

**Form and Language in
Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*
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Introduction

When Sam Selvon moved to Britain from the Caribbean in the 1950s he was part of a group of writers including E.K. Brathwaite, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Andrew Salkey and Derek Walcott that began to make an impact on the London literary scene. His third novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, presents the reader with the individual stories of several working-class black and Asian immigrants to Britain from the Caribbean, including Moses Aloetto, who is considered a veteran, having been in London for nearly a decade, and Sir Galahad, who has just arrived. These are the main characters in the novel, although there are several others whose stories are related through the episodic structure of the narrative, and who combine to represent a collective subcultural community of black working-class immigrants in 1950s London.

Most of the criticism on Selvon to date has focused on his position as a Caribbean or postcolonial writer,¹ but as Mark Looker has stressed, it is important to read Selvon contextually, “from the perspective of post-war British fiction in general” (19). It is important, therefore, to consider Selvon in relation to the debates in the 1950s around the relationship between specific literary forms and the ideological assumptions those forms carried with them, especially in the 1950s understanding of terms such as realism, modernism and experimentalism.

In this article, therefore, I contextualize Selvon's fiction, not only in terms of a postcolonial writing, but also in relation to dominant trends in the British writing of the period. This is particularly relevant given the fact that Selvon (as did many of the Caribbean writers of the period) felt his work could only be legitimized if it was presented through the colonial and cultural ‘centre’ of London's literary institutions. Most of his 1950s fiction was first published in London, and many writers identify

the importance of the BBC's radio series, *Caribbean Voices*, to provide a platform for Caribbean writing during the period (Looker 7).² It will also become clear that Selvon's fiction dramatizes and articulates many of the anxieties and concerns of both mainstream society and culture, and marginalized black subcultures in 1950s Britain. His writing represents an engagement with dominant literary practice in the West rather than simply an alternative that comes from the periphery. As we shall see, Selvon's fiction produces, on the one hand, a culturally specific 'resistance' literature that relates to his position as a marginalized Caribbean writer, while on the other, claims a right to be judged against, and ultimately incorporated into, the universalizing discourses of literary value imposed by the dominant institutions of literature in the West.

The article is divided into two main sections. The first discusses *The Lonely Londoners* in the context of the literary and cultural debates predominant in the 1950s in Britain, and in relation to the artificial opposition of realism and experimentalism propounded by writers and critics of the time such as C.P. Snow, William Cooper and Georg Lukács. I argue that Selvon's writing negotiates between the modes of realism and modernism by using narrative techniques that correspond to each. In the second section, I discuss Selvon's use of language and, in particular, the manipulation of Standard English in his novels through the use of Creolized linguistic forms, and the ideological implications of this in a postcolonial context.

Informing both sections of the article is the argument that Selvon's fiction constructs two distinct groups of 'addressee.' Following Steven Connor's model of the addressivity of literary texts (8–13), I argue that Selvon's novel projects a dual model of anticipated readership: first, the Caribbean subcultural groups that were beginning to establish a distinct black British identity in the late 1950s; and second, a mainstream white audience that receives the text as a kind of reportage novel, recording an essentially alien experience through the articulation of otherness.³ As Selvon has commented concerning *The Lonely Londoners*, "I wrote a modified dialect which could be understood by European readers, yet retain the flavour and essence of Trinidadian speech" (Fabre "Interview" 66). This geographical and cultural palimpsest lies at the heart of un-

derstanding Selvon's fiction, and offers a way of interpreting the various experimental narrative and linguistic techniques he deploys.

Although we need to be wary, as Kenneth Ramchand has pointed out, of applying Western critical models to Selvon's work, it is fruitful to discuss *The Lonely Londoners* in relation to several Western theorists. In particular, Selvon's narratives produce resonances with concepts and models developed by Deleuze and Guattari, and Mikhail Bakhtin, as well as postcolonial approaches to narrative theory by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. In this article I explore the connections between these theorists and Selvon's fiction. In particular, I discuss the connection between Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'deterritorialization' and the 'minor literature' that Selvon produces; in relation to Bakhtin, I examine the multiple or 'heteroglossic' voices that Selvon deploys in his fiction. I also discuss the ways in which Selvon's experimentation with language represents many of the techniques that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have identified as representative of postcolonial approaches to writing.

I. Selvon in Context: Realism, Modernism and the Caribbean Novel

One of the main debates informing 1950s British fiction was the oppositional relationship between the literary modes of realism and modernism (the latter often being defined as 'experimentalism' during the period). This opposition was expressed in terms of both method and implied ideological assumptions (Rabinowitz; Gasiorek; Bentley). In an interview with Michel Fabre, Selvon has commented on his approach in *The Lonely Londoners* in terms of both realism and experimentalism. When asked about his use of dialect in the novel, he replies: "I just attempted to write the way people spoke and to render their language out of a desire for verisimilitude, or realism," but he goes on to suggest that this process was "an experimental attempt" (65–66). Somewhat paradoxically then, Selvon's articulation of 'authentic' Caribbean speech as a realist project represented a form of experimentalism in the context of the mainstream British novel of the period. This paradox, however, is produced by the shortcomings in the realist/modernist oppositional model rather than as a failing on Selvon's part. In fact, what I want to argue is that *The Lonely Londoners* disrupts the assumption in the 1950s

debate on literary form that realism and experimentalism were ideologically opposed.

Before turning to this discussion, it is necessary to explore the nature of that debate. During the period, realist modes carried with them a series of ideological assumptions that emphasized the political role of fiction. This understanding of the political duty of literary realism was a legacy from the 1930s, but was still broadly assumed by writers on the left during the mid-1950s. For Georg Lukàcs realism, in both its socialist and critical modes, was the literary style that was most conducive to articulating a committed literature that intended to awaken readers to specific political inconsistencies, or to critique specific abuses of power in contemporary Western culture. As he wrote in 1957:

Great realism . . . does not portray an immediately obvious aspect of reality but one which is permanent and objectively more significant, namely man in the whole range of his relations to the real world, above all those which outlast mere fashion. Over and above that, it captures tendencies of development that only exist incipiently and so have not yet had the opportunity to unfold their entire human and social potential. To discern and give shape to such underground trends is the great historical mission of the true literary avant-garde. (48)

Lukàcs, of course, was not working in a British context, but his position corresponds with many writers on the left in Britain in the 1950s. Doris Lessing, for example, commented in the same year, “I hold the view that the realist novel, the realist short story, is the highest form of prose writing,” and, “literature should be committed. It is these qualities I demand, and which I believe spring from being committed” (14, 15). Committed, in the context of the period, was short hand for ‘politically committed to left wing causes’ and it is in this cultural climate that *The Lonely Londoners* would have appeared.

Selvon’s 1950s fiction engages with this understanding of the ideological function of the realist mode, but his engagement with realism reveals a writer who is questioning the political assumptions associated with the form. This can be identified in the way in which *The Lonely*

Londoners appears to combine realism with techniques traditionally associated with literary modernism. In an interview, Selvon has described his narrative technique in terms usually associated with modernism:

I think I can say without a trace of modesty that I was the first Caribbean writer to explore and employ dialect in a full-length novel where it was used in both narrative and dialogue. I was boldfaced enough to write a complete chapter in a stream-of-consciousness style . . . (Fabre 69)

The use of stream of consciousness in a 1950s novel would be interpreted as a modernist technique, and therefore would produce associations with certain ideological assumptions about the kind of readership the novel anticipated. For example, in William Cooper's definition of experimental writing: "The impulse behind much Experimental Writing is an attack from the inside on intellect in general, made by intellectuals so decadent that they no longer mind if intellect persists" (36). According to Cooper, 'experimental' writing, (a term which, for him, is synonymous with modernism) anticipates a range of addressee that excludes the working-class and other marginalized groups, projecting towards a particular socio-cultural group characterized by educational privileges. Beyond this charge of elitism aimed at modernist writing, it was thought that the representation of the isolated and alienated subject in modernist writing undercut any attempt to articulate a collective community from which a politically committed literature could form. As Lukàcs argued, for modernist writers, "Man . . . is by nature a solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings . . . Man is reduced to a sequence of unrelated experimental fragments; he is as inexplicable to others as to himself" (20, 26).

However, Selvon's use of modernist techniques problematizes this position. In *The Lonely Londoners*, the use of stream of consciousness, for example, has a dual function, one that indicates the alienation of the Caribbean immigrant in London, but at the same time functions to connect such an individual to a collective subcultural identity of similar immigrants. Also, it inscribes, without irony, a 'stream of consciousness' voice that represents a black working-class character. The technique,

therefore, would seem to reject the association of modernism to a specific readership educated within a white, middle-class, Western culture. Take, for example, the following extract from the stream of consciousness section of the book:

listen to this ballad what happen to Moses one summer night
one splendid summer night with the sky brilliant with stars like
in the tropics he was liming in green Park when a English fellar
come up to him and say you are just the man I am looking for
who me Moses say yes the man say come with me Moses went
wondering what the test want and the test take him to a blonde
who was standing up under a tree and talk a little so Moses
couldn't hear but Blondie shake her head then he take Moses
to another one who was sitting on a bench and she say yes so
the test come back to Moses and want to pay Moses to go with
the woman. (106–07)

The lack of punctuation here and the flow of language representing the immediacy of thought mark out this passage as an example of stream of consciousness technique.³ Selvon uses this technique partly to emphasize the alienation felt by the black immigrant in the alien environment of London in the 1950s.⁴ However, the style does not only reflect the solitary thoughts of an isolated individual, but also attempts to communicate to another of the same subcultural group an anecdotal story of the experience of one of the members of that group. The mode of address, “listen to this ballad” establishes this collective address, while at the same time revealing the alienation of Moses (and therefore all the Caribbean immigrants connected by the mode of address) from English culture as represented here by the “English fellar” and the two women to whom Moses is offered. Selvon’s use of stream of consciousness, therefore, is not primarily to indicate an individual’s alienated experience of the modern metropolis but to show its applicability for the political representation of black individuals as a collective experience. As Clement H. Wyke argues, for Selvon, the use of stream of consciousness style represents a liberating and ultimately empowering technique for the representation of black identity (47). This is very different from Lukács’s understanding of the

role of modernist literary techniques and would challenge the conventional understanding of the political role of such writing in the 1950s.

This disruption of the assumed relationship between modernist technique with ideological implication is also seen with respect to the construction of plot in Selvon's novel. *The Lonely Londoners* presents the reader with fragmented narratives of individuals such as Galahad as an expression of individual experience.⁵ The deployment of this narrative technique has a dual function in the novel. First, it represents the experience of alienation as fragmented expression, and as indicative of the immigrant experience in the metropolitan centre. Second, and somewhat contradictorily, in Selvon's case it produces, through the accumulation of disparate narratives, a collective narration of minority representation. This corresponds to what Deleuze and Guattari identify as a "collective assemblage of enunciation" common in what they identify as a "minor literature" (16–27).⁶ This form of writing produces a cultural 'deterritorialization' which can be identified in Selvon's writing as a marginalized black Caribbean writing in English, and placed in the colonial centre. The process of creating a collective narration or minority literature is, therefore, a process of political empowerment through the creation of representative and identity-forming narratives that simultaneously reject the cultural centrality of Englishness and proclaim the validity of marginalized voices within the privileged site of the novel form. As Gordon Rohlehr writes: "In *The Lonely Londoners* it is the group that has a full self, that faces the wilderness and survives; not to belong is to be lost in the void" (41). This is represented structurally through the accumulation of different stories recording the experiences of several exiled Caribbean individuals in 1950s London, such as Moses, Sir Galahad, Tolroy, Big City, the Cap and Bart. The collection of these individual stories ultimately combines to produce a collective subcultural 'enunciation.'

The Lonely Londoners, then, represents a radical form that negotiates different modes and traditions of writing: realistic, modernist/experimental and oral. This hybrid form is related to the double sense of addressee the text projects and indicates Selvon's awareness of the need for a complex narrative style to articulate the specific concerns of a postcolonial literature. The use of modernist techniques supports the progres-

sive content of the novel and therefore undermines the argument that these techniques are restricted to the articulation of middle and upper-middle-class experience, appropriating the form for a marginalized sub-cultural group. The text also disrupts the claim that modernism represents an inherently alienated and individualistic discourse as defined by Lukàcs. In the context of the 1950s, the combination of narrative techniques that correspond to contemporary definitions of both realism and modernism appear to be contradictory, but it is within this opposition that the radical nature of Selvon's writing lies. In effect, Selvon produces a form that incorporates elements of both realism and modernism to produce a politically engaged writing that takes account of the postcolonial context of his position as a black Caribbean writer working in 1950s Britain. *The Lonely Londoners* is an example of what Andrzej Gasiorek identifies as a type of post-war British novel that problematizes the oppositional discourse between the modes of realism and experimentalism. Selvon's position as an outsider from mainstream formal/ideological conventions thereby allows him to produce a writing that disrupts those conventions. As we have seen, this disruption is produced in Selvon's use of literary style and plot, but it can also be observed in his experimental and engaged manipulation of language and it is to this area that the next section turns.

II. "Is English We Speaking": The Politics of Language⁷

As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have argued, language is one of the key sites in which postcolonial writers express their cultural distance from the literature of the colonizing power. Manipulation of linguistic forms is an important means by which Caribbean writers, for example, proclaim their sense of place (and displacement), and construct a distinct identity in terms of difference to a dominant construction of Englishness. In literary texts, this alternative is often negotiated through a manipulation of, and experimentation with, 'Standard' English: "The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that postcolonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (38). Now Ashcroft et al. have been criticized for their lack of acknowledgement of

localized factors to their generalizing concept of postcolonialism (Vijay and Hodge; Loomba 96–97); nevertheless, their theory of the manipulation of language and literary form in postcolonial literature still holds weight when looking at certain writers. Selvon, in particular, uses many of the language strategies that Ashcroft et al. identify as defining postcolonial writing: abrogation, appropriation, the challenging of Western concerns with ‘authenticity,’ the concept of a polydialectic continuum, and syntactic fusion.

As discussed in the previous section, Selvon claims that his novel operates in a realist context, and this is produced through the representation of language. In narratological terms, the text presents us with a third-person extradiegetic (Genette 212–68) narrative that adopts the idiosyncratic language styles of the characters it describes:

And this sort of thing was happening at a time when the English people starting to make rab about how too much West Indians coming to the country: this was a time, when any corner you turn, is ten to one you bound to bounce up a spade. (Selvon *Lonely* 24)

The use of West Indian slang words (such as “rab”), elision, and the manipulation of Standard English syntax to represent the speech patterns of black working-class Caribbeans (“people starting to make”; “bounce up a spade”) are deployed by Selvon to produce an ‘authentic’ representation of this particular subcultural group. This claim to verisimilitude, in the context of the debate on realism in the novel in the 1950s, gives Selvon’s work connotations of authenticity and documentary immediacy that were valued by many left-wing commentators. This aspect of the novel’s use of language forms, therefore, places it within a particular formal and ideological framework against which the text would have been received.

But it is not only characters who speak in non-Standard English; the third-person extradiegetic narration also takes this form. Selvon has described his decision to use a form of Creolized expression for his narrative voice as a crucial and liberating stage in the writing of *The Lonely Londoners*:

. . . when I started to work on my novel *The Lonely Londoners* I had this great problem with it that I began to write it in Standard English and it would just not move along . . . It occurred to me that perhaps I should try to do both the narrative and the dialogue in this form [Trinidadian form of the language] I started to experiment with it and the book just went very rapidly along . . . With this particular book I just felt that the language that I used worked and expressed exactly what I wanted it to express. (qtd. in Nazareth 421)

Here, Selvon relates the liberating effect of his decision to express the narrative voice in the same Creolized style used by the central characters. This marks a 'release' from Standard English as a technique incorporated into the narrative, as well as the linguistic, structure of the text. The removal of distance between the omniscient narrative voice and the characters it describes, or, in Catherine Belsey's terms, the rejection of a "hierarchy of discourses" (70–72) represents an empowering expression of collective identity that rejects the positioning of authority produced by having the narrator speak in Standard English whilst the characters use dialect.

The strategic deployment of deviations from Standard English in Selvon's fiction represents what Ashcroft et al. describe as the dual processes involved in many postcolonial novels: abrogation and appropriation (38–39). Abrogation is defined as the "denial of the privilege of 'English' . . . a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication"; whilst appropriation involves the "reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, [marking] a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (38). Although Ashcroft et al. categorize these as two distinct functions in postcolonial writing, it is apparent that the two processes operate simultaneously in Selvon's novel: the manipulation of syntax and the deviation from Standard English grammatical structures show that both abrogation and appropriation is present. The way we identify each of these processes depends more upon the perspective we bring to the text, and this issue interacts with the concept of a dual addressivity. For the white British 'mainstream' reader, the text can be identified as abrogation of the cultural centre, the rejection of Standard English as

representative of the rejection of the cultural assumptions and power relations on which it rests. For an addressee that corresponds to the sub-cultural group of black settlers to Britain in the 1950s, the process of appropriation functions more as an empowering strategy by establishing a specific subcultural identity, and by taking control and subverting the colonial language. This latter process, for example, is dramatized in *The Lonely Londoners* through the character of "Big City" who "re-names" the city using his own comic system of nomenclature (95). As Looker comments, Selvon's narrative is involved in "establishing a territory, learning the terrain, colonizing the city" (64). This symbolically represents the appropriation of the colonial space through a subversion of the language, the empowering of the marginalized black subject, and the re-colonizing of this (post) colonial space.⁸

The strategic manipulation of Standard English by Selvon also represents what Mikhail Bakhtin would describe as an example of the heteroglossic function of narrative fiction. Bakhtin identifies competing linguistic forces at play in certain fiction, which he defines as 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal.' He argues that while there is a constant 'centrifugal' pressure exerted by the dominant culture to standardize language into a unified system, there is, simultaneously, a reverse impulse, a 'centripetal' force that counters this homogenizing process by subverting and rejecting standardized usage. This contestation of language can be seen in the use of differing registers, styles of speech and cultural 'languages' presented in a novel, a linguistic mix that he refers to as 'heteroglossia':

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity . . . Heteroglossia, as organized in these low genres, was not merely heteroglossia vis-à-vis the accepted literary language . . . that is, vis-à-vis the linguistic center of verbal-ideological life of the nation and the

epoch, but was a heteroglossia consciously opposed to this literary language. (272–73)

In *The Lonely Londoners*, the use of Creolized speech represents a form of language that is opposed to the “linguistic center of verbal-ideological life of the nation,” which, in Selvon’s case, is Standard English. The use of this kind of utterance, therefore, carries within it the negotiation of a connection with, and distance from, the language of the centre, and subsequently acts as an expression of opposition to the cultural and ideological frameworks of that central culture.⁹ As Cliff Lashley argues, in a Jamaican context, this manipulation of language represents a political comment that implicitly challenges the dominant system of cultural assumptions, and the power relationships between the colonizer and the colonized (Lashley; Ashcroft 48).¹⁰

In *The Lonely Londoners*, the language of the extradiegetic narrator and the intradiegetic characters both correspond to Bakhtin’s identification of the centripetal aspects of language use. The exclamation by Galahad in the novel “Is English We Speaking,” thereby proclaims his distinct identity through its manipulation of Standard English grammar. Furthermore, it simultaneously recognizes the historical legacy of colonial exploitation, and the subsequent right to claim back authority and control over the imposed language of the colonizing power. Within the linguistic frame of Selvon’s novel, therefore, is written the specific moment of the 1950s within a colonial/postcolonial history. The geographical return to the centre of the colonizing power represents a form of colonialism in reverse, a process that Jean-Paul Sartre identified as an effect of decolonization in the post-war era (7–26). It is within the framework of ‘English’ language that this (post) colonial history is rewritten from the perspective of the colonized, and Selvon’s 1956 novel is an example of the first moment of this decolonizing process as it begins to be articulated in literature. In this sense, Selvon’s early work represents an example of what Franz Fanon identifies as the liberating stage of a ‘revolutionary’ or ‘national’ literature in the cultural power relationship between colonized and colonizing nations (179). However, in Selvon’s case, it is a revolutionary literature that is displaced onto the subcultural

experience of the Caribbean emigrants to Britain in the 1950s. His writing expresses a kind of 'trans-nation' literature, occupying a subcultural space between the 'nations' of the Caribbean and Britain, and before the emergence of a distinct black British identity.

However, Selvon's manipulation of language needs to be investigated further in relation to its representative function. In particular, any conception of 'authenticity' is problematized in his work as the language patterns and styles he deploys in *The Lonely Londoners* do not correspond to an actual language used in practice in any specific area of the Caribbean. Rather, they represent an amalgamation of various different 'languages' or appropriations of English used across the Caribbean: what Ashcroft et al. define as a 'Creole continuum' (44–51). As Jean D' Costa writes,

The [Caribbean] writer operates within a polydialectal continuum with a creole base. His medium, written language, belongs to the sphere of standardised language which exerts a pressure within his own language community while embracing the wide audience of international Standard English. (252)

Selvon was aware of the importance of producing a work that could claim the authority of authenticity, and his awareness of audience is revealed through his conscious manipulation and negotiation of Creolized language styles and 'Standard English.'¹¹ However, this 'authenticity' is grounded upon a particular construction or *invention* of a Creolized language style that represents, in a written form, the 'polydialectic continuum' of language used across the whole of the Caribbean. Selvon has described the construction of this 'authentic' language as a negotiation of 'verisimilitude' and 'fabrication':

It is . . . important to reproduce dialect not only if one strives after verisimilitude as an artist but after truth . . . when I wrote *The Lonely Londoners*, my intention was not primarily to be realistic . . . I only tried to produce what I believed was thought of as a Caribbean dialect. The modified version in which I write my dialect may be a manner of extending the language. It may be called artificial and fabricated. (Fabre 67)

The 'fabricated' language he somewhat paradoxically constructs to represent an 'authentic' Caribbean dialect, is nevertheless represented as a contrast and alternative to Standard English. Selvon recognizes the experimental nature of this process, of 'extending the language,' but it is a process that also includes within its construction issues around representation and authenticity. The fact that Selvon was writing partly for a British market conditions the way in which the 'Caribbean' is represented in the novel, both in terms of a linguistic representation and as a process of proclaiming or announcing a distinct subcultural identity. As Susheila Nasta suggests, "while he reproduces in some measure the speech patterns of the people, it is clearly an artificial form of the language adapted for a literary usage and which is accessible to an international as well as a local audience" (*Critical* 8–9).

Selvon's novel, therefore, problematizes the concept of authenticity through its deployment of a fabricated language. Furthermore, it foregrounds the cultural specificity of the value judgements placed on the 'authenticity' of a particular mode of writing, a discourse especially prominent during the 1950s, and in particular around the issue of 'committed' writing. As Ashcroft et al. argue:

In the early period of postcolonial writing many writers were forced into the search for an alternative authenticity which seemed to be escaping them, since the concept of authenticity itself was endorsed by a centre to which they did not belong and yet was continually contradicted by the everyday experience of marginality. The eventual consequence of this experience was that notions of centrality and the 'authentic' were themselves necessarily questioned, challenged, and finally abrogated. (41)

As an example of early postcolonial writing, *The Lonely Londoners* is engaged in the process of constructing an 'alternative authenticity' through its representation of the specific historical and geographical experiences of a particular subcultural group. However, the novel also clashes with the value-laden concept of authenticity in 1950s British literary discourse through its abrogation and appropriation of Western literary modes. 'Authenticity,' therefore, becomes a particularized and culturally specific concept that Selvon's novel problematizes and negotiates.

Again, this issue relates to the dual model of addressivity the text produces. For a white British addressee, the novel satisfies the desire for the expression of what it perceives to be an authentic account of the subcultural experience of Black Caribbean immigrants to Britain in the 1950s. For the black Caribbean addressee, however, the very group it writes into the text, the issue of authenticity becomes redundant, as the exaggerated characters and events the novel describes are more concerned with the production of a specific cultural identity and the empowerment of a subcultural group through the privileged cultural site of the novel. For the latter function, the issue of verisimilitude becomes secondary to the necessity to produce an empowering voice for this marginalized subcultural group. This issue is bound up with the authenticity of the creolized language that Selvon uses. As James Proctor rightly identifies, “[Selvon’s] language does not simply modify a West Indian vernacular but it is also structured around ‘Standard English’ in order to give it a signifying potential to the ‘European reader’” (48).

In summary, then, Selvon’s manipulation of language has distinct political and ideological implications. The alterity of the style of language in *The Lonely Londoners* acts as a site of resistance to the dominance of Standard English in the novel as a Western genre. Ashcroft et al. point out that the ‘syntactic fusion’ of a Creolized continuum of language and Standard English serves to disrupt the latter, and politically to challenge the ideological assumptions upon which dominant white British society rests (68–72). To disrupt the dominant forms of language represents a subsequent disruption of the ideology that that language implicitly supports. This is what Selvon achieves in the *The Lonely Londoners*. Nevertheless, to understand Selvon’s treatment of linguistic and narrative form accurately it is important, as we have seen, to take into account the social, cultural and, above all, literary climate in which his novel first appeared.

Notes

- 1 For example, Salick writes that *The Lonely Londoners* “contributes significantly to the development of the West Indian novel, and establishes itself as one of the earliest of major contemporary texts of postcolonial fiction” (120). Nasta calls

- Selvon's London writing "a crucial milestone in the history and development of Caribbean writing" ("Setting Up Home" 82).
- 2 Looker identifies the irony of the power of the BBC to 'legitimize' these marginalized voices, not only for a British (and international) audience, but also in the Caribbean (7–8).
 - 3 Abrams defines "stream of consciousness" as: "a special mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce, without a narrator's intervention, the full spectrum and the continuous flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations" (202).
 - 4 This articulation of the sense of alienation experienced through modernist form corresponds to Williams's reading of modernist technique (82–94).
 - 5 Many critics have identified the episodic nature of the novel: Fabre 66; Ramchand; Wyke 34; Salick 120.
 - 6 Deleuze and Guattari, in their book on Kafka, identify the creation of a 'minor' literature produced by writers from a marginalized social group living within a dominant culture. This literature tends to develop a voice that represents a collective expression of marginalized communal identity. They write: "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs major language . . . The three characteristics of minor literature are the within a deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (16–18). Looker identifies the connection between Selvon's 1950s writing and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization but does not go on to identify this as an example of a "collective" element of a "minor literature" (74).
 - 7 The quotation in the heading is taken from *The Lonely Londoners* (93).
 - 8 London can be identified as 'postcolonial' in the sense that Easthope uses the term. He identifies England as a postcolonial state because it is as much affected by the issues of postcolonialism as the postcolonial spaces outside of the United Kingdom (4).
 - 9 Warner-Lewis has shown that in *Moses Ascending*, the sequel to *The Lonely Londoners*, the linguistic situation complicated by Moses's attempt to rise up the social ladder. As she cogently writes, "This linguistic hybridisation and extravaganza will betray and underscore the marginal status of the migrant, the outsider, the fluctuations attendant on his tenuous social and economic position, and the psychological confusions bred by his internalised upward class mobility" (66).
 - 10 See also Thime's excellent essay connecting Bakhtin's theories of the Carnavalesque with Selvon's technique in *The Lonely Londoners*.
 - 11 Although for the purpose of this article it is beneficial to use the concept of 'Standard' English, I am aware of the inherent problems of such a concept in terms of identifying where and by whom such a concept is established and maintained, and how it relates to the practical usage of English. This issue is particu-

larly important for 'literary' uses of language, which by their very 'literariness' problematize the notion of a structurally standard form of a national language.

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