices of marginalized people are represented by more politically powerful, socially prominent or culturally acceptable individuals, it is impossible to know whether the actual perspectives of the marginalized subjects are even being recorded at all.

The issues of representation and the mediation between oral and scribal literature described above are especially pertinent in the Caribbean context. The representations and restrictions of interior narrators by main narrators occur frequently in early Caribbean literature, despite the absence of formal frame narratives in early Caribbean fiction. Journals, histories, and ethnographies abstract and interpret Caribbean stories and discourse in the frame of European travel narratives, and C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley*, is an example of a novel in which a middle class narrator is called upon to frame the stories and language of lower class, Creole-speaking characters. The main narrator Haynes records the story of the residents of #2 Minty Alley based partially on his own observations and largely on the interior narratives brought to him in his role as confidant to the other residents. Haynes represents these interior narratives in quotation marks. The main structural difference between *Minty Alley* and a traditional frame narrative, like *Wuthering Heights*, is the sheer volume of informants whose stories Haynes frames and the subsequent brevity of each installment. The ability to view *Minty Alley* as a frame narrative also suggests that the analysis of the relationship between main narrators and interior narrators can be extended, even to instances in which narratives in direct speech constitute a relatively small percentage of a novel as a whole.

Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark* contain many vibrant short narratives or "ballads" in direct speech. A consideration of the way these ballads are framed in narration leads to a greater appreciation of Selvon's linguistic and structural achievement in these novels. The conversations in which these ballads are embedded reveal the communicative purpose of the narratives. The characters tell stories about people they know as a way of entertaining one another and more importantly as a way of creating a sense of solidarity among West Indians. In *The Lonely Londoners*, ballads are exchanged between Moses and Galahad which express this sense of solidarity. Moses has lived in London for several years and Galahad is a newcomer from Trinidad. At one point, Moses asks Galahad if he knows a man named Brackley. Galahad replies, " 'But how you mean?' " ("Of course") and proceeds to tell Moses a story about Brackley: " 'You ever hear bout the time when Brackley sleep with a whore?' "[15] Like many of the interior narratives in the traditional frame-story novels, Galahad's interior narrative embeds quotations into the direct speech narrative. In this case, this layered representation of speech occurs as the narrator represents the speech of Galahad who in turn mimics the voices of the other whores in the yard: " 'A-a! Brackley sleep with Tina, me child!' "[16] This compounding of voices, perspectives, and quotation marks reveals the structure of representation taking place in the novel. The

West Indians tell stories about mutual acquaintances and familiar character types rather than relating stories across boundaries of difference as is the case in many of the European works examined above.

The representation of direct speech in particular becomes even more interesting when Moses replies to Galahad's story with another ballad about Brackley: " 'You hear bout the time they nail Brackley to the cross?'"[17] Moses and Galahad use a similar variety of language in their narrations. For example, both use the base forms of verbs for the foregrounded action of the story with past tense inflections like "was" and "it had" for background information. Their speech is also marked by various Trinidadian usages, like the semantic shift in "Tina *carry* him home"[18] (meaning to escort rather than to lift and transport) and lexeme in "them boys start to make *rab*" (meaning trouble or fuss).[19] However, Brackley's quoted speech differs in the two narratives. In Galahad's narrative, Brackley also uses the base forms of verbs with a past or perfective meaning: " 'What the hell happen to you? I give you money and I sleep with you and everybody know.' "[20] Whereas in Moses' narrative Brackley uses the standard English past tense: " 'They didn't stone Christ on the cross!' "[21] In contrast to Galahad, Moses seems to mimic Brackley in a different code from the Creole, which predominates in his narrative as a whole.

Although it is possible that both Galahad's and Moses' quotations of Brackley are accurate transcriptions of Brackley's actual words, it seems more likely that each narrator has manipulated Brackley's speech to fit with the style of the retelling. The quotation of Brackley's speech in the narrative about his rendezvous with Tina re-encapsulates the narrative, allowing Brackley to narrate for himself. Brackley, Galahad, and the narrator of *The Lonely Londoners* share the joke and share the Creole language in which they tell it. Moses' narrative, on the other hand, pokes fun at Brackley rather than sympathizing with him. The code switching in direct speech signals the distinction between the voice of the character and the voice of the narrator (Moses). The use of Standard English also underscores the broader comic purpose of the tale. The humor in the story revolves around the ironic contrast between the solemnity of Christ and the crucifixion and the absurdity of Brackley's vulnerable position on the cross. The contrast between the Creole features of the ballad and the Standard English features of Brackley's protest extends this irony. The Trinidadian masquerades as Christ, but winds up playing the fool, despite his use of Standard English. However, neither Moses nor Galahad creates a contrast between the code of narration and his representation of the character's speech in order to exercise linguistic or moral authority over

him. Similarly, no contrast exists between the code of narration in the novel and the code used in direct speech. This concordance between narrator and character is very different from the practice of using Standard English to frame representations of Creole language as in *Uncle Remus* or *Minty Alley*.

Not only does Creole language escape the boundaries of quotation marks in *The Lonely Londoners* and *Housing Lark,* but the narratives often break through the frame of direct speech. In some instances, the main narrator simply steps in to provide background information for the interior narrator's story, a classic movement from mimetic to diegetic discourse, which is seen in the following example from *The Lonely Londoners*:

> (Moses) "Eh-heh! You know Mahal?"
> (Narrator) Mahal was a mad Indian fellar who used to go around town playing as if he driving car, putting in gear and stepping on the x and making hand signals and blowing horn.
> (Galahad) "But how you mean? Everybody know Mahal!"
> "He must be catching arse with the new type of gear it have on them cars now!" Moses laugh.
> Galahad laugh. "He still driving old-model."[22]

As noted with the previous examples, Moses and Galahad share stories about characters they both knew in Trinidad to fulfill specific communicative purposes. One of these purposes is to entertain, but an even more important purpose is to identify with the same social network. It is not actually true that "Everybody know Mahal!" Therefore, the narrator must step in with a digest of the common knowledge shared by the two characters. This not only enables the narratee to understand the joke about Mahal pretending to drive a particular type of car, but also involves the narratee in the process of solidarity building among the West Indian immigrants.

A much more dramatic transgression of the quotation marks occurs in *The Housing Lark*. Harry Banjo, a Jamaican calypsonian who has just arrived in London, expresses surprise that Fitzwilliams, a member of the wily group of Trinidadians he has just met, is married. His roommate Battersby or Bat starts (in the quotation marks of direct speech) to tell Harry the ballad about how the tough-talking Fitz became the most henpecked husband of all: (Harry) "I didn't know he was married. Bat chuckle. 'Was a big thing. Let me give you the ballad . . . ' "[23] At the end of the ellipses in quotation marks, a line of asterisks signals the end of the chapter or episode in which Harry and the Trinidadians become acquainted. The next chapter or episode is the ballad Bat tells Harry. The

narrative includes Bat's asides to Harry, "Boy," and Bat's first person pronouns "we" and "my". The main narrator is absent, except for the parenthetical "(Bat telling Harry)". Yet, despite all these signals that this is a narrative from direct speech, it is not framed by quotation marks. The ballad ends with another row of asterisks and the next chapter begins, "That was the ballad that Bat give Harry about Fitz, killing himself with laugh as he say it."[24] This overlap between the narrative in direct speech and the flow of narration in the novel suggests that all of the chapters in *The Housing Lark* are representations of the various ballads that the West Indian immigrants share.

This relationship between the ballads of direct speech and the episodes which unfold between each set of asterisks is further reinforced when a later ballad is introduced in direct speech and then given its own chapter outside the quotation marks. The ballad is set up when Nobby's friends ask him about his dog:

> "Jesus Christ Nobby," Bat say, "you ain't get rid of that dog yet?"
> "Yes," Nobby say.
> "And who is that outside scratching and barking?"
> "That is another one."
> "Another one! You get another one?"
> "Yes man," Nobby say as if he embarrass, "and the damn thing following me about."[25]

Presumably, Nobby tells Bat about how he came to have a second dog, but the ballad is not presented from Nobby's point of view because first the main narrator has to provide the main narratee (and the reader) with the background of how Nobby obtained the first dog as the result of trying to please his animal-loving landlady. To this end, the ballad is actually introduced again this time by the narrator in a metanarrative comment to the narratee: "The episode of how Nobby get that dog could pass time before we go on the excursion to Hamdon Court."[26] This comment is remarkable because it reveals the level of communication occurring between the narrator and the narratee. The main narrator speaks directly to the main narratee in a gesture similar to Battersby's "Let me give you the ballad . . . "[27] Here again, as with the initial rant about weather forecasts, the narrator as a West Indian addresses the narratee as a West Indian, and in the context of exchanging ballads for entertainment and solidarity, a communicative context Selvon calls "old-talk": "he grab the chance to mingle with OUR PEOPLE, to hear the old-talk and to see how in spite of all the miseries and hardships they could still laugh skiff-skiff and have a good time."[28]

The Lonely Londoners also weaves together individual stories about the different West Indian characters in an old-talk format. The sense that both narrator and narratee eavesdrop on the conversations and lives of the characters makes these two novels similar to traditional frame stories. However, the narrators in *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark* do not exercise the control over the characters they represent which is commonly found in frame narratives. They do step in to provide background information for what the narratee is hearing, and they do make subjective and evaluative comments about the characters. Yet at the same time, the narrators remain closely allied with the characters in their narration, especially the central characters Moses and Battersby. Ramchand suggests that the consciousnesses of Moses, the narrator, and Selvon "fuse into one" at the point when Moses begins to contemplate writing a book which might be *The Lonely Londoners*.[29] Yet, the dominant metanarrative trope in *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark* is not the idea of the central characters writing a book about their experiences in London. Rather, the main metanarrative trope is the sharing of ballads between immigrants in sessions of old-talk when multiple narrators address multiple narratees, a trope which ultimately determines the structural framework of the novels.

The qualities of old-talk can be seen in Selvon's descriptions of this style of communication between the West Indian immigrants. For example, in *The Lonely Londoners*, the exchange of stories about Brackley between Moses and Galahad occurs because "The pigeon and rice have Moses feeling good and he in the mood for a oldtalk."[30] Toward the end of the novel, the narrator reveals that the various immigrants ritually gather in Moses' room to talk:

> Nearly every Sunday morning, like if they going to church, the boys liming in Moses' room, coming together for a oldtalk, to find out the latest gen, what happening, when is the next fete, Bart asking if anybody see his girl anywhere, Cap recounting a episode he had with a woman by the tube station the night before, Big City want to know why the arse he can't win a pool, Galahad recounting a clash with the colour problem in a restaurant in Piccadilly, Harris saying he hope the weather turns, Five saying he have to drive a truck to Glasgow tomorrow.[31]

This passage reinforces the idea of Moses as the central consciousness in the novel, a consciousness which assembles the different characters' stories into a book. Yet elements of *The Lonely Londoners*, such as Galahad's initial reactions to being alone in the tube station and the "p.s. episode with the pigeons what happen to Cap, and he never tell any of the

boys because he fraid they laugh at him,"[32] are outside of Moses' consciousness and not available to him as a narrator. Instead, the group of West Indians narrates, and, like traditional frame narrators, they are also narratees, who listen to the different ballads the group tells.

The Housing Lark has a passage that describes the possibility of multiple personae participating as narrators and narratees in the same conversation:

> If you ever want to hear old-talk no other time better than one like this when men belly full, four crates of beer and eight bottle rum finish, and a summer sun blazing in the sky. Out of the blue, old-talk does start up. You couldn't, or shouldn't, differentiate between the voices, because men only talking, throwing in a few words here, butting in there, making a comment, arguing a point, stating a view. Nobody care who listen or who talk.[33]

With old-talk meandering freely between the different voices, the most comprehensive understanding of Selvon's narrative style is that of different narrators contributing their words, comments, views, and stories to a composite audience that is decidedly West Indian. In contrast to Ramchand's sense of central consciousness, different perspectives meld into one narrative structure, a narrative structure which is free-flowing and not dominated by a single voice.

In portraying a discourse being conducted between West Indians, Samuel Selvon actually inverts the frame of European perspectives. The British cannot frame the West Indian discourse in *The Housing Lark*: "It like a game, all of them throwing words in the air like a ball, now and then some scandalous laugh making sedate Englishers wonder what the arse them black people talking about."[34] However, the West Indians can imagine what British people are saying and can frame their discourse: "You could imagine the talk that going on on the boat: 'Look dear, come and see, there's a party of Jamaicans on the bank.' And big excitement on the boat, everybody rushing to the gunnels (is a pity some of them don't break their arse and fall in the Thames) to see."[35] In this way, Selvon manages to create novels which break free from the frames of European perspectives by allowing West Indian speakers and listeners to discourse directly—old-talking as narrators and narratees.

Criticisms which assert that Selvon's novels are "episodic in structure" or "minimal in plot" overlook how the direct speech provides a framework for organizing the different ballads into a cohesive whole. This structure allows various voices and the perspectives and linguistic codes associated with them to be heard in *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark*. Most importantly of all these voices speak directly, rather than being

subjected to representation by the overarching frame narrators of the European tradition. Rather than being weak in comparison to British works, the narrative structures found in Selvon's London novels are a remarkable development in form.

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Notes

[1] Roydon Salik, *The Novels of Samuel Selvon: A Critical Study* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 120.
[2] Kenneth Ramchand, Introduction to *The Lonely Londoners*, by Samuel Selvon (London: Longman, 1985), 10.
[3] Samuel Selvon, *The Housing Lark* (1965; reprint, Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press,1990), 10.
[4] Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1982), 7-10, 16-20.
[5] Ibid., 16.
[6] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* in *Norton Anthology of English Literature,* vol. 2, ed. M. H. Abrams et. al (1902; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 2011.
[7] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (1847; reprint, London: Penguin, 1995), 155.
[8] Barbara Lalla, *Virtual Realism: Constraints on Validity in Textual Evidence of Caribbean Language History* (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: Society for Caribbean Linguistics, 2005), 11.
[9] Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, 2003, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext00/remus11.txt/> (accessed February 14, 2007) Project Gutenberg.
[10] David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 30.
[11] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002), 146.
[12] Taylor Hagood, "'Prodjickin', or mekin' a present to yo' family': Rereading Empowerment in Thomas Nelson Page's Frame Narratives," *Mississippi Quarterly* 57 (2004): 423-440.
[13] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall, 1993), 70.
[14] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 112-97.
[15] Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956; reprint, London: Longman, 2004), 127.
[16] Ibid., 128.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 127.
[19] Ibid., 128.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 37.
[23] Selvon, *Lark*, 40.
[24] Ibid., 45.
[25] Ibid., 81.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 40.
[28] Selvon, *Lark*, 110-11.
[29] Ramchand, 20.
[30] Selvon, *Lonely*, 127.
[31] Ibid., 138.
[32] Ibid., 134.
[33] Selvon, *Lark*, 123.
[34] Ibid., 126.
[35] Ibid., 126-27.