INSIDE/OUTSIDE

THE BRITISH NOVEL IN THE 1950s

by

JAMES EDWIN MCCLUNG

(Under the Direction of Adam Parkes)

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the nature and quality of the novel in Britain in the middle decade of the twentieth century. Apart from a comprehensive view, the study adopts an initiative approach to reconsidering the work of West Indian novelists Samuel Selvon and George Lamming as well as the work of Colin MacInnes as important texts from the period due to their particular ability to communicate and describe the condition of Britain in the post-war period. Historicizing and contextualizing the period from the 1948 docking of the *Empire Windrush* to Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, I propose to lay the proper groundwork for a clear recognition of the role played by each of these authors within and without the major social and historical conversations of the day: the perceived role of a "new" postwar imperial Britain in global affairs and culture, the significant influx of colonial (particularly West Indian) emigrants, and the remarkable change in the class organization of England, within and throughout London especially.

For some time, the generally-held impression among critics of twentieth century British literature suggested that very little significant work was produced in the period following the Second World War and the deaths of Yeats, Joyce and Woolf. The feeling in many of the periodical and literary outlets of the late 1940s was one of finality. The British

novel was publicly pronounced dead in the *Observer*, in newspapers, on radio and elsewhere. This study argues in particular that the movement of the novel in the 1950s often combines the experimentalism of the modernists with the realism of previous generations and a recognition that the novel had both an ability and a responsibility to document important social and cultural changes during a period of reevaluation of what it meant to be British and the relation of that nation with former colonial holdings and the rest of the world.

INDEX WORDS: British novel, 1950s, Windrush, Enoch Powell, Colin MacInnes, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, post-colonial, modernism, twentieth century, realism, fabulism, novel, English, West Indian, Caribbean, emigrant, immigrant, migration, diaspora, London, teenager, Notting Hill, race, citizenship, black, Barbados, Trinidad Jamaica, Caribbean, colonial, Commonwealth, empire, post-war

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B.A., Oglethorpe University, 1998

M.A., University of Georgia, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2009

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December 2009

DEDICATION

To Robyn, the most remarkable supporter I could ever be fortunate enough to have.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As with any work of hoped-for substance and import, I can hardly argue that this text is entirely and exclusively the result of my own efforts. Special thanks are due to Dr. Adam Parkes, University of Georgia and Dr. David Bradshaw, Worcester College, Oxford University for their professional and personal guidance and direction during both the research and writing phases of this study. Gratitude is also due to the UGA Graduate School Dean's Award for research travel, as a substantial portion of this document would not have been possible without that award. Thanks also to the UGA at Oxford Program, which has afforded me access to some of the most comprehensive research facilities in the field. Finally, sincere and boundless thanks are due to my parents, Jerry and Kaye McClung, who have been a constant source of patient support throughout my life and educational pursuits.

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Wither, the Novel?

"Is the Novel Dead?" The question was posed as a prompt to a year-long interrogatory exchange in *The Observer* in 1954. Over the course of that year many would engage in the debate, but as one might expect from any journal ultimately and primarily aiming to sell copy, there was great deliberation, furious assertion, sweeping generalization and ultimately no resolution. Meanwhile, disputations smoldered while in the intervening year dozens of works fitting in various ways under the blanket description "novel" were published in Great Britain. Anyone likely to have supposed an answer to the question when first encountering it as a banner headline in *The Observer* was unlikely to have been swayed by any of the arguments under it and almost assuredly finished the year with the original unconsidered answer in mind. However, in practical terms even if in no other way, the response to that question over time has proven a solid "no." The more even-tempered and cautious may choose to respond advisedly with a "no, not yet," and the pessimistic or cynic might always be prepared with a ready, "soon." Whatever the case, the real issue is that the question itself is suspect because it is imprecise–unfair because indistinct. The novel evades ready definition. In *The English Novel: An Introduction* (2005), Terry Eagleton describes this resistance to taxonomy, pointing out that "It is true that if your definition of the automobile is fuzzy enough, it is hard not to trace the BMW back to the ancient Roman

chariot," before going on to suggest parenthetically that "This may help also to explain why so many premature obituary notices of the novel have been issued. What they usually indicate is that one *kind* of the novel has died, while another has come into existence."[1] Even by accepting this hypothesis and narrowing the question accordingly in order to ask, "Is the _____ Novel dead?," there is little promise of a clear answer.

Nevertheless, Rubin Rabinowitz did attempt to provide just such a resolution by proposing that in the 1950s there was a death of the "Experimental Novel," prototypically represented by James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931).[2] Yet anyone who has encountered B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969), Malcolm Lowrey's *Under the Volcano* (1947), or Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), to name but a few, is likely to realize that experimentation with the form of the novel was still a literary pursuit for some time after that mode was pronounced defunct. Apart from the still quite active experimental novel, there were novels written in the 1950s that spoke clearly to the emergent and very real constitution of a new phase in Britain's social history. This age was one particular to the post-war world and represented a new direction for the former empire. A clearer, more immediate perspective on this state of affairs in Britain can be easily found in the works of Colin MacInnes, Samuel Selvon and George Lamming. Their perspectives are not ignorant of the efforts of authors who had come before them, nor are they unaware of Britain's long and august and literary heritage, but each of these authors in his own ways departs for new territory in the British novel, recovering the form, if it was wandering in some sense. Rather than focusing on recovering what was past in regard both to the novel and

to the nation, MacInnes, Selvon and Lamming spent enormous amounts of their literary capital in trying to depict through their novels the delineation and formation of a new, mid-century Britain occurring around them. For MacInnes, that nation was marked by progressive social and moral attitudes, changing racial relations and the vim of youth in direct conflict with the established and reluctant-to-relent notions of the past British attitudes and behavior. Selvon and Lamming, too, recognize the state of race relations as having a grand effect on the formation of a new Britain, but as West Indian immigrants they bring a particular notion of the outsider's sense of a "homeland" that only exists in histories and questionable accounts from the past. This fictionalized home becomes a central image in their individual attempts to focus literary energies in a new direction. No longer working from the stable platform of a clear cultural and global standing, the British novelist in the mid century is forced to abandon the experimental as an end unto itself. The rapidly shifting realities of national and individual life demanded attention. The racial riots, legislative acts constantly redefining citizenship, economic sanctions, housing shortages, work stoppages, and rise of popular culture movements are all material in and of both the novel and the popular media during this time. MacInnes, Selvon and Lamming recognize the need to balance these fictionalized notions of home with a proper perspective on the changing social realities of the mid-century, and taking care to acknowledge the heritage before them, each works to reconcile the reality of life in the colonial center with notions of the empire rapidly being outpaced by changes in the postwar world.

For some time, the generally held impression among critics of twentieth-century British literature has suggested that very little significant work was produced in the period following the Second World War and the deaths of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, some three months apart in early 1941.[3] The feeling in many of the periodical and literary outlets until even the early 1960s was one of finality. Bernard Bergonzi, writing in *The Listener* in 1963, argued that:

> Since Joyce and Proust, I would suggest, there has been no further room for newness, for pushing forward into the unknown. And here, I think, is the fundamental impasse of the contemporary novelist: he has inherited a form whose principal requirement is novelty; and yet he has nothing more to be new about, either in experiences or the manner of treating them. Nevertheless, the search for newness continues, and often in a serious and dedicated fashion.[4]

Familiar novelists still producing work, like Evelyn Waugh, were considered holdovers from a period of previous greatness, not heralds of an emergent literary scene. New work was found wanting even before it had been considered properly. Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence and depending upon the particular critic's preferences, Proust, collectively cast a long, dark shadow. Even more reductive was the criticism that the occasional work not typical of the previous age; for example, Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) was measured simply as a return to an even more remote past of comic tradition and realism.[5] Such works were determined to have arisen out of a spirit of literary backlash–a counteraction to the experimentalism of the early 1900s.[6] In either case,

whether this crisis had a basis in fact or was simply produced via rejection of the current offerings as retreads of old themes and methods, the general sentiment was definitively that the novel was moving backward, not forward. Self-appointed cultural arbiters like Waugh and Cyril Connolly were fighting to maintain what they believed to be a rapidly waning "dignity" of prewar British arts. Connolly insisted that "the true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece and [. . .] no other task is of any consequence."[7] Such an undertaking faces myriad difficulties given the quantity and quality of literary output in the proceeding three decades, but Connolly and the reading public he purported to represent had been trained to high expectations, perhaps of their own construction, but high, nonetheless.

Providing a backdrop to this discussion, life in Britain in the post-World War period was influenced greatly by two major changes in the social order. A sudden increase in emigration in combination with a social vacuum left by the dramatic loss of life in the world wars and fluctuating ideological positions, ultimately producing a feeling of diminution concerning British empiricist ideologies, all contributed to a unique cultural and literary atmosphere. Recognizing in this upheaval an opportunity, a need for clarification and a definition of the state of British affairs in the late forties, T. S. Eliot argued in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948):

> We can assert with some confidence that our own period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago; and that the evidences of this decline are visible in every department of human activity. I see no reason why the decay of culture should not

> proceed much further, and why we may not anticipate a period, of some duration, of which it is possible to say that it will have *no* culture.[8]

Eliot gives voice to a persistent and growing stress on long-guarded notions of British character based upon a sense of moral, political, social and philosophical superiority. A decided hegemonic shift in the Western world had undoubtedly occurred. Tabloids, newspapers, monthlies and radio broadcasts from this period are all filled with news of the United States and Soviet Union. After the devastation and razing of Britain and most of Europe during the second World War, the popular writers and arbiters of culture, like Eliot, conveyed great concern about how best to redefine Britain and its role in world political relations at the beginning of a new and different conflict between two large, sovereign nations in what would eventually become the Cold War. From Sputnik and the space race to Coca-Cola, pop music and beyond, Britons seemed unable to get enough news about the exciting and imminently dangerous new world order developing under the machinations of the United States and Russia. It was undoubtedly an exciting time, yet the excitement was characterized by an uncertainty. Eliot cautions, and some feared it was the case, that the culture of Britain was in danger of extinction or worse, irrelevance. Such concerns over British identity abroad ultimately impinged upon both local and individual conceptions of identity at home. If Britain was now in a position of unclear status in relation to much of the rest of the world, generating a kind of displaced identity crisis, then the individual for whom nationality, culture and notions of self were closely connected began to feel a similar sense of crisis or indecision.

With respect to the novel, Bergonzi allowed even in 1970 that the crisis of self and nation, "evident during the last twenty years," had obviously wormed its way into the literary world. As the nation goes, so the novel:

> There are times when to be English is, it seems, to be destined for endless humiliations. In these circumstances I do not think it surprising that many English writers, and some of the most talented among them, have exhibited the classical neurotic symptoms of withdrawal and disengagement, looking within themselves, or back to a more secure period in their own lives of the history of their culture, making occasional guesses about a grim and apocalyptic future.[9]

Given the depression of culture that Bergonzi characterizes here, one might get the notion that nothing whatever was being produced of literary or cultural value, making obituaries of the novel utterly unsurprising. But, the problem was not that cultural decline had informed subsequent literary depression; it was that the dejected tone of most critical elocution of the day was symptomatic of an incapacity of perspective. Critical application of old expectations and judgments hampered proper recognition of new work as substantial. The problem was not that there were no good novels; the problem was that too many critics were looking for novels to be "good" using the critically-lauded work of previous decades as the only worthwhile standard of measurement, expecting of any new work similar experimental methodology or critical position. Critics had become, for lack of a better term, lazy. Bryan Appleyard describes this lack of rigor as a creative and critical "tiredness" in the late 1940s, and he claims that

exhaustion has more effect on the literary ambience even than any cultural diminution, real or imagined.[10]

Yet, despite the degree to which such effects were telling in the literary world, there was much changing in the social and cultural arenas. Britain withdrew rapidly within island borders. For the first time in a very long time the impression of national identity was predicated not on the idea of "us" going "there." The mechanism of identity became one in which outsiders, whether emigrants or young people with no respect for traditions and institutions, had come to plague the insiders, those imagined, prototypical "Brits." Through this new relationship, the inside/outside dichotomy, a notion of self in the postwar age was being born. Useful in a number of ways as a manner of speaking about the novel and culture during this period, the distinction between a known–mostly understood as a safe or comfortable "inside"–and the unknown or unfamiliar–understood as the "outside"–became a generalized and applicable revision of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. Whether intending to craft new notions of Britain as home, notions of self in clear relation to that home, or an association within oneself and among others who for all intents and purposes shared the same values and beliefs, the inside was a comfortable replacement for the security of colonial center, now invalid. White, middle- and upper-class Britons suddenly found that it was not they colonizing the far-flung corners of the globe, bringing "education" and a sense of imperial history with them. The imperial center was suddenly the destination for British citizens of all colors from all over the globe. These outsiders

brought an explosion of new cultures, ideas, contexts and designs; very few of them fit comfortably into old notions of what the inside should be.

Inside and outside became the locations for those seeking to define themselves in relation to and against this new order in the postwar world. This dichotomy characterizes the 1950s in particular, yet for most of the last thirty years at least, it has been standard critical practice to discuss literature written in this atmosphere as belonging to a "post-colonial" age. The problem with discussing literary productions during this time in a "post-colonial" context is not so much a failure of the critical works in question to properly address the age or the artifact but that the terms of that discussion themselves are utterly indistinct. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have suggested, "we use the term 'post-colonial', however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression."[11] If this definition is to be taken as the beginning of a mode of address, the fallacies are already manifest. Depending upon the specific geographic location one chooses and the "present day" in which one finds oneself, there are hundreds of years implicated in the discussion of "post-colonial" literatures. In his landmark study on the subject, Edward Said has effectively argued that in fact this complexity of definition is generated by an inability to see beyond the imposition of Western imperial notions of the outsider, defined in his case as the "Oriental." Any judgement that begins from a position of the Occidental, the insider,

choosing to view the Oriental, the outsider, necessarily has always already tainted its own experiment.[12]

In addition, such a wide, undistinguished swathe of deliberation fails as formulated here to offer any suggestion of difference between the period during immediate colonial control and the period of increased mobility and proto-independence after. Enormous differences are then left to slip through the cracks in many cases. As Simon Gikandi has suggested, "the argument that colonialism has been transcended is patently false; but so is the insistence that, in the former colonies the culture of colonialism continues to have the same power and presence it had before colonialism."[13] One cannot propound a correct theory that would lump the current age of British identity in with bygone periods of great colonial and commonwealth holdings. Apart from this, most such theories also begin with an assumption that the literature in question is likely to be nearly unintelligible, as the "idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing."[14] One need not be dismissive of the entire enterprise of post-colonial studies, but to utilize such a broad terminology as "post-colonial" in an attempt to describe the immense variety of both time and space that term presumes to encompass is to seek only general conclusions already contained within the presumptions of self and other included in the language at work. Specific study of individual works and authors within the contexts of their own historical and social circumstances would be a more considered application of the goals within the

field, and so doing would allow for the generation of new perspectives on the periods, locales and individuals involved.

In more immediately useful literary terms, the inside/outside distinction can be applied to the manner in which either an author or fictional characters constitute themselves through their work while also accounting for the real-world changes occurring around them. Lamming's ideological approach and particular application of post-colonial tenants is one quite reflective of Said: the self is a product of many outside forces working on the individual, insinuating and imprinting a new notion of self designed to replace or supplant the native understanding constituted through his own interior apprehension of the world in which he lives. MacInnes pro-actively places himself outside the expected standards of behavior, making himself an outsider by conscious decision. By rejecting the insider position that Britain must somehow cling to outmoded notions and personally adhering, even if awkwardly and artificially at times, to outsider notions of character and social interaction exhibited in youth society and black culture, he seeks through his work to provide an example of how the vitality and optimism of these two groups suggests a new direction for Britain. Selvon's outsiders, almost literally buried deep in the heart of the colonial inside, learn to form and identify themselves anew; one can be both an insider in London, familiar with its climes and spaces, even owning it in some sense, and yet still always remain an outsider, but that disconnection can itself be a form of common experience, bringing all manner of outsiders to a fellowship of common loneliness.

These three authors represent some of the more unique instances of attempts in 1950s literature to reflect the context of the age through literature, but these three are only individual examples of a larger range of possibilities; widely various encounters with exile, travel and relocation in the twentieth century can hardly all be considered here. Many authors and works focus keenly on a variety of new and foreign experiences, thus bringing greater understanding of a wider world and stunning cultural diversity to the simple distinction between insider and outsider. One of the most studied authors of the post-war period is V. S. Naipaul, yet this particular discussion will not expend energies on his already well-examined work, primarily because, until the publication of *The Mimic Men* in 1967 and *The Enigma of Arrival* in 1987, Naipaul focuses almost all of his authorial energy on writing novels in English about Trinidad and Tobago or India, leaving untouched one of the most potentially illuminating aspects of his meandering existence: his time moving back to the colonial center, to Oxbridge education and London, the capital of a colonialist world.[15] In each of the aforementioned works, Naipaul includes both personal detail and fictionalized accounts of the emigrant experiences of his life, but the nature and quality of those accounts, following on Lamming and Selvon's work by a decade or more, seem more influenced by their work than influential in their own right. The works of Lamming and Selvon in the 1950s are more interesting as illuminations of the manner in which the colonial outsider comes to, changes, and is changed by the city. Those accounts are contemporaneous with their occurrence and afford a more immediate prospective of the age in a way that Naipaul's do not.

Likewise, the work of those former members of white English society who have moved in an increasingly mobile world from the periphery of empire back to the center and out again, while revealing in their own ways, are not the focus of this study because they draw as much attention away from Britain as toward it. Jean Rhys certainly provides an interesting counterpoint to the notion of the black emigrant coming into a British inheritance as an outsider inside the colonial center, and while her most famous work, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) expresses the pressures of prejudice and feeling of disconnection inherent in the outsider perspective, it falls outside this area of particular concern relating to the significant alteration of notions of self and nationhood inherent in the London scene. The work of Doris Lessing is also in some sense representative of this period and the cultural phenomenon of the outsider coming inside a culture. *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is a masterpiece of narrative play and a tale of the construction of self in a mid-century world, yet is consciously devoid of context specific to the time and place of its composition. Relentlessly turning inwards, the work is concerned primarily with a disturbance of comfortable notions of narrative construction and individuality, not very much with the construction of self in relation to a changing or changed outside world. Because of these interior concerns, not accessible to discussions of the notion of identity within the city space, she is also not a figure of discussion in this particular context.

With Selvon, MacInnes and Lamming in mind, and considering the heft of those works just mentioned but not under discussion here, it is difficult to appreciate how anyone might level the charge that the novel was in decline during the 1950s. What is determined to be a kind of literary "tiredness" is examined further in a recent critical

survey of the period, *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (2007), in which Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge employ much the same critical expectations as those already examined before they conclude interestingly that "As their island shrank, mid-century writers became more domestic and domesticated."[16] While this general conclusion is somewhat erroneous, the importance of this observation is the description of Britain as a "shrinking island" and the notion that novelists of the day might have weakened the novel because of a conscious turn toward the local, the "domestic." That sensibility does permeate many novels of the period, but it is not a diminution of those works. Rather, a turn toward the "at-home" or the domestic is an effective description for what many of these works do well.

Some critics are already examining the works of these authors in just such a proper context, but they frequently treat the more significant moments of understanding as aberrations rather than revelations or indications of a larger set of possibilities. Even Bergonzi, who at first seems most willing to summarize the period as a lacuna, suggests that the kind of realism practiced by MacInnes, also exercised by Selvon and Lamming, is itself a worthy combination of a nineteenth-century aptitude for mimetic realism and twentieth-century introspection and innovation, ironically adapting Eliot's famous line to describe them: "Realists, yes. But they do the realism in different voices."[17] It is possible to see through the lens of modernism and still not have one's view of mid-century novels irretrievably altered. Indeed, as one may suggest of the great experimenter Joyce, there is much realism in the work of the mid-century, but it is a realism that recognizes the subjective, complicated nature of description. The real can be

done in different voices. A new conclusion may then be reached: to be properly real, there must be different voices. An understanding of the literary concerns like these in the modernist period is important, but raising previous novels to levels of infallibility and cult objectification immediately biases any reading of any work outside the period. Rather than reading the late-forties through the sixties as a period self-consciously *not* modernist, the period should be read within or as a reaction to its own circumstances.

Certainly, these authors recognized what had just happened with the novel as well as what was happening in the wider world, but had they become so preoccupied and stymied by the unrelenting focus on works of the past, they may have never written a single word. Jed Esty argues that "writers such as Sam Selvon, George Lamming, and Doris Lessing were already starting to demonstrate how what reads as historical decline in one register, emerges as something a great deal more culturally and politically interesting in another."[18] Yet Esty and most others concern themselves with what British fiction became some twenty or thirty years after this period, focusing more of their energies on novelists such as Salman Rushdie or V.S. Naipaul in his later years, not understanding the foundational nature of the works of mid-century novelists on the work of these later notables. With the possible exception of some non-fictional works by Lamming, these three authors, the two West Indians most surprisingly, are rarely if ever mentioned in manifestos of the post-colonial literary and critical movement today. This fact seems all the more curious when one considers that it was during a twenty-year span in the middle of the century that Britain relinquished nearly all its colonial holdings and withdrew to island borders. Selvon and Lamming were among the first

wave of emigrants from those after-colonial island nations of the Caribbean to travel back to the colonial center. MacInnes was among the first and most celebrated to chronicle how that migration had begun to exert social pressure and effect change in Britain. Their absence from most studies of post-colonial literature is therefore perplexing. Most post-colonial studies skip right over the 1950s and 60s, behaving as if the publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981 was the birth of the critical mode within the literary field, a counterpart to the arrival of Said's cultural theory. Many productions, including the works of novelists mentioned here, documented faithfully a significant social and critical moment during the mid century, so many in fact that post-colonial studies can benefit from a reconsideration of the period as influential at the least, even foundational at most.

Historicizing and contextualizing this watershed period in British emigration history, from the 1948 docking of the *Empire Windrush* to Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, provides a clear path to determining the foundations of change in Britain's social order after the World Wars. Consideration has traditionally been given to the *Windrush* episode as the initiation of colonial influx, but as Sukhdev Sandhu has argued, the ship's arrival at "Tilbury Docks in 1948 did not herald the beginning of multi-racial Britain, a foundation myth which became entrenched in the wake of 1998's fiftieth anniversary celebrations."[19] The United States Congress' passage of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, better known as the McCarran-Walter Act,[20] is what prompted significant increase in the numbers of West Indian immigrants in Britain.[21] The attitude in Britain toward this increase was conflicted at best. Due in

large measure perhaps to the already existing crisis of self that had entered into British character, this "colonization in reverse" was treated by most as a matter for grave concern.[22] In early July of 1949, the Royal Commission on Population cautioned that "For present-day Britain, with a birth-rate well below replacement level, the maintenance of a large flow of emigration can hardly be regarded as practicable or desirable [. . .] emigration on the nineteenth-century scale cannot be reconciled with twentieth-century birth-rates."[23] From the beginning, concern over immigration would be expressed in its most benign fashion as a concern over space and resources. Led by conservative member of Parliament Enoch Powell, a popular figure in anti-immigration movements of the mid-century, a groundswell of anti-black sentiment began to threaten race relations. On 20 April 1968, Powell stood before Parliament and pronounced that the present levels of immigration being allowed in the country would inevitably lead to conflict and degradation of the British way of life. He declared that:

> Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'. That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come. In numerical terms, it will be of American proportions long before the end of the century. Only resolute and urgent action will avert it even now. Whether there will be the public will to demand and obtain that action, I

> do not know. All I know is that to see, and not to speak, would be the great betrayal.[24]

In so alluding to Virgil and cautioning the British public against a seemingly inevitable and shameful descent into American-style racist behavior, Powell gave voice to a growing strain in the British conservative and traditional ranks that the nation and its moral and cultural certitude were in peril. His suggestion that drastic action need be taken to curtail the influx of colonial and commonwealth citizens was met with a surprising amount of popular support, even though most politicians decried it at the time.

In a period of less than twenty years, the political and cultural landscape of Great Britain changed irrevocably. Exchanges of power between the Conservatives and the Labour Party's representatives led to continual "official" redefinition of what it meant, legally, to be British or English. In 1948, the government passed the British Nationality Act, allowing unimpeded access into Britain for any and all colonial and commonwealth citizens. A period of significantly increased immigration followed, with the overwhelming majority of those individuals arriving from the West Indies.[25] By 1961, the increase in population, coincident with a recession in 1958, had driven the concern over population growth due to immigration to a very high level, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill was introduced and passed through Parliament in 1962. This bill "controlled entry by a system of labour permits that in practice approximately halved the rate of net immigration."[26] Labour broke from its established immigration-friendly reputation when it took control of Parliament in 1964 under Harold Wilson, restricting

entry further with a Parliamentary white paper. 1968 legislation restricted entry further to only those holders of a British passport, but this was not to be the last controversial move to restrict incoming colonials. Continuing well into Thatcher's Parliament of the late seventies and eighties, restrictions and regulations on entry to Britain were a constant reminder that the prejudices of the past were not entirely erased from the nation's psyche.

Paradoxically, despite this atmosphere of racial controversy in subsequent decades, the initial public reception to many of these mostly young, male emigrants in the 1950s was positive. Some saw it as a boon for a flagging nation. *The Spectator* printed an opinion article on the new "Colonial Citizens" which approved wholeheartedly of King George VI's "Colonial Month," inaugurated in the opinion of the unnamed author with the purpose of "imbuing a section of the people of Great Britain with fuller knowledge of the dependent territories of the Commonwealth." Even better, however, is the possibility that the King's pronouncement will put citizens in the right frame of mind concerning all Commonwealth and Colonial citizens:

> Colour should be as much a matter of indifference as creed, and we in this country are obtuse beyond pardon if we fail to realise how greatly our outlook may be expanded by contact and discussion with men who live different lives under different skies and on different shores from our own. "Colonial Month" can perhaps do little directly to emphasize the value of such interchange of thought and experience, but it will have

> failed calamitously of its purpose if it fails to impress the lesson indirectly.[27]

It would not be long before such cheerful optimism was tempered by concern. Only a year and a half after the gladsome "Colonial Month," *The Listener* cautioned, "One day, race may turn out to be an even greater problem than communism."[28] A prediction that racial problems would soon surpass communism as a greater threat to the British subject is an odd mix of political and personal concerns, but that such an opportunity to do so in the popular media in any way suggests the level of equivalent concern in the public sphere demonstrates conclusively that a racial divide was already in place.

The Times and *Evening Standard* provided running commentaries on increasingly tense race relations, depicting Britain as unsure and fractious. In 1948, a headline in the *Standard* proclaimed "Welcome Home" to the *Windrush* emigrants while simultaneously including advertisements and cartoons featuring golliwoggs.[29] Letters calling for the forced removal of all black emigrants were often countered by letters calling for all native white Britons of wealth and skill to abandon the nation in favor of their own program of active emigration to Australia or America.[30] That Britain had a "Colour Problem" could no longer be denied.

Other troubles were often seen as connected. Labor shortages somehow coincided with large-scale unemployment, and one could as easily find an article in *The Observer* complaining that blacks are getting all the good jobs while simultaneously finding in *New Statesman* an argument for more emigration and a need for increased

vigilance to counterbalance the unfair wages and practices perpetrated upon these newcomers. *The Spectator* declared patly:

> West Indian immigration compels attention. Eight thousand immigrants have arrived this year and some twenty thousand more may be expected in 1955. Local authorities are beginning to show signs of alarm at this flood of migrants whose standard in the matter of housing, in particular, are necessarily very much lower than those current here. And there are darker possibilities still. This is the first appearance of a classic racial problem in this country. [. . .] The rank and file of trade-unionists are less liberal in their views, and will object even more strongly if there is the faintest suspicion of unemployment. It is no good thinking that people in these islands are any more immune to the racial virus than those in, let us say, the United States. When the proportion of coloured people in the population rises above a certain level we may expect the ugly incidents that always occur in similar situations.[31]

This is clearly an age of rapidly changing attitudes about the role of the colonial citizen and the Commonwealth. In Parliament and in the popular press–indeed, members of Parliament often voiced their opinions through the popular press–debates about how one should define citizenship raged alongside simultaneous calls to strengthen or to sever colonial and Commonwealth ties. Many feared Enoch Powell's words seemed destined to come true.

Concurrently, the population in cities swelled. People came from the rural areas of England as well as the even more rural locales of the West Indies and Africa to live in London, Liverpool, Manchester, and a host of other English cities. Newcomers were taken advantage of by predatory landlords and unscrupulous homeowners.[32] Ghettoes sprung up overnight, making a bad situation even worse. News outlets lambasted those believed responsible for the exploitation of others, not to mention the degradation of the city and of Great Britain's character, yet very little was done to rectify this odious state of affairs, and few people seemed to have any idea how to proceed. In the words of an editorial in *The Spectator* in early 1955, there was increasing fear that "something may sooner or later explode somewhere"; something did.[33] The Notting Hill race riots in late August and early September of 1958 represented the largest racially-motivated public violence in Britain until the 1981 Brixton Riots. More than that, they represented the public eruption of a previously unacknowledged conservative racism that had been fomenting for some time.[34] While many would seek to write off events like Notting Hill and Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech as aberrations, others have argued that the persistence of a "colour bar" in Britain was the result of at least tacit consent on the part of all citizens. Samuel Bonhomme argued in the early seventies that racism, or "racialism" as it was often called in Britain, was the result of the colonial heritage of the British, intended or no, and was perhaps inextricable from the national character:

> Enoch Powell is no exception to the general run of things. We must not forget that the books Enoch Powell read as a child were no different than those read by any other native-born English person. The schools he went

> to were native schools; the teachers who taught him were native teachers; they, too, had their minds plagued and poisoned with prejudice and racial hatred handed down from their forefathers many centuries before.[. . .] To put the whole structure of the British society together, I would say that a twisted education coupled with a wrong sense of values are responsible for all the racial hatred today. What strikes me most is the fact that most of the black immigrants in this country were born British not by choice but by right of the British Crown. These people have given their lives for Britain; to them it was an honour to be British and neither did they wish to be anything else. The black men, and in particular the West Indians, were always taught that England was their mother country.[35]

While Bonhomme's reading is perhaps guilty of generalizations of its own, it does make clear that in many ways the tensions between fear of a loss of British character and the large-scale redefinition that colonial contraction and Commonwealth immigration implied are rooted in the same interior spaces. In the bonhomme of "Colonial Month," few would have predicted that in five short years a Conservative MP candidate would take the Smethwick seat from the Labour incumbent, campaigning on the slogan "If you want a Nigger Neighbour, vote Labour."[36] Much had changed in those intervening years.

The novels of Selvon, particularly *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and of MacInnes, specifically *City of Spades* (1957) and *Absolute Beginners* (1959), dealt directly with the city

spaces in London and the racist attitudes that led to the riots in Notting Hill in the late 1950s. Selvon's work provides depictions of variant perspectives within the emigrant population on the tensions created by the increasing diasporic presence of "colonials," while MacInnes's work establishes the perspective of the embattled British youth movement: rebellious, sympathetic to the "marginalized" culture of the West Indian and African diasporas in particular, and generally at odds with the vestiges of pre-war British culture and society. Their novels do far more than serve as records of current difficulties, in various ways both Selvon and MacInnes advance their own polemical purposes: the cause of greater understanding and tolerance amidst the growing pains that inevitably result from sudden changes in Britain's population and culture is easily observed as a major concern for both, but their manner of approaching those concerns marks them out as worthy of deeper investigation than has previously been afforded to either.

George Lamming's novels *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and *The Emigrants* (1954), in concert with his essay collection *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), combine the novelistic focus of MacInnes's crisis of self and Selvon's focus on the crisis of the color barriers in Britain. He further typifies the middle of the century as a time of tremendous personal and cultural possibility marred by a near-stifling miasma of historical preconception and dangerous nostalgia for a past made far better by hindsight. Characterized by the urgent intermingling of individuals and groups of disparate emigrant cultures, classes, ages, and agendas, Lamming's work suggests in its own way that the age of the novel has certainly not passed and that the form is still quite useful as a medium for keen

observation and representation in a rapidly changing world. His novels provide unique and valuable perspectives on possible new directions for a culturally various and socially integrated British novel. By embracing individual "otherness" as the true foundation of the indistinct "otherness" that emigrants have previously represented, a momentarily lost Britain may be rediscovered or rededicated.

In the late 1940s, T. S. Eliot spoke of just such a rededication to cultural maintenance:

> Neither a classless society, nor a society of strict and impenetrable social barriers is good; each class should have constant additions and defections; the classes, while remaining distinct, should be able to mix freely; and they should all have a community of culture with each other which will give them something in common, more fundamental than the community which each class has with its counterpart in another society.[37]

While Eliot's argument is initially confined to an identification of class and social roadblocks, we might benefit from consideration of this statement in light of the works of MacInnes, Selvon, and Lamming as a representation of the range of possibilities for a new direction in British literature and culture. Each of these novelists in his own way seeks out and attacks institutionalized notions of the self and the other in a fashion that mimics the same movement occurring within a number of emergent cultural collectives. Those entrenched and under attack institutions may be described variously as classes, nations, cultures, races, age demographics, intractable histories, or interpersonal relationships, but they all result in a denial of what Eliot describes as a kind of

fundamental common ground characterized by free movement between and among different ideologies and social positions. They allow, in the estimation of MacInnes, Selvon and Lamming, something against which the individual and groups of individuals may work out their own definitions of self. They afford the necessary "inside" for the proper positioning of these authors on the "outside," allowing them something to write in relation to or against. By so doing, these novelists provide definitive answers to questions of both the form and the nation's vitality. There are many others who would take up this project in their own ways, but to begin here is to begin with a deeper understanding of what at this time was possible and is yet to come in the literature of a newly-expanded notion of Britain, a notion whose expansion came to include, among others, the young, the emigrants, and a host of previously-under-represented peoples.

Chapter 2–

An Absolute Beginning:

Colin MacInnes and the Constitution of a New Britain [1]

One of the more concatenated literary voices of the period after the second World War must be Colin MacInnes. His novels encompass a wide variety of styles and subjects; he adopts a number of authorial personae, and he purports to speak at varying times for young and old men, women, children, immigrants, natives, the English, Scots, Australians, Shakespeare and the crown, to name but a few, in novels ranging in scope, style and subject from the picaresque nineteenth-century romance and travelogue, through swashbuckling tales of abduction and maturation on the high seas to the gritty, disillusioned realism of the postwar twentieth-century, all in a nation and time seemingly devoid of identity. In particular, the novels *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959) and *Mr. Love and Justice* (1960), now generally known as MacInnes's "London Trilogy" but originally collected as *Visions of London* (1969) are the works through which MacInnes finds his strongest and most significant authorial voice. That voice speaks directly to the concurrent formation of a new British identity during the tempestuous 1950s and 1960s in a rapidly changing Britain. At once confident, strident and intent upon recognizing what is new about Britain, this voice seeks to reconcile conflicts between what has been as well as what will become of the identity of the nation.

John McLeod has suggested that many writers in "Postcolonial London," including MacInnes, wrote primarily because they wanted to "bear witness to the racism, violence, and torment they and others experienced during the decade, and offer a bleak, sombre view of the city that demythologizes the colonial myth of London as the heart of a welcoming site of opportunity and fulfillment."[2] MacInnes certainly may be numbered among those who have found the 1950s to be fertile ground for social criticism and literary production aimed at revealing the city for what it has become, not what tradition imagines it to be. One of the most formative events of this period, particularly for MacInnes's own ideas about race relations in Britain, was the Notting Hill race riot that occurred over a period of several days in late summer, 1958. Armed with belts, bike chains, knives, iron bars, razors, and other dangerous weapons, 300-400 people formed mobs in the primarily black neighborhoods of Notting Hill and Notting Dale; they harassed, intimidated, and attacked their way through the community. Many were left severely beaten, fortunately none were killed, but considerable damage was done both to the fragile relations between the races and the sense that London was immune to such activity.[3]

For decades, the details of this series of events have been closely guarded in sealed police records, but many recognize that "the ferocity of Notting Hill 'racial riots,' as the press called them, shocked Britain into realizing for the first time that it was not above the kind of racial conflict then being played out in the American deep south."[4] These events became for MacInnes a kind of centerpiece to his work. When he began writing about race relations in Britain, the riot was several years yet to come, but by the

time he had concluded his *Visions of London* trilogy, the Notting Hill occurrences would become totemic of his ideology and his social agenda.

If in no other sense, MacInnes's desire to produce works of consequence seems born of a deeply held belief that the world had changed and was changing in remarkable ways that the literary community had an established responsibility to document and explicate, assist or discourage. While MacInnes may not have fought in Notting Hill, he would fight against the racial prejudice indicated there by depicting the events and the life of London's marginalized without any shutting of the eyes. MacInnes searched for a particular voice native to the times in which he wrote, yet he was simultaneously capable of speaking of these times as a third, disinterested party. Considering the significant amount of discussion over the state of English literature and the novel in particular occurring at the time, his quest was undertaken with a trepidation that he freely acknowledged, yet he clearly believed writing to be his responsibility.

Looking into the more disturbing aspects of London life, MacInnes hoped his work could also represent the formation of a new London, "daringly imagined as making possible a utopian social blueprint where the prejudices and hostilities encountered on the street might be conquered. At the heart of such utopian visions [. . .] resides the festive spirit of popular cultural life considered to facilitate alternative forms of contact beyond divisive social categorization."[5] In an effort to best afford himself a vantage point for these critical and formative capacities, in addition to a considerable yet not incompatible desire for some measure of fame, MacInnes worked in a variety of

media, spreading himself over a variety of publications, outlets, and public opportunities over a period of many years. In so doing, he established himself as an insider on the cultural scene, a commentator and sought-after critic with a carefully maintained image of existence on the fringe of the mass of those in London and Britain. He worked tirelessly to portray himself as that inside outsider throughout his varied career.

Despite a clearly expressed preference for writing novels, MacInnes made most of his occasional wealth as an essayist, radio host, periodical contributor, travel writer and cultural commentator. In these endeavors, he was arguably more successful than he ever was as a novelist; he certainly made more money from his non-fiction, and many have argued that his strengths as a writer lay there as well. In an examination of MacInnes's career, Bernard Bergonzi argued that: "As an essayist MacInnes is Orwell's natural heir, and in *England, Half English* [1961] he does for the 1950s what Orwell did for the Thirties and Forties."[6] Bergonzi's argument that MacInnes had become the vessel for communicating, describing and therefore defining the "new" British character was a kind assessment, surely, if not a tall order considering the complications of describing that character at the time. Others have been more sanguine about the nature of MacInnes's more disputable work. John McLeod reads MacInnes as presenting a personalized ordering of things, arguing that "it is unwise to read MacInnes's novels as little more than narrative vehicles for thinly veiled statements of his own opinions or for ideology at large."[7] Such an assessment seems negative at first, until McLeod goes on to explain:

> His fiction facilitates an important degree of critical self-consciousness and self-questioning often missing in his essays. MacInnes's novels are much more subjective and artful than is often assumed, and engender an important third dimension unavailable in his non-fiction. For this reason they mediate an important analytical vision of postcolonial London in the late 1950s perceived from a position poised ambivalently inside and beyond the cultures and communal spaces they depict.[8]

What MacInnes does literarily that makes him unique is to expend nearly all of his authorial energies working to openly acknowledge the changing face of Britain and the world alongside the changing interior spaces of individuals who make up these larger constituencies. MacInnes's "ambivalent" position as an insider affords him the opportunity and ability to be a keen and accurate observer, yet because he is neither black nor a teenager–his two greatest subjects–he remains on the outside of his subjects as well. Standing on both sides of this line complicates his literary representations, certainly, and it would be unwise to suggest that he always correctly assessed the changes internal to these groups and their eventual effects on the nation and culture. Still, nearly every one of his novels, certainly those written in the 1950s and early 60s was exclusively targeted at exploring the interior/exterior dichotomy of the individual, the British novel and the nation itself from his own dual position inside the culture of London and beyond, or outside, the groups he identifies as the most materially and culturally involved in those changes. Many have posited that MacInnes's desire to write novels about London was born of a sense of responsibility, a sense of rebellion, even a

simple proclivity for caprice.[9] Ironically, the real reasons for his almost too-ready acceptance of any sea-change in the London scene may well be the result of personal desires to accomplish his own sort of acceptance within the literary and larger cultural communities of the day. His protestations against old styles indicated just how irrelevant he believed them to be. Depictions of the old Britain, the vast empire of Britain, should be replaced by a new and more energetic–albeit smaller–Britain. MacInnes saw it as the mandate of the author to break out of patronizing, limiting perspectives on the nation and the city and to display the more vibrant places he believed them to be.

In so doing, MacInnes often expressed concern over the manner in which many authors of a more experienced, sociological or traditional background had not risen above the pretension and tourist-like colonialist behavior that threatened every effort to depict the outsider spaces inside the new Britain. In a review of Ursula Sharma's 1971 social and biographical study *Rampal and His Family*, MacInnes outlined this frustration:

> The theory is this. You, the sociological investigator, more intelligent and educated than your simple subjects, yet thoroughly sympathetic towards them, first win their confidence and then hang microphones around their necks for endless sessions. The consequent yards of tape are edited, and from them emerges a text which at last reveals the true thoughts and feelings of these hitherto submerged souls.
>
> But alas, no: what these confected texts most reveal is the bland condescension of the sociologist. For we live in an age of cultural

> imperialism: the trader, the missionary and the colonist are now replaced by the academic intent on capturing the last and most precious possession of the exploited, which is their individuality, and offering this exotic fruit to culturally-deprived readers of the affluent world.[10]

Avoiding the pitfalls of disaffected, condescending and patronizing attitude is an important concern for MacInnes. To approach either the teenage question or the emigrant question in a strict sociological manner was clearly not likely to bear the literary and cultural fruit he desired. Editing tapes and transcribing interviews would produce only a tourist-like literature characterized by "bland condescension" and amounting to nothing more than literary-mission behavior. The key, as MacInnes saw it, was to avoid indulging oneself as an outsider looking into a community or collective, but to attempt an appreciation of the cultural phenomena in question as an insider. By the time he wrote this critique in 1971, he had already written three novels focused on two communities and subcultures from which he was an apparent outsider but in which he had attempted to immerse himself.

On the subject of youth, MacInnes was drawn initially by a genuine sense of free expression, borne of an expected vivacity combined with an unexpected capacity for capital. Youth of most any age and place might be expected to possess energy, yet in the 1950s the "teenagers," as they were first called in this period, were a sensation within popular media: "The rise of youth as dissident, as consumer and as object of moral concern was charted uneasily by the media throughout the decade from the first appearance of the Teddy Boy with his distinct crepe-soled shoes, long-tailed waist jacket

and string tie; through the commercialization of the mid-1950s 'skiffle' music craze."[11] In MacInnes's reckoning, one of the more significant and unusual departures from the standard expectation of callow, disaffected youth was a high degree of self and cultural awareness. Within his work, that awareness is often centralized in the voice of his teenage narrator:

> This teenage ball had had a real splendour in the days when the kids discovered that, for the first time since centuries of kingdom-come, they'd money, which hitherto had always been denied to us at the best time in life to use it, namely, when you're young and strong, and also before the newspapers and telly got hold of this teenage fable and prostituted it as conscripts seem to do to everything they touch. Yes, I tell you, it had a real savage splendour in the days when we found that no one couldn't sit on our faces any more because we'd loot to spend at last, and our world was to be our world, the one we wanted and not standing on the doorstep of somebody else's waiting for honey, perhaps.[12]

The voice of that narrator here seems quite close to that of MacInnes himself. Reacting aggressively to the normalizing and commodifying depictions of the mass media, the narrator and MacInnes attempt to preserve what is promoted as a certain purity and autonomy to the "teenage thing." The description of adults and media representatives as "conscripts" is also particularly telling here. The young narrator, echoing MacInnes's own concerns over the socializing and commercial sterilization of unique movements in 1950s culture, suggests that others have been inculcated against their will, even

brainwashed into a kind of desire to assimilate all that appears different into their existing social systems. Youth resists. Most importantly, that resistance takes the apparent form of disinterest. Unlike the condescending sociologist, the teenagers of Britain revel in their outsider status, defining themselves against, rather than within, the outdated notions of cultural space and place.

At the individual level, a person could be liberated from established modes of thought and prejudice by indulging one's own opinions and acting solely upon them, disregarding what might be expected via historical precedent or convention. The youths of *Absolute Beginners*, particularly the young unnamed hero, provide an excellent example of this new sort of liberated individual, one capable of considering the increasing variety and sophistication of social and moral options and selecting the one best suited to himself at any given moment, with little or no concern for whether or not that decision might be almost immediately contradicted by his next. Despite such an ideology apparently devoid of consistency, MacInnes argues that consideration of every circumstance on an individual basis is the only manner in which prejudice, closed-mindedness, and institutionalized disenfranchisement may be surely avoided.

Too much was occurring in the British scene to go undocumented. MacInnes recognized an opportunity and took full advantage. His intentions were not always entirely altruistic, however; MacInnes occasionally admitted to great contradictions in his attitude toward writing and the documentation of social phenomena arising in the post-war period. More often than not, his contradictions were born of a need for money, and he surely recognized that writing would allow him to make a living. An inveterate

spender, MacInnes was almost constantly in need of cash, and that need was not always easily reconciled with the long, drawn-out nature of publishing at the time.[13] As his acquaintance and biographer, Tony Gould, puts it: "Writing novels was Colin's ticket to self-respect; broadcasting, being a radio personality, largely induced self contempt. But it satisfied a craving for celebrity and paid at least some of his bills."[14] MacInnes frequently mentioned that the idea of working in radio with the BBC was not one he considered self-affirming, but it was certainly ideal in some sense. His ideas about getting in, getting paid, and getting out are well-documented in his own correspondence and conversations; he once admonished the poet Charles Causley: "Never join the BBC. Always approach it as a buccaneer: plunder it and get out. They'll always come back to you."[15] "Blasé" would certainly be an appropriate word to describe MacInnes's attitude toward the BBC and his time spent there.[16] Nevertheless, it is the craving for some type of "celebrity" as Gould has put it, that makes cynical statements like this one on the part of MacInnes seem like performances of their own. By publicly and frequently biting the "hands" that often fed him at the BBC, MacInnes was cultivating a performative image of himself as an outsider, working like a pirate behind the August doors of the venerable BBC. Like his blithe youth in *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes takes advantage of institutions but for mercantile ends.

Still, despite his occasional bouts of frustration over his novelistic endeavors and his own increasing doubts about whether he might be better off leaving off the novel altogether, MacInnes came to feel that he had a capability greater in scope than much of his work might suggest, if only his craving for fame and notoriety would not complicate

things as they often did. In a moment of self assessment in 1960, MacInnes surmised that he had achieved "Not 'fame', or anything like it; but to having a *small* but I think *attached* reading public, and, what I think matters much more in the long run, quite a lot of influential, strategically-placed supporters in the whole English cultural scene."[17] This appraisal was, not surprisingly, accompanied by a request for advance money, and MacInnes clearly felt that he might best argue for his own worth as a writer from a position of commodity and as an asset to the publisher, yet it does also demonstrate a commitment to writing as a career that never really left MacInnes despite his successes as a radio personality.

MacInnes was equally convoluted in his social attitudes. In his extensively traveled and widely varied life, he had many acquaintances, many even who would think of themselves as friends, but he had very few who lasted throughout his life. To be fair, MacInnes did not make it easy to be a friend. When he was not asking for money, showing up late for appointed social arrangements, or castigating his companions for the slightest of indiscretions, he was solitary, pensive or emotionally and mentally removed altogether from interactions. Discussing MacInnes with an acquaintance, playwright Bernard Kops, Gould relates that "he [MacInnes] was 'borrowed from death . . . he couldn't get back into the human family . . . He was the most alone and lonely man we ever met'."[18] Even to those artists with whom he socialized in the 50s, MacInnes seemed like an outsider. This sullen, removed attitude toward others would make him a difficult person to be friends with, certainly, but his penchant for viewing the world and everything in it as source material would make it even tougher:

> MacInnes loved to typecast his friends; and woe betide them if there was any deviation from the image he had of them. [. . .]MacInnes would do the same sort of thing with blacks—to such an extent that one black man was heard to complain, 'Man, that Collins [as they often called him], he make you feel *so black*'.[19]

MacInnes tended to think of most anyone and everyone he met as well as every situation he encountered as material for writing, whether fiction or nonfiction. His paradoxically antisocial nature and need for company were reconciled in his tendency to fit his acquaintances into readily-apprehended "types," making him prone to practicing the worst stereotyping behavior. Perhaps bolstered by his own outsider status, MacInnes never felt connected enough to the community of artists and writers with whom he associated, thinking of himself also even as a type in relation. Such a perception gave him permanent outsider status, even in his own life, making him most often feel more as an observer than a participant.

One instance of the correspondence between his roles as observer of real life and writer of fiction can be found in the narrator of *Absolute Beginners*. The character is based upon an acquaintance of MacInnes from the fifties in London's Soho district, full of clubs, music, drinking and dancing. In his early twenties, Terry Taylor was a sometimes photographer, who did not particularly take an "artistic" approach to photography. The craft was simply a way of making money, really. MacInnes introduced him to writing and an artistic community, and as Gould describes it: "Taylor personified the paradox which is central to MacInnes's vision, that of innocent corruption, of semi-criminality as

the creative and daring alternative to a life of mindless drudgery."[20] While such an assessment of Taylor's personality speaks directly to MacInnes's own occasionally profit-oriented visions of his literary efforts, it also suggests an interesting possibility in relation to Taylor's chosen occupation. Photography, whether pursued for artistic ends or not, introduces a complication of the nature of reality in relation to perspective and fabulation.

The young narrator of *Absolute Beginners* works as a photographer not because he appears to see any particular artistic merit in it but because he sees a possibility for making money. If he occasionally gets the opportunity to make an artistic shot or two, so much the better. Beyond this similarity to MacInnes's own writing career and perspective, the creation of the character as a photographer poses questions about the ability of any artistic medium to accurately portray the world, particularly when it can also be used so subjectively or self-interestedly. The photographs that the young man takes are representations of what exists in the real world, but they are not themselves realistic. Framing the shot, freezing the moment out of context, choosing the composition, the position of the shooter in relation to the subject: all of these factors play a role in making the photograph more artistic invention than reportage, yet the photograph itself contains much of the detail of real life. The specificity and stark nature of the photograph are revealing faithful representations of real moments, people and things, and they thus straddle the space between representation and invention. Occasionally, that capability is tested.

As the narrator prepares himself to go into the streets of Notting Hill to "witness" the riots, with the intention of making a "difference" if only by his presence,[21] he leaves behind his camera: "I took up my Rolleiflex, but put it down again, because it didn't seem useful any longer."[22] Initially, this act seems unaccountable. If his intention is to witness the riots, to show by his presence and through the very act of looking at the goings on that he supports the "Spades" and their plight, that he does not agree with the violence, that he is ashamed of the white rioters, then what better weapon in this silent, documentary witnessing than a camera? His photos could serve as evidence to indict aggressors; he could help to support the victims by providing a record of their woes, but his camera suddenly seems to him useless. Certainly it still can produce photos, but his choice appears born of the assumption that the camera is incapable of capturing the full reality of the situation. At best he would produce single images, taken themselves with limited perspective and clarity. The ability of the photographs, in their own way artifacts, to communicate the real presence of a viewer, in this case himself, is anemic. He argues that what is needed are real "witnesses. Friends who will witness this thing, and friends who'll show the Spades this two square miles isn't being written off as a ghetto."[23] The artifice inherent in the photograph would stand in the way of direct communication of his ideology. The camera would literally be between himself and those with whom he hopes to connect. Behind the lens, he would be an interloper, an observer, an outsider. Leaving it behind is a symbol of MacInnes's intent to attempt a portrayal of the real effects of the Notting Hill riots without mediating mechanism. The novel is still art and fabulation, but he wishes to momentarily remove the mechanism of

that production as a way of communicating his experiences as a witness, both to the events and on behalf of those directly affected.

The descriptions on the following pages are disjointed and direct. They are ironically almost snapshots themselves, but the cause for this change in the narrative quality is accounted for simply. MacInnes began writing this section of the novel by acting very much like a journalist: "Many of the incidents described in the final part of *Absolute Beginners* are based upon reports in the *Manchester Guardian*. Throughout the Notting Hill riots MacInnes took notes from these *Guardian* reports, which he used extensively, but with fictional license, in writing the novel."[24] That section of the novel is episodic and fractured not because the narrator is fractured but because the source material is. The events themselves are so shocking and difficult that the narrative method reflects that reality via disjointed, fictional retelling. In so doing, it as if MacInnes himself has left behind his own camera, rather than overtly reshaping the events and framing them in an overtly-artistic and fictional way, he behaves as a witness, documenting each encounter episodically and dryly, trusting that the shocking nature of the events will communicate the shame and indignation without need for commentary and creativity. This choice creates a tension, not simply born of the events, but also of the contradiction between the narrative method and the desire to unflinchingly depict a series of unaccountably horrible acts.

As a very young author, MacInnes had already begun to recognize this tension between conflicting desires and methodologies for depicting life in the real world and life in the novel, writing in a letter to an unknown recipient in 1933: "It's of course very

difficult not to see real people in the characters, and this is a hinderance [sic]."[25] Considering the real-life inspiration for his narrator in *Absolute Beginners* and the real-world source material for his depictions of the riots, that difficulty is understandable. MacInnes's recognition is yet another of the many indications of his belief that any good novel must generated by fabulation and invention in combination, something internal to the author. In contradiction to his apparently frequent use of it, he sees realism in the novel as a potential hindrance, yet his experiences with acquaintances later in life would argue that he eventually understood that realism was a necessary component. The problem might ultimately be stated more simply: the concern is not with seeing any "real" people in the characters, but is instead with seeing particular real people in the characters. The idea is to strike a separate balance, allowing the real world to inform and instruct the writing, either by design or by natural predilection. As MacInnes argues in the preface to the "Sharp Schmutter" chapter of *England, Half English* (1961):

> I suppose a "documentary" novelist would be one who selects some social theme that genuinely preoccupies him and who, after a study of its outer forms and even inner meaning, clothes this factual survey in a fictional apparel. If that is a just description of his experience, it is not what has ever happened to me.
>
> In my own case a theme, later to be evoked in fiction, has always "moved in on" me and has become, without any deliberate intent, a part of my life almost before I was aware of it, and certainly long before I thought of writing of it. During this period of saturation such

> apprehension as I have is intuitive, then thoughtful; the factual "documentation" always comes long afterwards–a check-up on outer shapes of essences with which I am familiar. I cannot conceive of writing anything about a theme that does not already interest me profoundly through direct experience; and the notion of going "on location" to "study" a subject is completely alien to my (in any case idle and impatient) temperament.
>
> I would thus describe *City of Spades* or *Absolute Beginners* – no doubt flatteringly – as poetic evocations of a human situation, with undertones of social criticism in it: wildly romantic in mood, and as rigorously analytic as I can be, by implication.[26]

MacInnes argues that it is entirely expected for an author to be influenced by his surroundings on every level, that all writing is in some sense documentary, though good writing is not self-consciously so. In fact, he makes it quite clear that he has little or no interest himself in writing about situations with which he has no "direct experiences." The nearest suggestion that there is not some creative element to this literary process obviously affects his sensibilities. Despite the priority he assigns to such experience, he is quick to relegate it to second-class status behind the "poetic evocations" he describes floridly. Curiously enough, he would seem to see no real conflict in the statement "wildly romantic in mood, and as rigorously analytic as I can be, by implication." Ultimately this flourish within his own essay reveals much of his own perspective on

writing. For a work to be characterized as wildly romantic, the assumption might reasonably be made that it is not concerned with realism in any appreciable way.

The romantic goals of the cultivation of beauty and delight would not fall at all in line with empirical adherence to fact. To be "real" in a mimetic way is to be authentic and, in the case of MacInnes's depictions of the Notting Hill riots, socially responsible, but to be only "real" he appears to feel is not to be an artist or an author in any legitimate manner. One must simultaneously be a "wildly romantic" poet, describing reality, in order to maintain a literary eminence. The singularity of MacInnes's work lies within his attempts to faithfully account for the "real" changing social and physical landscape, in a simultaneously mimetic and romantic manner. He attempts to recreate and depict the city faithfully, with characters moving through spaces and places in a documentary way. In this formulation, the novel can be "rigorously analytic" and a realistic imitation, a trustworthy facsimile.

As a result of this double-dealing capacity he found within the novel, MacInnes frequently expressed a genuine belief that, despite what was being suggested broadly in the literary community at the time, the novel still possessed great potential energy. As he states in his polemic about writing and reading, *No Novel Reader*:

> Art, however prophetic, and literature, however critical, reflect the values and coherence of the society from which they spring. Eighteenth-century England was an expanding society; in the nineteenth-century, or in the greater part of it, it was, whatever its inner doubts and potential decay, one of great wealth and confidence. These types of society produced the

> "great novels" that mirrored their assurance. But when, in the present century, England became involved in two major catastrophic wars, a rapid loss of empire, and immense social and material disruption, its arts reflected these dire occurrences; indeed, had they not done so – as philistine "great novels" continued insouciantly to do – they would have been peculiar indeed.[27]

This "social and material" deterioration exhibits itself in a number of places in MacInnes's work, but probably nowhere as boldly as in the frustrated pronouncements of the young narrator during the Notting Hill riots. The young man's friend, the Fabulous Hoplite, rejects the notion that his own witnessing of the events of that night will somehow usher in any possibility of change, arguing instead that there is need for "*important*" people to get involved if change is to be made, and the narrator counters:

> Well, Hoplite, let's bring them in too! This is their big opportunity—the one they've been waiting for to prove their words about the kind of country this is! Let's have some of those public figures who haunt the telly studios, to advise us what to do! Let's have the thinkers of the left and right to tell us how they'd handle this one! Not from their home base, but from here! Let's have the bishops and ministers, to hold an inter-racial service in the open air! Isn't this their big chance? And let's have the queen in all her glory, riding through the streets of Napoli, and saying: "You're all my subjects! Each and every one of you's my own!"[28]

The author's own call to action hides, thinly veiled, behind the words of his young character. Invoking Queen and country, both tradition and national pride–if nothing else–should encourage the English to action. The sudden appearance of a charged rhetoric coming from the youth is intended both to shame and to spur his countrymen. MacInnes is nothing if not socially active here, yet he tempers even his own hopeful rhetoric with a skepticism and cynicism that encompasses the whole of Britain, referring to this ruinous set of events ironically as a "big chance," yet holding little actual hope of that advantage being taken by anyone other than himself. Long before Hoplite "shook his head in pity, gave [. . .] a little wave, and blew," it is obvious that MacInnes feels that another opportunity for a much-needed reconditioning of British character has been lost. That anomic atmosphere was characterized by weakness and apathy in MacInnes's view, and could be corrected in literature; at the very least, the works of the day might reflect the possibility of change in a more positive direction.

As MacInnes boldly states in *No Novel Reader*, current complications of the novel form as it relates to events like Notting Hill, are based upon incapacity of perspective and anachronistic tendencies. What worked for the past will not work now. Britain could afford to be inwardly weak in the nineteenth century because it was so geographically and economically far flung; the analogy carries over to the works, perhaps even the authors themselves. They may have been works of little consequence, save for the quality of their writing, but because the works were exemplary of "great wealth and consequence," they need be nothing else. Given the new circumstances of twentieth-century postwar Britain and the world, novels and novelists could no longer

be hollow things, neatly packaged. The luster was gone, and the novelists in addition to the "public figures," "bishops," "ministers," and royal family indicted in the absolute beginner's speech, had a responsibility to be individuals of interior substance and meaning; no longer would luxurious outer workings and inner convolutions serve as a mask. Faced with a loss of outer magnificence, the novel was forced to the interior, and the "inner doubts and potential decay" were laid bare. To believe anything else, he intimates, would be a willful act of the most romantic imagining, something which may well have once had its place but now no longer served any legitimate purpose. MacInnes clearly intended to stay abreast of this rapid shifting of literary conditions by responding to current circumstances through writing that was itself grave and direct.

According to MacInnes, authors must act responsibly, they must realize a need for accountability or answer a call for new assessments of self and nation on behalf of the people of Britain and within the context of a new set of social circumstances, quite unlike those of the pre-war period. The novel could be at least partly responsible for easing tensions and liberating a nation stuck in a postwar rut. Previously utilized for all manner of individual ends and personal agendas, literature could easily become a symbol, if not the agent, of regeneration. His work and the work of others could become, as he described, "their big opportunity—the one they've been waiting for to prove their words about the kind of country this is!" By the mid 1950s, MacInnes was dedicated to testing this theory in very real terms, the fact that it might benefit him personally to do so was in no way a contradiction. On the contrary, personal benefit and enrichment in a

manner both social and financial was absolutely in keeping with this new mode. As the young photographer states in *Absolute Beginners*:

> I shall now disclose my graft, which is peculiar. It's not that I haven't tried what's known as steady labour, both manual and brain, but that every job I get, even the well-paid ones (they were the manual), denied me the two things I consider absolutely necessary for gracious living, namely—take out a pencil, please, and write them down—to work in your own time and not somebody else's, number one, and number two, even if you can't make big money every day, to have a graft that lets you make it *sometime*. It's terrible, in other words, to live entirely without hope.[29]

MacInnes practiced this same philosophy himself. He worked in his own time, and he occasionally did "score big" with a novel or recurring position with the BBC. Such an ideology reveals much about the negotiations between the inside/outside mentality of MacInnes. One could utilize the "system," the inside, in freelance ways, so long as one maintains an outsider attitude while so doing. Ultimately, as with the narrator, the point is for one to subsist on one's own, to avoid becoming one of "the vast majority of squares who are exploited."[30] To exploit, rather than be exploited, is MacInnes's expectation.

This sometimes mercenary attitude toward writing might be read as a disrespect for the literary enterprise or a cynicism about what literature can accomplish, yet just like the young man in *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes cautions against assuming that his

capitalistic attitude reflects an unsophisticated understanding or appreciation of literary atmosphere and capability. One need look no further than MacInnes's approach to previously exhibited, controversial, and ultimately canonical literary efforts to see that he does not affect the standard callow youths' rejection of all things "old," nor the jaded pessimism of the novel form. Instead, he reflects a considered appreciation of even the most recent literary giants, recognizing opportunity, ability, and consequence, followed immediately by a coming-to-terms in an intellectual manner:

> So much has been written about Joyce (and more read, one may fear, than he is), that one need not go on about streams of consciousness, and interior monologues, to remind anyone of his originality; except perhaps to add that, as well as making experimental innovations, he remained, when he wished to, the superb realist he had always been. Suffice it to say, for present purposes, that if no one since has written quite in the manner of Joyce (without falling over their feet, and unless they are Samuel Beckett), an enormous number of writers have been influenced by him (often disastrously) through seeing that, in the hands of a genius, a "novel" (or more properly, a long prose work executed in a form all of its own) can soar off from realism into almost any empyrean, provided the writer's conscious and subconscious remain more or less in control.[31]

MacInnes clearly appreciates the liberating influence that Joyce's work represents for himself, the novel, and other people, both authors and non-authors. As an insider in the world of novel writing yet an outsider in many ways socially, MacInnes obviously

found some symmetry between himself and Joyce. The ability to experiment while still maintaining a "realist" foothold made a great impression on MacInnes in his early days of writing as a fine example of the new type of work he believed was needed. Still, this statement, not at all contradictorily, also represents a hesitation over the intense interiority of Joyce's work at the same time as its methods are championed. "Realism" and "interiority," as MacInnes describes them here, may be presented through the meanderings of an individual mind (or two in Joyce's case), but those "empyrean" meanderings always must be founded in an individual writer's consciousness or unconsciousness.

What arises from this theoretical statement is an interesting conundrum. MacInnes clearly states here and elsewhere that the novelist he prefers, the novelist he wishes to become, must be one who knows himself as thoroughly and in as detailed a fashion as a reader of *Ulysses* might come to know the interior and exterior spaces of Bloom or Dedalus. Beyond that, he must know the subject and the setting of his work as well. This attitude, of course, almost exactly aligns itself with the critical conclusions of F. R . Leavis.[32] That MacInnes represents a Leavisite ideal, or at the very least aspires to it, may be best illustrated by the startling similarities between MacInnes's previous comments on Joyce and Leavis's comments on the ideal poet:

> Poetry matters because of the kind of poet who is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age. He is, as it were, at the most conscious point of the race in his time. [. . .] The potentialities of human experience in any age are realized only by a tiny minority, and the important poet is

> important because he belongs to this (and has also, of course, the power of communication). Indeed, his capacity for experiencing and his power of communicating are indistinguishable; not merely because we should not know the one without the other, but because his power of making words express what he feels is indistinguishable from his awareness of what he feels. He is unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be. He knows what he feels and knows what he is interested in. He is a poet because his interest in his experience is not separable from his interest in words; because, that is, of his habit of seeking by the evocative use of words to sharpen his awareness of his ways of feeling, so making these communicable. And poetry can communicate the actual quality of experience with a subtlety and precision inapproachable by any other means.[33]

Leavis clearly advocates that the artist be an individual with particular sensitivity to the time and places in which he lives. That sensitivity, or ability for fine, astute observation, will convey through the work the "communicable" "ways of feeling." The written productions of such a mind will also transmit far more than sensation. In addition, something quite real, the "actual quality" of the writer's experiences will be communicated. The trick, according to MacInnes's reading of Joyce, must be that the work is only afforded the capacity to meander into the "empyrean" because it is first founded solidly on the basis of legitimate observations of the real and then guided by the conscious and subconscious of the responsible author. Leavis makes the same

connection differently by supposing that the interest in the literary product must be inextricably linked, in fact "indistinguishable" from the "interest in his experience." Leavis made clear that he felt Joyce, in particular, was one who had not observed this mandate, but MacInnes's consideration of the recently-departed Joyce would elevate Joyce as an example of how one might best merge the abilities of sharp observation within one's world and fine control of the language needed to properly speak of it.

MacInnes then began his own search for a subject, both concept and individual for his own attempts to follow in this Leavisite manner. It was only as he began to approach forty years old by the middle of the 1950s that he developed one archetype for his literary "knower": the youth of Britain. Clearly feeling that young men and women were the current arbiters of a desired ability to observe the world and to experience it fully, he sought to become their mouthpiece and use them as his. For MacInnes's extraordinarily fruitful following decade, youth and youths would become half of the combination of British identity through which he would focus his authorial attentions. He had become involved in a form of generational thinking in the world of literature that seemed particularly heightened in the twentieth century. He thought of himself as a distinct member of a generation, his youthful subjects as another, and each successive one discovered new challenges, new aspirations, new problems.

The cultural and theoretical projects of writers like Connolly and Waugh in particular seemed to have failed because they were not in possession of a proper perspective on literature in general or the novel in particular. As Hans Robert Jauss argued in 1967, the "literary work is not an object that stands by itself and offers the

same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence."[34] The point was not entirely to stand in opposition to other generations and to write works that aggressively repudiated past works, but to distinguish oneself from them with clarity of present intention and purpose, leading ultimately to a literature in possession of its own goals, influenced by the past, but beholden only to its own time. Jauss acknowledged that the significance of a particular work, its own history, is "a process of aesthetic reception and production that takes place in the realization of literary texts on the part of the receptive reader, the reflective critic, and the author in his continuing productivity."[35] Generational thinking about literature is the inevitable result of this method. The work is a locus of activity that includes author, reader and critic all acting in relation to the work within the period during which it was composed. Failure to properly situate the work in this manner only led to improper or incomplete understanding of the work by the critic, flat readings by the consumer, or unsuccessful writings by the author.

Theorists such as Harold Bloom identify this proper situation as a type of resistence to what he termed an "anxiety of influence," suggesting that an over-developed sense of responsibility to literary precursors and audience without the proper temperament for the work in relation to its own time can lead an author into awkward anachronism, becoming more and more an issue for concern the better an author understands his craft. The studied author with a sense of his literary precursors and the historical backing of the previous generations can become stymied in his work.[36] The

responsibility of the author who aspires to significance, then, is great. As MacInnes argued in a letter to the editor of *The Twentieth Century*:

> Each generation in our country ought, I suppose (and believe), to be thinking about our people and the world, and doing so at the utmost pitch of whatever experience each of these age groups may have yet acquired. The young, as your texts (and so many other instances) bear witness, seem to me to be thinking harder and more effectively about our nation than do – despite their longer years for collecting fact to feed ideas – the men and women of any elder generation.[37]

The key is to have a mind for the present moment and to write or witness the nation and culture as currently constituted. Such aspirations need not be exclusive of prior experiences and activities, but they cannot allow those considerations to supersede all other concern, as they may often do. The fact that he belongs to the indicted "elder generation" obviously does not deter MacInnes from such a critique; instead it affords him the experiences needed to properly place or dismiss past events and social mores in favor of a more studied view on the current culture.

Clearly feeling that his sensibility and lifestyle were in line in many ways with the youth of Britain, MacInnes embarked on a curriculum designed to explore the freedom and honesty he felt was portrayed by and through the youths of the age. Bergonzi has argued that "MacInnes's hero is not altogether credible, or at least not as a truly representative figure; his monologues, like so much writing of the time, owe a debt to Salinger, and his voice is not always to be distinguished from that of his knowing

middle-aged creator,"[38] yet MacInnes never felt the age discrepancy nor the questionable credibility of the hero to be a problem; he in fact became known in popular media as a cultural commentator on the "teenage question." MacInnes might have seemed out of place in a milk or coffee bar in the 1950s, but his genuine appreciation and understanding for the frustrations of youth and the hope for possibilities, exhibited through his work and in his own life, made clear that one need not be a teenager in order to act in a genuinely concerned manner like one. Who better, then, to demonstrate what Leavis suggested was a desirable "indistinguishable" "capacity for experiencing" coupled with an undeniable "power of communicating"?[39]

Working to exhibit his ability to sympathize with and represent youth, MacInnes designs an encounter between his narrator and a "diplomat" early in *Absolute Beginners*; Mr. Mickey P. tells the young man that he has "a study to complete for my organization on British folk ways in the middle of the century."[40] Representative of the adult who "just doesn't get it," Mr. P goes on to quiz the young man about his views on the two major political parties in Britain. After asserting his profound lack of interest in politics and being admonished for it, the narrator is asked, "Then take the Bomb. What are you going to do about *that*?" He responds:

> "Listen," I said to him. "No one in the world under twenty is interested in that bomb of yours one little bit."
>
> "Ah," said this diplomatic cat, his face coming over all crafty, "*you* may not be, here in Europe I mean, but what of young peoples in the Soviet Union and the USA?"

> "Young peoples in the Soviet Union and the USA," I told him, clearly and very slowly, "don't give a single lump of cat's shit for the bomb."
>
> "Easy, son. How do you know that?"
>
> "Man, it's only you adult numbers who want to destroy one another. And I must say, sincerely, speaking as what's called a minor, I'd not be sorry if you did: except that you'd probably kill a few millions of us innocent kiddos in the process."[41]

Apart from allowing the young narrator a moment to stand up to the authority of an adult, this conversation seems particularly designed for the purpose of affording MacInnes himself the opportunity to stand in support of a youthful perspective of open disdain for the preoccupations of adults and their political fetishes.

These youths MacInnes seeks to champion were quickly becoming citizens of consequence if for no other reason than that they were in possession of capital. As he argued in "Young England, Half English," first printed in *Encounter* in 1957, and later reprinted in *England, Half English*:

> Today, youth has money, and teenagers have become a power. In their struggle to impose their wills upon the adult world, young men and women have always been blessed with energy but never, until now, with wealth. After handing a pound or two over to Mum, they are left with more spending money than most of their elders, crushed by adult

> obligations. They are a social group whose tastes are studied with respect.[42]

This respect, while initially based upon fiduciary capability, quickly extends to other matters of greater social significance. Devoid of adult obligations, they seem to MacInnes more free to experience and express the changing world around them. Typified by the title character of *Absolute Beginners*, born during the Blitz, the new youth of Britain have no illusions or nostalgia for a prewar world order, no inherited reverence for the British Empire. They look upon the world with jaded attitudes, disregard and keen eyes, seeking opportunities only for themselves and failing to show or even acknowledge the need to exhibit any deference to the way things used to be. The new culture of the British teenager had itself become a type of aggressive, colonizing force. Gould suggests:

> Teenagers were the "new classless class"; England's two nations were no longer the rich and the poor, or even the upper and lower classes – Marx and all that was old hat, passé – but teenagers and adults (tax payers). Suddenly, teenagers were the ones with spending money; whole industries were geared to their needs – not just pop music, but the clothing, motor scooter, radiogram, travel, cosmetics, and soft drinks industries as well. Like the Pied Piper himself, teenagers called the tune and, in keeping with their new economic status, they were more mature for their age than earlier generations had been. And now they were just

> as classless, these new teenagers [. . .], so they scorned national boundaries and were, in effect, an international movement.[43]

Given the attitude expressed by the narrator in debate with Mr. P, a disregard for national boundaries and a strong sense of his own power are in evidence, certainly. That disregard, not to be mistaken for indifference, was based largely upon the initial blending of international cultures through pop music, films and advertising.

In the novel that must be read as MacInnes's referendum on youth and progressive attitudes in mass culture, *Absolute Beginners*, a realization of power and opportunity is almost immediately recognized by both author and character, as an alternate version of Joyce's Dedalus epiphany:

> This teenage ball had had a real splendour in the days when the kids discovered that, for the first time since centuries of kingdom-come, they'd money, which hitherto had always been denied to us at the best time in life to use it, namely, when you're young and strong, and also before the newspapers and telly got hold of this teenage fable and prostituted it as conscripts seem to do to everything they touch. Yes, I tell you, it had a real savage splendour in the days when we found that one couldn't sit on our faces any more because we'd loot to spend at last, and our world was to be our world, the one we wanted and not standing on the doorstep of somebody else's waiting for honey, perhaps.[44]

No longer content to wait for handouts from grownups, no longer interested in taking a subordinate role in society, in the considerable economic and cultural vitality of the

younger generation MacInnes finds a source of literary inspiration and a vehicle for writing in the interior and experimental yet observant and realist vein.

That inspiration, the bottled-up energies of many thousands of youths develops far beyond the initial groundswell of bravado into a genuine sense of political and social significance. The teenage movement becomes, by MacInnes's reckoning, an invading army as the absolute beginner, already eighteen (gasp!), looks at his friend "The Wizard" and considers the self-assured and ultimately tragic knowledge that he himself, nearly past his prime, failed to grasp until this moment:

> I think, that he's found out at a very early age what most kids never know, and what it took me years myself to discover – in fact it didn't dawn on me until this year, when the knowledge of it's come too late to use – namely, that youth has power, a kind of divine power straight from mother nature. All the old tax-payers know of this because, of course, for one thing, the poor old sordids recollect their own glorious teenage days, but yet they're so jealous of us, they hide this fact, and whisper it among themselves. As for the boys and girls, the dear young absolute beginners, I sometimes feel that if they only knew this fact, this very simple fact, namely how powerful they really are, then they could rise up overnight and enslave the old tax-payers, the whole damn lot of them–toupets and falsies and rejuvenators and all–even though they number millions and sit in the seats of strength.[45]

The sense of great potential energy, the fear that in a great moment opportunity might be squandered because of an inherent and ironical distrust in organization as a hallmark of age permeates the text. MacInnes's main character frets over this endlessly, becoming all the more frustrated but resigned as the novel continues. He has yielded to this; "It's terrible, in other words, to live entirely without hope."[46] Still, despite the depressive tendencies of youth, he continues to search for some outlet for his energies, some way of both improving his own lot and improving upon the relentless tedium of time and the inevitable aging that comes with it.

For MacInnes, the potential of his own work extend into the realm of the Leavisite as well. He felt great potential was within him to write novels that could document and effect a cultural change. Writing to his friend and frequent correspondent Elspeth Huxley, MacInnes assessed his own writing in the context of both the effects of his characters as characters and their effects as representatives of the genuine possibility of advance and change within real-life Britain and the world:

> For what I have always tried to do (or what the temperament given to me imposes on me), is precisely to "state" the "insoluble" problem as fully and truthfully as I can, and then leave the 'conclusion' as one that may taken many different possible forms. So that when you say to me (on page 3) "I am a little puzzled as to why you think I . . . should actually take sides . . ." then if you are not doing this, then neither is C MacI. . . .

> Have you noticed, in the works of C Mac I, that the amoral, life-using characters are always the dough or yeast in which the one (or two) 'heroic' characters operate in a contrary direction? To take *A Beginners* for example: surrounded by all that dreadful lot, the boy himself is not corrupted; and in crises, reacts precisely in the sense I imagine you would approve of. This is, of course, a very ancient literary device – for example (if you will allow me the comparison) any virtue in Hamlet cannot possibly be made manifest without his operating within the atmosphere of Elsinore. What I am trying to get at is to say (leaping, like a valiant Mum, to the defense of my heroes) is that while things I've written are often deemed to be about "low life", their whole point is this life is not their hero, but the one or two who turn against it in the crisis. Consider even *C of Spades*. Can it be doubted that J Fortune, in his African way, is not defeated by this society? And M Pew in his English way?[47]

Precisely because MacInnes feels that these characters live in a real immoral world, he is able to make "manifest" through them the desire to act, to "take sides," as he admonishes his friend. All of that can be realized through his writing and the mechanisms of youth or racial difference. Fighting against defeat, his characters, and by extension anyone living in the real world who has been threatened with defeat by the "atmosphere" in which they subsist, can turn against it and become a hero. Trying times and difficult days provide the basis for measures of greatness, even if those measures

are only realized regionally or personally, they are opportunities for one to act in the world.

In 1964, MacInnes wrote that "we live today in a very conforming society; we have to adapt ourselves strictly to the rules and regulations we find about us in society, and the opportunities for adventure, the opportunities for a free expression of our own lives are certainly not as great as they were fifty or sixty years ago."[48] Like a teenage Hamlet in Elsinore, the young narrator of MacInnes's second London novel works within the atmosphere of London in the late 1950s, a place of race riots and concerns about the Americans and "the bomb," as an avatar of this spirt of remaining an active outsider within the mouldering inside. Feeling constrained within the confined spaces of postwar Britain in the middle of the century, yet knowing at times "how powerful [he] really [is]," the young narrator, nearly nineteen years old, considers his place in the city to be a significant one in some ways.

Lest one accuse MacInnes of idealizing youth and creating a utopian vision of a London never to be had, "In [. . .] *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes comes to consider more critically the contradictions at the heart of his utopianism, as well as the difficulties in creating a new version of the city from the energies and enthusiasms of youth."[49] MacInnes identifies something tragic and engaging in youth. That frustrated compulsion to respond and act in a rapidly-altering world is something that MacInnes felt and developed in his main character, something he experienced in his own life and profession during this time. His evocations of Hamlet are not without a certain resonance. The period was one of great energy and frenetic movement, but all was

marked for MacInnes with a disturbing lack of real meaning and effect. In a 1959 review of Shelagh Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey*, MacInnes came closer to enumerating this exasperation than perhaps anywhere else:

> As one skips through contemporary novels, or scans the acreage of fish-and-chip dailies and the very square footage of the very predictable weeklies, as one blinks unbelievingly at 'British' films and stares boss-eyed at the frantic race against time that constitutes the telly, it is amazing – it really is – how very little one can learn about life in England here and now. [. . .] This last decade will be remembered as the one in which the biggest social changes happened and the very least was discovered about them by "the arts."[50]

MacInnes frets about an absolute lack of substance. He rejects wholesale all the writing that lacks the backbone of any authentic, transmittable experience. Literature was failing to communicate what was happening in the world – one of its rare, important tasks – and MacInnes virtually fumes over this state of affairs. MacInnes's frustration is based upon the same expectations for social action assessed by Jauss in 1967. Jauss's assessment of the social function of literature argues that the potential for influence inherent in any great work is only present in relation to a learned and self-aware public and an equally learned and self-aware artist: "The social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, performs his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior."[51] *Absolute Beginners* and

City of Spades are designed by MacInnes as formative efforts at documenting a new national character. Through those who refuse allegiance to the old ways and refuse also to be bewitched by the noise of those "fish-and-chip dailies," the arts have a chance to respond to and support hoped-for social changes.

The narrator of *Absolute Beginners* speaks with all the urgency and realization of opportunities for change at the end of the novel. As he waits to embark for Norway, feeling very much an outsider in his own home, escape on his mind, he observes:

> I got a Coke, and went and gazed, and it certainly was a sight! All those aircraft landing from outer space, and taking off to all the nations of the world! And I thought to myself, standing there looking out on all this fable – what an age it is I've grown up in, with everything possible to mankind at last, and every horror too, you could imagine! And what a time it's been in England, what a period of fun and hope and foolishness and sad stupidity![52]

His wonder provides here an interesting counterpoint to the cynicism he expresses in both the same character elsewhere in this text and in his entire body of work. The fact that the unnamed narrator makes a point of identifying that most American of drinks, Coke, speaks in combined fashion to the fascination of English teenage culture with the American pop scene, the commercialized and to some degree indoctrinated nature of these loose-spending youths, and suggests, paradoxically, that while the young man feels a moment of elated association with the possibility of cultural invigoration, that feeling may be little more than a slick packaging on yet another pre-fabricated version of

culture. Still, within all the positivity of the first part of the passage, not to be lost is the wise-beyond-his-years last comment. As frustrated as he has been by the events of the last few days in Notting Hill and throughout London, he still recognizes his home as a place simultaneously full of "fun and hope" as well as "foolishness and sad stupidity," and these are not incompatible concepts for him. At the end of the novel, the unnamed narrator, who has been trying to leave England, first for Rio, then when he could not get a ticket, for Norway–clearly trying to escape to anywhere–does not leave. What makes him stay is not, at least ostensibly, a love of home, of England, but an arrival:

> In taxied a plane, quite close to where I was standing, and up went the staircase in the downpour, and out came a score or so of Spades from Africa, holding hand luggage over their heads against the rain. [. . .] most of them were young like me, maybe kiddos coming here to study, and they came down grinning and chattering, and they all looked so dam [sic] pleased to be in England, at the end of their long journey, that I was heartbroken at all the disappointments that were in store for them. And I ran up to them through the water, and shouted above the engines, "Welcome to London! Greetings from England! Meet your first teenager! We're all going [. . .] to have a ball!"[53]

Presented with these newcomers, the youth cannot help himself. The possibilities they represent and his subsequent fear that possibility might be squashed, pushes him into action. Not as a representative of England but as a representative of teenage spirit and direction, he rushes out to meet them and is immediately is taken into their group; "the

old boy looked me in the face and said to me, 'Greetings!' and he took me by the shoulder, and suddenly they all burst out laughing in the storm."[54] In an ironical move, it is as if the youth has sought and gained acceptance from the arrivals. Despite his efforts at being jaded, "heartbroken at all the disappointments that were in store for them," he seems drawn to them, not so much because he feels he can help them, but because they look so hopeful, so happy. Moving first to welcome them, it is they who welcome him as the novel closes.

As an outsider himself, coming together with newly-arrived outsiders at the close of the novel, MacInnes's youth and the "Spades," both represent for the author not the wide-eyed wonder of the rube, but the guarded optimism of those too young or too "outside" the nation to have been ground down to hopelessness. Between them, they would represent for MacInnes all the possible revitalization and rededication of a post-empire, post-war, mid-century Britain. An ability to be simultaneously impressed with the simplest-seeming developments of the modern world and blasé about one's place in relation to it is not exclusively the domain of youth. Simultaneous to his embarkation upon a literary journey exploring teenage culture and attitudes, MacInnes was obviously struck by an ostensibly different cross-section of the new postwar British culture. The steadily growing community of emigrants from Africa and the West Indies became another furor of interest for MacInnes and fertile ground for the combined realist and fabulist sort of literature he wished to produce. MacInnes's interest in the youth of Britain was a mirror image of his fascination with black emigrant culture, rather than the reverse. That his first novel in the London Trilogy focuses keenly on the "colour

problem" and the growing national debate over immigration policy only further supports his assertion that the emigrant population was in possession of great potential energy as well.

The very title of that first London novel, *City of Spades*, establishes the significance MacInnes was already giving to the swelling population of African and West Indian immigrants in London in the mid-1950s when the novel was written. As if the city itself was already being taken over, the section heading, "Part I: Johnny Fortune hits town" presents the main black character, Johnny MacDonald Fortune, almost as a conquering hero. His arrival stands in stark contrast to the situation of the white, tentative Montgomery Pew, thrown into a job as "Assistant Welfare Officer in the Colonial Department," who possesses no special skill, in fact no sense at all of what he is doing or those he is meant to aid. In the chapter entitled "Pew tentatively takes the helm" the Englishman Montgomery seeks direction from the outgoing occupant of his new post at the Colonial Department:

> "Couldn't you explain, please, my duties to me in more detail? After all, I'm new, I'm taking over for you, and I'd be very glad to know exactly what . . ."
>
> [. . .]
>
> His eye a bored inquisitor's, he said: "You know, at any rate, what you're supposed to be?"
>
> Simply, I answered: "I am the newly appointed Assistant Welfare Officer of the Colonial Department."

"But may I enquire if you know anything about our colonial peoples? [. . .] I mean Negroes. Do you happen to know anything about them?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing whatever?"'

"No."[55]

Serving as a stark contrast to the disaffected ignorance and waspish boredom of Pew is the self-assured and infectiously upbeat Fortune, who upon ending the first meeting with his "case official," expresses an ease and confidence not found in the native Pew:

"Excuse my familiar asking: but where can I get a shirt like that?"

"Like this?"

"Yes. It's hep. Jumble style, but hep."

He reached out a long, long hand and fingered it.

"In Jermyn Street," I [Pew] said with some self-satisfaction, but asperity.

"Number?"

I told him.

"Thanks so very much," said Johnny MacDonald Fortune, "And now I must be on my way [. . .]."[56]

Already fascinated by this dynamism, the staid Mr. Pew cannot help recognizing the relative ease with which Fortune carries himself and watches him exit jauntily "with an unexpected pang," feeling as if he "was executing a tracery of tentative dance steps to

some soft inaudible music."[57] Fortune is obviously not what was expected. In a manner not unlike that of the blithe youths of *Absolute Beginners* to follow, MacInnes found and wrote of a new infusion of vitality and self-assurance on the London scene and the British countenance. That verve was communicated mostly for the sedate Pew by the snappy, easy manner of Johnny Fortune. Alone in an entirely new country, no friends as of yet, with no job, no place to live, and no prospects–Pew is meant to supply those–Fortune seems entirely at ease. When Pew turns to a discussion of the very serious possibilities of difficulty in finding lodging and consistent, reliable wages, Johnny's attention can barely be engaged. Instead, he begins to educate the Colonial officer:

> "Don't Jumbles never skip their rent as well as Spades?"
>
> "I beg your pardon once again?"
>
> "Don't Jumbles . . ."
>
> "Jumbles?"
>
> "You're a jumble, man."
>
> "I?"
>
> "Yes. That's what we call you. You don't mind?"
>
> "I hope I don't . . . It's not, I trust, an impolite expression?"
>
> "You mean like nigger?"
>
> I rose up.
>
> "Now, please! This is the Colonial Department Welfare Office. That word is absolutely forbidden within these walls."

"It should be outside them, too."

"No doubt. I too deplore its use."

"Well, relax, please, Mr Pew. And don't be so scared of Jumble. It's cheeky perhaps, but not so very insulting."

"May I enquire how it is spelt?"

"J-o-h-n-b-u-l-l."

"Ah! But pronounced as you pronounce it?"

"Yes: Jumble."

It struck me the ancient symbol, thus distorted, was strangely appropriate to the confusion of my mind.[58]

Johnny's "distortion" has effect far beyond the co-opting of a favored symbol. He has, in one fell swoop, clearly gotten the better of Pew. MacInnes enacts a reversal of roles and establishes clear distinction between the two men. Their inside and outside relations have been brought to the fore and recognized quite literally in the debate over the use of a racial slur in either context and locale. Pew, trying desperately to fill the administrative role as the insider, acting on behalf of the Colonial Department Welfare Office, moreover representing "John Bull," is entirely outmatched and under-prepared for the vim and self-assuredness of the outsider Fortune.

Pew finds little inside the well-organized dossiers that have been handed over to him that can prepare him for the advance of Johnny MacDonald Fortune. The outsider, coming inside to the colonial center, the very offices of the Colonial Department, within moments of their first meeting, has re-educated Pew on his status as a "Jumble," rejected

his offer of accommodation at a hostel, and in fact gone so far as to suggest that people in England should perhaps co-habituate, "Jumble and Spade, like we let your folk do back home."[59] The rapid dissolution of the distinction between insider and outsider unnerves Pew; he muses: "The interview was not taking a turn I thought appropriate. Equality between races—yes! But not between officials and the public."[60] Clearly beyond his preparations and precious dossiers, Pew barely mounts a defense against the effusive, excited and remarkably at-ease Fortune.

MacInnes constructs this scenario frequently in his work, that of the individual from outside the institutional space getting the better of the representatives inside the institutional space. In this case Pew, surrogate for Britain and very much the insider facing the influx of colonial citizens, officiously awaits the arrival of the outsider: "Primed by my brief study of the welfare dossiers, I awaited, in my office, the arrival of the first colonials."[61] Scarcely seconds after his appearance in the office, Fortune has demonstrated an ease and spontaneous creativity with the language, the city and himself that Pew cannot match. Pew put on a brave face, but admits he is "certainly not so self-assured as [his] dry, drained, rarely perturb-able countenance might suggest."[62] After the continued barrage of questions, excitement, and good will, Pew, having tried to hold his countenance and represent the home country respectably, capitulates: "Really, Mr Fortune. You cannot expect me to discuss these complex problems. I am—consider—an official."[63] Comically, MacInnes depicts an insider, outmatched and under-prepared for even a single outsider. This depiction undermines any absolute relation between those in the nation and those out of it. Fortune, almost the conquering

hero, breezes out of Pew's office as quickly as he breezed in. Already taken with him and his apparent ease with the world, Pew "watched him go out with an unexpected pang."[64] In the space of a single encounter, the outsider, has left an indelible mark on the insider.

Throughout *City of Spades* and *Mr Love and Justice*, MacInnes depicts staid English types repeatedly overwhelmed by the vigorous personalities of one "Spade" after another. It is not Pew who articulates to Fortune the spaces and places of London, bringing him into his new home as a guide and confidant. Rather, Fortune draws Pew into *his* London. The title of the novel does not propose that the city is full of Spades, but that it has become *theirs*. The outsider, moving inside, has himself created a world that demonstrates even the most English of Englishmen can be foreign with in his own city. Most of these newcomers have a manner of ease, creativity and openness that is unmatched in the colonial capital by any representative Englishman, no matter how well he may be prepared for the arrival of that other. Montgomery Pew's very name conjures institutional images of prototypical English church benches, row upon row, symbolic of the tacit obedience to predetermined rules and patterns of behavior, whereas Johhny Fortune's name speaks of a careless, happy and loose pursuit of treasures not to be found in institutional acquiescence. Pew has no answers for Fortune; he cannot even keep up with him, because he is dispositionally incapable:

> What most differentiates an African from an Englishman is that our chief ambition is to put our lives into a savings bank, while he as firmly believes that every day is there to be enjoyed. [. . .] This eager buoyancy

> does not prevent coloured people from falling into deep troughs of sudden gloom, but their melancholy is rarely morbid, and never lasting. Of course, this wonderful instinct for the pursuit and capture of joy goes with a certain fecklessness. They aren't *responsible* in the way so many Englishmen are; but then, so many Englishmen are little else.[65]

Obviously, MacInnes falls here into utilizing types, collectively summarizing the attitudes and standard practices of both groups, but the sentiment behind having done so is obvious; just as with the admirable freedom and openness of teenagers, he can only look with some jealousy and envy at the unfettered, atypically 'English' newcomer to the social scene. MacInnes was quite aware of his problematic position as a middle-aged white Englishman, writing with self-bestowed authority about the black population of London. Such a paradox frequently led to his work being referred to as condescending, even racist. In a particular fit of pique over this conundrum, he wrote to his friend, Elspeth Huxley:

> When C of Spades appeared, I was rebuked both for being "unfair" to English and African society. Tribune said (through the pen of an unusually moronic Caribbean) I had betrayed the coloured races, Mr. Sidney Poitier refused John Osborne's invitation to act in a film of the book because it was "anti-Negro". So what the hell am I?
>
> I am for my people in what I love in them, and against them when I think I see them destroying themselves. I am for their "supremacy" derived from virtue and talent, and against "white supremacy" as an alibi

> for weakness. So far as Africans go, I love and admire them and have no illusions whatever as to their possessing qualities I know they have not.[66]

It was perhaps inevitable that a white, English author would encounter resistance to his desire to write about black culture, something he never encountered in his proclivity for depicting the young, even though he was not himself young. Still, MacInnes was undeterred. Unaccountably, the comments above are themselves the kind of proof MacInnes's detractors might have sought. His stereotyping of Caribbeans and Africans is shameless and unabashed, and yet these comments appear in the context of a letter explaining how he does not engage in such behavior.

Nevertheless, in both his literary life and his personal life, he began to conceive of himself as someone who could help do something about the "Colour Bar" in Britain by dramatizing it in his novels. As he argued to Huxley, his desire was to avert a kind of English self-destruction and to simultaneously apprehend some of the new energy of postwar London in a manner that would inform his writing and English society at large. MacInnes genuinely believed that his writing could achieve something important in Britain and the world. Through his novels and essays he might communicate something essential both to the new emigrant population and to his English brethren. After reading an essay by Huxley in *Encounter* that criticized public figures who she felt provided a romanticized notion of blackness, employing the "noble savage" stereotype, MacInnes responded in a personal letter and began outlining his own positions:

> Feeling myself (no doubt with self-delusion and inverted arrogance) to be one such, I would reply this. It is not because of illusions

> about African virtues. It is not because of disguised hatred of my own country, which I adore. It is not because of a squalid and pretentious contempt for what Europeans in Africa have achieved. [handwritten on the typed letter] It is not because of genuflections to "what must be."
>
> It is because I think that, within the context of life in 1961, it is impossible for an African, and for a European, to confront each other for one single second, and in any situation whatsoever, if this confrontation takes place in a colonial context. And please believe here that what interests me more than what Africans may feel about this (which is after all their business), is what such a relationship, in 1961, will do to Europeans.[67]

MacInnes's desire to clarify the point is itself telling. Despite his frequent socializing with both African and West Indian emigrants, MacInnes can never escape the simple fact that he will always be a figure of suspicion within both the white and black community because of his race and because of his attitude. His tack, stated plainly within the letter to Huxley, was to validate his approach to the problem by making claims on a greater sense of civic pride. He goes on to further argue this point specifically with Huxley: "This – if I may project myself even further into the foreground for a little longer – was what *Absolute Beginners* was about, just as, in another way, *City of Spades* was: both portraits of what happened to English people, rather than Afro-Caribbean, when we reacted to the confrontation with these peoples in terms of sickness and denial."[68] His explanation, then, of why he is allowed to write about the

plight of blacks in London is not that he feels himself to be one of them, but that he recognizes that, through them, white Britons have been themselves revealed.

In *Absolute Beginners*, as the young narrator encounters his friend the Wizard at a White Protection League rally, the disappointment and shame MacInnes has spoken of in his own correspondence is dramatized:

> Then I looked at Wizard. And on my friend's face, as he stared up at this orator, I saw an expression that made me shiver. Because the little Wiz, so tight and sharp and trim and dangerous, had on a little smile, that showed his teeth a bit, and his wiry little body was all clenched, and something was staring through his eyes that came from God knows where, and he raised on his toes, and shot up his hands all rigid, and he cried out, shrill like a final cry, "Keep England white!"[69]

The fist-raising vehemence of the young Wizard, whom the narrator had earlier described as someone with promise, "a lot of teenage living to do," is now representative of the problem, that element of the city and the nation with no sense of the possibilities of the emigrant community. He is an exemplar now of the "sickness and denial" about which MacInnes wrote to Huxley; far too many Britains were falling prey to prejudice and discrimination on both sides of the issue.

Britain was in danger of becoming an unrecognizable place to MacInnes. Because of the prejudices and vehemence taking over in many communities, something was being lost: his pride in Britain, in London in particular. The young narrator laments:

> I don't even understand my own country any more. [. . .] In the history books, they tells us the English race has spread itself all over the dam [sic] world: gone and settled everywhere, and that's one of the great, splendid English things. No one invited us, and we didn't ask anyone's permission, I suppose. Yet when a few hundred thousand come and settle among our fifty millions, we just can't take it.[70]

In echoes of MacInnes's personal concerns, the narrator fears that the British public is forgetting itself. An overdeveloped sense of nation that mistakenly does not already include the colonial and Commonwealth citizens as part of the "we" that Britain represents is a tragically limited one. That exclusionary logic has in turn left the colonial citizens without a sense of themselves in relation to the mother country. The narrator's debate continues: "I've got a brand new passport. It says I'm a citizen of the UK and the Colonies. Nobody asked me to be, but there I am. Well. Most of these boys have got exactly the same passport as I have—and it was *we* who thought up the laws that gave it to them. But when they turn up in their dear old mother country, and show us the dam thing, we throw it back again in their faces!"[71] The new arrivals have been denied a part of themselves. The narrator of *City of Spades* observes that the convolutions of nationhood and location have created a situation in which "they were still a mystery to themselves."[72] This denial of identity is the shame of Britain, according to MacInnes.

In the *New Statesman* in 1967, MacInnes took his frustration directly to the people of Britain, appealing if nothing else to their eroded sense of British supremacy and

employing scare-tactics as a method of convincing of the need for a change. He wanted his countrymen to realize that

> in our dealings with black Britons, two alternatives now face us. One is to recognise that they are Britons, just as we are, and entitled to (not 'granted') total equality of economic and social rights–not next year, sometime, never, but at once. The other is to continue politely to reject them, and create hostile black ghettos in our country–which will certainly result in what we call "disturbances" or "incidents."[73]

Failing to move with these arguments, MacInnes hoped to play further on a sense of shame:

> Often, it seems to me, when we speak with outraged contempt of the conduct of white southerners in the US, we fail to realise that we, too, created, in the West Indies, a "deep south" of our own. Being a maritime, not a land power like America, we did this overseas. Yet the parallels are startling. And just as the southern blacks have moved up to the industrial north, so have the agricultural Caribbeans come here. And just as few southerners seem to realise that southern blacks are literally their own cousins, so do we fail to realise the same reality about that charming (but very angry) fellow taking tickets on the bus.[74]

The article from which both of these quotations are drawn was written during the time in which MacInnes had begun to involve himself in the black power movements in Britain. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Britain in December 1964, Malcolm X in February

1965, and a number of politically active groups arose almost immediately after. MacInnes was virtually the only non-black individual who was allowed to participate on a high level within these groups. He became a close associate of Michael de Freitas, also known as "Michael X," the leader of the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS).[75] Of course, it may have been as much a political move on X's part, given that all three novels in the London Trilogy had been published and acclaimed for many years; MacInnes had emerged in some circles as an authority on the "colour problem" in Britain.

Nevertheless, MacInnes was willing to openly criticize the English tendency to feel superior to Americans over such prejudices. Articles and editorials abound in this time decrying the riots and racism in the southern US but failing to acknowledge the dangerous albeit smaller-scale problems occurring in metropolitan and rural England. He also clearly expresses the prevailing Labour party position that these emigrants are a legitimate part of British economy and society and had best be accommodated before the exclusionist policies of the Tories lead to widespread hostilities between colonials at home and abroad.

Ultimately, MacInnes was not to be deterred by the attitudes of those reluctant to understand the emigrant community as one of great potential, not only within and for itself, but as an indicator of what Britain herself might be capable of. As with the teenager, the emigrant is representative of the possibility of a revitalized Britain. In an effort to communicate the importance of tolerance and call for an embrasure of the vivacity presented in this most unique of times in the nation's history, MacInnes often

spoke quite personally about his attitude toward the emigrant communities. In an essay published in *New Society* in 1972, only a few years before his death, he identified the three things that these communities had introduced into his own life:

> 1. Patience, tolerance and kindness beyond words.
>
> 2. A vision, through them, of what a society looks like when you've none of the privileges and most of the handicaps.
>
> 3. How to write English . . . I have borrowed shamelessly from African and West Indian English – neither of which are 'broken English' but fresh, re-created English languages of their own.[76]

Members of these communities can certainly be counted among those closest to MacInnes throughout his life, and the ability to envision London from their perspective while revitalizing his use of language was undoubtedly a major component of his success as a writer.

A contrasting hostility toward blacks had been in evidence in various places and ways throughout the city for quite some time and was generally ignored on both sides, as much as could be borne. Many felt that "to be an immigrant anywhere else in London meant that, out in the open, you ran a gauntlet of hostility, until you were safely forted up behind locked doors. It was only in Notting Hill that there was a public life. Clubs, restaurants, cafes, music, street corner talk. This was the work of the immigrants, many of them bad boys who set out to make Notting Hill a playground where bad boys could have fun."[77] So long as these communities remained a safe haven, as long as each group was afforded a space, blacks and whites managed an uneasy peace in the city. After the

events of 1958, there could no longer be any denial; the hostilities were no longer unspoken. MacInnes wrote:

> The key events here were the riots at St. Ann's Well, Nottingham, and in Notting Vale (not "Notting Hill" by the way: it all happened to the north-west, a quarter of a mile away or further). Now, as race riots go these days, neither was very large: no one was killed in either place, though hundreds were injured, frightened or insulted. Nor were the whites who provoked the riots in any sense representative of the population as those who do so are in South Africa or the southern States of the US. They belonged to a rootless, self-destroying, lumpen fringe, detesting because self-detesting.[78]

His desire to explain that the rioters were not representative of the general population may have been wishful thinking on his part, for while those wielding bottles and bike-chains may have been members of a "lumpen fringe," others who witnessed the violence and did nothing were not:

> And about those who watched, I saw something new to me, and which you may find quite incredible—but I swear it's the truth I'm telling you—they didn't even seem to *enjoy* themselves particularly–I mean, seeing all this—they didn't shout, or bawl, or cheer; they just stood by, out of harm's way, these English people did, and *watched*. Just like at home at evening, with their Ovaltine and slippers, at the telly.[79]

All are not equally guilty, perhaps, but MacInnes makes clear that all are implicated. As much as he may have hoped it to be an isolated incident, MacInnes did realize rather quickly that something had been revealed in Notting Hill that could not be covered up. A certain kind of innocence, or an ability to feign it, had been lost in the riots. Gould catalogs the reaction thus:

> That was the true significance of the Notting Hill race riot, as MacInnes instantly grasped. Even before the dust had settled he was suggesting to his publisher that someone should write an instant book [writing in a memo to Reg-Davis Poynter] – "My guess is that it will seem, with Suez, they key event of the post-war period." Just as Suez spelt out, for the benefit of any lingering doubters, the end of the era of British world dominance, so Notting Hill put paid to the idea that we could still claim any kind of *moral* leadership.[80]

A loss of goodwill, a loss of carelessness, and a loss or moral certainty are all bitter pills for MacInnes to swallow, and both the results and the blame are to be shared:

> What horrified me about the "happenings" in London W II in September 1958 was not so much what was done to Afro-Caribbeans, as what my fellow countrymen were doing to themselves. Each milk bottle cracked down on an Afro-Caribbean skull was a dagger with which my fellow bottle-wielders were stabbing into their own soul, and mine, and their country's honour.[81]

What had been damaged were the narrative possibilities of London as it represented Great Britain--not how the nation had been, but how it might have been. Times had changed, there was certainly no doubt of that. MacInnes recognized the shifting nature of the metropole and the nation and supposed that through his work he might aid that change, at the very least document it. By so doing, he was enabling his own growth and expression, attempting to encourage the same in others, and displaying a love and respect for his country and city that he was often accused of lacking. It is the imperative of the author and the free mid-century mind "To give shape to this poetic mess — to form, in his mind's eye, the private city of his own imagination — each Londoner can create, in his thoughts, a city entirely his own"; one need hardly add that MacInnes hoped his London, "city of any dream"[82] might become an actuality, something to be reported through essays and non-fiction, not held only within the pages of a novel.

Chapter 3–

Talking to the Colour Black:

Samuel Selvon and the Work of a Lonely London

As an author who has come to outline a project of postwar nationality and definition of self in relation to the adopted homeland, V. S. Naipaul has undoubtedly placed himself among the more well known, if not the more well-regarded postwar British novelists seeking to accomplish some redefinition of what it means to be an outsider, coming to the inside of the colonial space. A representative of the outsider perspective, often described generally in post-colonial studies as an "other,"the "subaltern" or the "subject," Naipaul has admitted that he owes a significant literary debt to the work of Samuel Selvon. The two authors were active during the same mid-century period, but Selvon began a concerted effort toward discussion of the individual emigrant as constituted by and in relation to the imperial home well before Naipaul began to examine his own past in relation to Britain. Naipaul, who focused much of his energies early on in the direction of composing narratives about his homeland, once declared, "because Sam has written so authentically he has made it easier for the rest of us who want to make people talk the way they do. Sam was the first man, and I think we ought to give him credit for this, who made it possible."[1] Naipaul refers specifically to Selvon's innovative use of dialect or patois as the most remarkable facet of his work. Closer examination of Selvon's most well-known novel, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956),

reveals that both Naipaul's recognition of Selvon and a preferment of Selvon's work in a greater sense may begin with such a stylistic appreciation but is only complete when one properly acknowledges that Selvon's narrative methods only begin a sustained effort, the goal of which is to communicate the full range of experiences and vitality within his the city and communities depicted in his work.

The Lonely Londoners is a problematic novel, surely. The experiences, events, and identities within the work are carefully arranged in order to appear paradoxically jumbled together within the narrative. The novel focuses mainly on Moses but frequently dips in and out of his perspective, moving around and refocusing. At one moment journalistic and direct, at others philosophic and emotional, the novel is not easily bound by any simple distinctions of non-fiction, fabulation, or narrative form. In writing *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon refers often to the act of writing, so much so that many readers have confused Moses's narrative with the novel itself. Still, Selvon works skillfully inside and against the bounds of documentary as well. The various characters who move within and through Moses's circle each have opportunities for narrative themselves. They are introduced, in most cases their backgrounds are explained in historical detail, each presenting a type, yet simultaneously being distinct, unique and individual.

The content of their own literary creations, of Selvon's literary creation, is determined by the interplay of the notions of these individuals spanning a gap as well. Georg Lukács argued that the form of the novel is always marked by a "homesickness," which is symptomatic of the "rift between 'inside' and 'outside', a sign of the essential

difference between the self and the world, the incongruence of soul and deed."[2] Acknowledging this incongruity, the novel form is particularly adept at expressing a "transcendental homelessness."[3] Such an aptitude for the exilic subject affords the novel an ability for representation that may encompass the individual and the collective, particularly in the West Indian emigrant community in London in the 1950s. Selvon's London novels emerge from apparitional sense of placelessness, defy clear description and standards of narrative and subject the reader to a loss of clear definition in relation to the texts, generating an odd sense of comfort to be found in exile while simultaneously establishing recognition of a common isolation that is in turn itself a paradoxical bond. That apparitional sense becomes concrete and far more literal within the community of the West Indian novel. Exile is foregrounded as a primary concern for the Lonely Londoners, and their condition is oddly only exacerbated by social interaction.

In a manner consistent with MacInnes, for Selvon the novel form was particularly apt for negotiating the tension between the apparently conflicting impulses of the realist and the fabulist that were generated by his need to explicate and speak of the also conflicting notions of self and place generated through exile and placelessness. Trinidad-born, Selvon became a writer in the islands as a young man in the 1940s before becoming an exile; he set out to dramatize the widest possible range of immigrant experiences. Selvon's novel works on the tension between what is artfully designed and what is documentary in order to communicate as fully as possible the "transcendental homelessness" of which Lukacs has spoken while simultaneously dramatizing the very

real and historically specific homelessness of the West Indian emigrant in London. In so doing, Kenneth Ramchand argues Selvon has struck a tentative yet unique balance: "*The Lonely Londoners* is a work of imagination. Our understanding of its relevance to the social world from which it draws its material is enhanced by our first responding to it as fiction, something that has been made up, in this case, out of fairly recognisable material."[4] While this assessment is correct insofar as the work straddles the line between the recognizable and the foreign, the problems presented by Ramchand's proposition begin with the assumption that the reader must begin reading with notions of the work as completely manufactured. Prioritizing the novel as fiction, only considering its relation to the real world as a secondary and exceptional curiosity is already to have limited the capability of the work to engage the reader. This given also presupposes that the novel, *any* novel, must be relevant to the social world from which it draws its material, but fails to account for the possibility that a novel may actually be intended as formative *of* a social world. To say that Selvon's novel has been made up of "recognisable material" is, of course, itself dubious on a number of levels; most importantly, to whom is it familiar? After all, *The Lonely Londoners* is a novel about those newcomers to Britain from the West Indies and other colonial outposts, told exclusively from their point of view. Ramchand's assumption that the novel is the stuff of reality then presupposes an understanding of a wide range of emigrant experiences that is unlikely to be found in any individual or most collections of individuals. To legitimize this position perhaps Ramchand should add "as a type" to his "recognisable." Selvon's material may well be drawn from the experiences of real Trinidadians, Barbadians,

Nigerians and others in London, yet it is unlikely that he supposes or even that Ramchand supposes that any reader of the novel is meant to recognize the characters as real life individuals as opposed to types. Thus while Ramchand's initial point appears valid, we must simultaneously acknowledge the novel as both imaginative and realistic; one cannot achieve priority over the other.

As an instance of Selvon's particular approach to this problematic novel, *The Lonely Londoners* indeed bridges the gap between fabulation and reportage while it simultaneously challenges the expectation of a singularity of voice implied by the notion of the novel as an imprint of solitary focus. Selvon's allegiance to the real and the confusion of the exilic and isolated nature of the novel itself is achieved primarily though a narrative which aims to collect as many voices as possible and present them singularly. The task is far from easy. The voice of *The Lonely Londoners* seems to be simultaneously plural and singular, focused both on historically relating the events of the lives of a group of emigrants in London and upon an individual as the center of this group. Even more than MacInnes, Selvon complicates the relationship between the empirical and the fictional. The voices in the novels are realistic imitation, and as a mimetic work, *The Lonely Londoners* clearly attempts to provide a true depiction of the experience of being an inside outsider in London, but the work contains much that is also directed toward the cultivation of goodness, beauty, delight, and instruction, demonstrating the city as a place of possibility for an intense realization of self and of one's place in relation to others.

Despite the clear sophistication of the various levels of the novel, the mechanism of narration in *The Lonely Londoners* collects the majority of attention in most every critical assessment. The narrative voice most often appears to be the voice of Moses himself, as many have argued in various ways. In a "Special Preface"to the 1991 edition of *Moses Migrating* (1983), Selvon acknowledges and playfully complicates the questions about narrative agency in the previous work. The preface, attributed to "Moses Aloetta Esq. By way of Sam Selvon"[5] both admits knowledge of the debate over the narrative source of *The Lonely Londoners* and seeks to confound any definite answer:

> It have a lot of myths and legends and nancy stories that circulate since I, Moses Aloetta Esq., presented my credentials to the literary world. [. . .] The author has often been asked how much of the books is himself, or the fictional character, or the actual person who inspired him. In the process of creativity, unknowingness is the quintessence that propels me—I want to know as much as the reader what happens next, or what shit "Moses" is going to come up with, and when I emerge, your guess is as good as mine as to who is the culprit. So that when literary critics—seeing some significance in the name as the Biblical Moses who led his people out of bondage—as me, "were you thinking of that when you were writing about your Moses and the black immigrants settling in England,"I can only say, "no, the name is common in Trinidad, and I just pull it out of a hat." But they dig and delve. Look for plot and sub-plot. Climax and anti-climax, purpose and motive. The machinations that went on in my mind

> whilst I was writing, if I had them all the time I would be writing books like peas.[6]

Frustratingly, humorously, Selvon adopts the position of himself, writing Moses Aloetta Esq., writing himself. "The author," who one may first assume is Selvon, but who is revealed as "I," "Moses" and is in turn himself neither Selvon nor the author Moses, suggests he, as a reader himself, is as often surprised by the novel's character Moses as any one else. In the preface to the 1985 Longman edition of *The Lonely Londoners*, Ramchand, representing those "literary critics" to whom Selvon refers, suggests that when Moses is "wondering if he could ever write a book like that, what everybody would buy," that "*The Lonely Londoners* is the book Moses would have written."[7] The matter becomes further complicated the longer one examines it. In his preface to the 1984 Caribbean Writers Series edition of *Moses Ascending* (1975), Mervyn Morris begins rightly enough: "'I', who? Moses, though an integrating consciousness, is neither narrator nor author of *The Lonely Londoners*." Yet as Morris continues, things seem to fall apart: "But at the end of that novel it is as though we have been reading the very book that Moses, cogitating, wonders if he could write: Moses and the omniscient author/narrator seem to merge."[8] Tying critics up in knots was not Selvon's goal. Rather than plainly state that Selvon writes Moses, who writes Moses, Selvon so convolutes the matter that it would appear clear that his intention is actually to render the question both inappropriate and irrelevant.[9] In the end, who wrote what in the mechanism of the novel itself is irrelevant. As Selvon suggests at the close of his Moses-penned-about-Moses preface, "remember there is more in the mortar than the pestle."[10]

The narrative thus creates irony. After all, one of the most basic points made by the novel is that while these immigrants are seen by the larger London community as representatives of a kind, Selvon clearly exhibits their variety through personality, experience, dialect, backgrounds, and perhaps most importantly, through their individual associations with nationality and homeland. Assumptions that begin by collecting all of the outsider emigrants into a homogenous groups are revealed to be patently false. They are not *all* outsiders, they are *each* an outsider. Reading the novel, one can recognize that Galahad and Cap are utterly and entirely different people, not just because they have different names and are from Trinidad and Nigeria respectively, but because the Nigerian and Trinidadian experiences of emigration and residence in Britain are fundamentally different. Certainly, these two fellowship with one another, identify themselves as members of a social group, but Selvon never suggests that they are the same. Recognizing this difference is key to an understanding of the novel and of Selvon's intentions. This recognition has more to do with admitting our own limitations in understanding as readers than it does in addressing inherent prejudices or prevailing notions of racism. Such tendencies, after all, are natural when one faces the unfamiliar, as Selvon expressed in a *Kunapipi* essay:

> But more than anything else, my life in London taught me about people from the Caribbean, and it was here that I found my identity. I had no desire to shed my background and cultivate English ways and manners. I was discovering a pride, a national pride, in being what I am, that I never felt at home. That was one of the things that immigration meant to me.[11]

Leaving home for the unfamiliar confines and communities of London gives the immigrant Selvon an opportunity to observe himself from without, in a sense. As he suggests, being in London made him realize what it meant to be "Caribbean" as opposed to being a "colonial." Further, it allows Selvon to understand himself as serving the dual role of representation and individuality, something his characters do throughout *The Lonely Londoners.* Moses and Galahad are both from Trinidad, and despite the initial similarities on the train platform, Moses seeing Galahad as a younger, more ignorant and wide-eyed version of himself, they clearly are revealed to be entirely different persons. They each represent Trinidad, true enough, but they represent Trinidad as a place with as much a variety of people as anywhere else, certainly London included. Among the immigrant community Moses finds himself not simply as one among many but as one among a collection of ones. Tolroy, Cap, Daniel, Bart, Big City, Five-Past-Twelve and Harris are no more he than he is they, yet as a group they come to form a community of their own. Certainly some of their experiences are similar, as surely as the prejudices they face and the hardships they encounter, but these are the things that bring them together even while they each seek to discover themselves within the context of their new home.

Selvon maintained, "I have never thought of myself as an 'exile'"; that is, he did not think of himself as being a member of that large, unwieldy group of those out-of-place and perpetually not-at-home in the world, but instead he felt himself to be complete wherever he happened to be; "I carried my little island with me, and far from assimilating another culture or manner I delved deeper into an understanding of my

roots and myself." He makes it clear that without leaving home, he would be incomplete: "Immigrating did that [self-understanding] for me, and provided the nourishment I could not find in the island to foster my creativity. I feel I do more for myself and my country by being abroad than I would have had the opportunity to do if I had stayed."[12] Only in London, says Selvon, "did my life find its purpose."[13] Sushelia Nasta explains this interpolation:

> Selvon's sojourn in London from 1950 to 1978 acted as a creative catalyst in the development of his art, enabling links to be drawn between the two preoccupations of his fiction: Trinidad and London. Through the encounter with London, it became possible to move, on the one hand, towards a more fully realised picture of the world back home and, on the other, to define and establish a Caribbean consciousness within a British context.[14]

London "nourished" Selvon. Through his "creativity" he was able to "do more" for himself and country than would have been possible had he stayed in Trinidad. Yet the mere act of immigration itself was not as much the key as was the fact that he found himself in London, the beating heart of the empire. All cities have their charms, but as the narrator of Selvon's short story "My Girl and the City" explains, there is something particular about London; "When I was in New York, many times I went into that city late a night after a sally to the outskirts, it lighted up with a million lights, but never a feeling as on entering London. Each return to the city is loaded with thought, so that by the time I take the Inner Circle I am light as air."[15] Having discovered in London a new

motive for writing and a narrative perspective that would both challenge him and the reader to more fully consider the nature of perspective in the relationships between audience, author, character, and community, Selvon determined that he would take one further creative step. As he describes, "I started to make notes, and when I returned to England I sat down to write *The Lonely Londoners*. I couldn't make any headway; was totally frustrated until I realised that I was using the wrong kind of the right English. I tried the 'nation language' of the English-speaking Caribbean, and everything fell smoothly into place."[16] In so doing, Selvon devised a manner of narration that, beyond simple confusions over authorial location in relation to or within the text, is able to produce complicated social, political and historical implications in part because of his design in making the mode of storytelling a character in and of itself.

The opening lines of the novel, "One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the light showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet," make quite clear that Selvon has determined that in many ways the city of London is itself a kind of dream-like, liminal space.[17] Not unlike the "city of any dream" that Colin MacInnes envisioned in his work, Selvon's London was to be a place in which the individual can express his individual nature; he may even imprint it on the city. That space, formerly familiar to some, would then perhaps become foreign, not as "known." Making the familiar unfamiliar, indistinct and "strange" already promotes Selvon's capacity for communicating the newness and awe felt by a newcomer to a place already understood for some. The restlessness communicated through these first lines, in

combination with the doubly-foreign notions of the city as a strange, otherworldly space removes any sense of familiarity that might afford a false perception of understanding for the narrative and characters to come. The use of "it" in the second clause is disconcerting. The indefinite pronoun does little to acquaint the reader with the meaning of the sentence. Already, things seem uncomfortable. Is London "it"? A general state of being? This "grim" place, covered in Prufrockian fog, is London.[18] But no London "we" know. Selvon tells us this place may as well be on "another planet"; for Moses, it is indeed. Very quickly, the reader is lured by jaunty, indistinct language and initiated into both the peculiar syntax and diction of the novel while simultaneously being re-introduced to London, different.

The particular patois that Selvon created and first used in *The Lonely Londoners* is undoubtedly the most well-known aspect of this work. But, it is often misinterpreted or miscalculated in the critical analysis of Selvon's novel. That subtle but important all-too-frequent misinterpretation can be seen in different ways in the following typical descriptions:

> This was the first time in West Indian literature that a writer had managed to put Caribbean speech, with all its intricacies and subtle rhythms, onto the page not as a curiosity, not as something exotic, but natural as sunlight. Caribbean language suddenly found a narrative voice of its own.[19]
>
> Selvon, probably the finest Creole writer in prose to date, shows how perfectly attuned Caribbean dialect is to conveying this, especially when

> further isolated amid the standard English speech of his novels set in England. The simplicity of language and sentence structure allows no escape from the naked truth of man's predicament.[20]

The essential argument made in each case here, indeed made in most commentaries about Selvon's dialect, is that the narrative register of *The Lonely Londoners* is Caribbean language dialect or a creole-English. It is in fact none of these things, as none of them exists. The tone, diction, and rhythms of Selvon's narrative are entirely a fabrication. What Taylor has right in the first instance above is that this fabrication is not presented as a "curiosity" or as "exotic" but as completely unaffected.

There are several thousand islands in the Caribbean Sea; among those islands are present and former colonies from dozens of Western European nations, as well as diaspora of both Asian and African populations, among others—in other words innumerable combinations of innumerable dialects. The English language has a complicated history in the Caribbean, and George Lamming recognizes Selvon as an author with a preternaturally strong aptitude for communicating the sophistications and varieties of that history. Lamming argues that Selvon's "peasant tongue has its own rhythms [. . .] and no artifice of technique, no sophisticated gimmicks leading to the mutilation of form, can achieve the specific taste and sound of Selvon's prose."[21] In previous times, Lamming goes on to argue, literacy and an aptitude for language were considered only the trappings of a middle class or elite English-speaking audience; the English novel was beyond the register of the West Indian or peasant, not insofar as consumption, West Indian children were raised reading English literature in the schools

curriculum, but in insofar as they were denied access to the novels by dint of any manner of connection and collusion with the subjects and concerns of the works, symbolized primarily through the language. Selvon changed that by repossessing the form as an artifact of "the people's speech, the organic music of the earth."[22] Selvon has not simply observed language in the wild, among those thousands of islands, and recreated it on the page with unconventional spellings. He has invented a language, which even he finds difficult to describe. His purpose in having done so is to generate a fuller sense of the community, the world in which the novel takes place. That sense cannot be found within any individual, but is only communicable through the fabricated perspective Selvon engages. Sandhu has argued that it is all born of a "determination not to overlook the seemingly mundane, to render the burr and plod of the lives of unexalted peoples," and suggests that it "courses through all of Selvon's work. It was through his linguistic innovation that he made the quotidian vivid."[23] It is not self-conscious artifice in that Selvon does not seek to call attention to himself by breaking off and commenting slyly to the audience at any point. The cant of Selvon's narration does not falter; there are no lacunae. In so doing, the narrative voice is communicated as a sincere voice; devoid of pretensions, the voice of the novel can be trusted, should be trusted. Selvon's choice is then revealed as clever artifice in a different way. He has not written in a simple manner because he is incapable of writing otherwise, nor has he written simply because he believes the stories are simple to tell. The narrative voice of *The Lonely Londoners* appears as sincere, simple, and unpretentious because it is a necessary part of Selvon's ideological goals for the work. The composition of a rhetoric

that communicates its own sincerity through simplicity allows Selvon to take greatest advantage of those most likely to make assumptions about what a West Indian in London may look like or sound like, how he may *be*, all while communicating the depths and intellect of many people on multiple levels. Ramchand argues: "The language of *The Lonely Londoners* is not the language of one stratum in the society, not the language of the people (meaning 'the folk' or the peasantry), but a careful fabrication, a modified dialect which contains and expresses the sensibility of a whole society."[24] The implication of this seamlessness is that this is the language of this place, this narrative space, of London–or certain parts of it–not simply the language "they" speak when they arrive "here." This language simply is this London.

The result is that one of the most important things about Selvon's first London novel is the manner in which he wrote it in the first place. Sushelia Nasta has argued that "it is in this area of language - a language *for* rather than *against* identity - that Sam Selvon's writing holds such an important and influential position."[25] Nasta reasons that contextually, Selvon's great contribution, in fact a "step forward in the process of decolonisation," was that he chose not to follow "more standard modes of portraying unlettered characters in traditional fiction."[26] In assigning the narrative method such an onerous political and social role, Nasta is not overselling *The Lonely Londoners*, yet she does perhaps make mistakes similar to those leaps typified by Louis James and Jeremy Taylor. The method and the voice of narration bridge the "difficult gap of perspective between the teller of the tale and the tale itself," but they do so in a way that does not simply suggest that this voice is capable of narration, that the subaltern *can* speak, to

borrow Gayatri Spivak's phrasing.[27] What is narrated is *not* West Indian, not London, but something entirely both. This *is* the language of these stories, not simply another character; the narrative method does not bridge the gap between the "teller of the tale and the tale itself." It demonstrates conclusively that the teller of the tale is the tale and the tale is the teller.

That teller-and-tale dichotomy helps to form the basis upon which another distinctive facet of Selvon's novel may be discovered. By looking into the manner in which the teller addresses the racial problems occurring in England in the middle of the century, one might expect to find certain preconceptions of frustration, aggravation, even outrage. The predictable expectation might be that Selvon's work as a black West Indian immigrant will be preoccupied with writing directly and frustratedly about issues of race almost exclusively. Doing so would perhaps be admirable, but could easily be accomplished through all manner of far less interesting, effective, and artful ways. Selvon has much greater skill and a greater interest for marking something unique about the manner in which language is tied to identity and exile than that. As Spivak argues, the point of criticizing the colonial center in its own language would not be to "describe 'the way things really were'" in an attempt to either praise of criticize imperial history and activity, but to challenge such descriptions by making accessible the "narrative[s] of reality" among those directly influenced and affected by imperial policy, now come to the imperial center.[28] Many critics have followed this argument through its first conditions as a way of looking at things as they are without following to completion Selvon's implications regarding how these things came to be or how circumstances

influenced those subject to that reality on a personal, local level. After describing how "racial discrimination was ubiquitous and continuous" in the period, Alan Sinfield observed:

> Sam Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* seeks to mediate generously between Caribbean and English attitudes. Blacks coming to London bring with them their customs of relating and their expectations about Britain. Generally, a genial air pervades the book, though some of the presentation of Blacks is defensively whimsical. However, there is also a persistent stain of perplexity and sadness (not resentment) at the unfairness, prejudice and hostility they encounter. [. . .] It is only as you put the novel down that you may recall that no white English person has spoken with more than politeness (and sometimes less) to a Black all through.[29]

Sinfield suggests here that Selvon's "generous" and "genial" air is a bit of a disappointment, that his "defensively whimsical" portrayal of blacks is less than one may hope for, but ultimately he recognizes that the truth of the matter, as Selvon's work implicitly argues was the truth of the matter at the time, is that open conflict over racial issues was truly rare. Notting Hill was traumatic but was not the rule of the day. Selvon simultaneously makes it clear through the structure and manner of the novel itself that he is not attempting to lessen the significance of direct racially motivated conflicts, but his portrayal is of the "persistent stain of perplexity and sadness" of those affected by the thousand tiny cuts of day-to-day racism. He does so, not because he is beholden to

talk about racism as a black author, but because racial troubles are a fact of living in the city, and he wishes to convey that life, warts and all.

Racial hostility and prejudice is not always driven by only those individuals who are open with their negative attitudes. During one of his more sanguine moments, Moses describes this circumstance to Galahad, "Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk."[30] The directly hostile can be easy to spot, avoid, and in the end, are easy to understand. The real problematic ones are those who purport to be "open-minded," even most desiring to "help," who still hold a grim view of the colonials they are trying to aid, treating them like simpletons – worse still, like animals – all in the name of progressive, socially-responsible behavior. Despite his well-meaning nature, the hapless and initially clueless Montgomery Pew in Colin MacInnes's *City of Spades* is a fine example of this type. Full of institutional good will, he shows himself to be as enured and accepting of certain racist preconceptions of black emigrants as anyone. *The Lonely Londoners* also addresses this problem quite openly, from depictions of women and men who sexualize and exoticize the newcomers, treating them as objects, to anecdotes of black men and women who themselves revel in anti-social behavior. Selvon confronts the real problems with assimilation, integration and progression by depicting all shades of the conflict quite openly.

Selvon indicates also that Britain was not dealing with a concerted, homogenized immigrant population, but rather a great mélange of people and attitudes. The characters in Selvon's novels are not black West Indians. They are Nigerian, Barbadian,

Trinidadian, Jamaican, and myriad others. They recognize the sometimes great, sometimes small cultural differences between themselves and others. They come to a point of defining themselves collectively not because of their origins but because of the clear and apparent demarcation established in Britain between "us" and "them." At the same time, however, the variety of difference, uniqueness and individuality that Selvon takes great care to establish throughout the work severely undermines simple us-and-them distinctions, revealing them as far too generalized and forced to be of any specific value or use. There are "whimsical" elements to his application of the us-them dialectic, but Selvon hardly finds the situation to be full of whimsy. What seems obvious at times, rather, is that whimsy is the only possible response in the face of the apparently insurmountable racism that the distinction seeks to enforce. Hungry, often homeless, and with little prospect of being taken seriously, the Lonely Londoners must laugh in order to make it from day to day.

The occasional joy, happiness and celebratory atmosphere among the Lonely Londoners might suggest that they are unaffected, but among themselves the problem is an issue of much philosophizing. Galahad believes he has discovered the root of the problem, and Selvon depicts him talking directly to the source, talking to the color Black: "Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, you so Black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world!"[31] In his own relatively unsophisticated way, Galahad has it exactly right. In a

move further indicating that Moses need not always be the lens through which Selvon focuses his ideology, the relatively young and in many ways naive Galahad has hit upon a central truth of their circumstances, even if he is not prepared to speak of it in lofty terms. The problem is not a capacity for being a "Londoner" as the men, young and old, move through the city confidently, freely. Most of the group are gainfully employed, so they cannot be considered problematic as a drain on municipal stores. The problem, as countless encounters in the novel show, is that their skin color, or the caricatures and stereotypes readily associated with their skin color, is obviously the only thing some people ever see. No one in the novel repudiates his theory, and the novel itself does not work to undermine it. Moses comes closest to ridiculing Galahad for what might be considered an oversimplification, but only goes so far as sarcastically admitting "take it easy, that is a sharp theory, why don't you write about it?"[32] As whimsically as it may be presented in this case, Selvon has in fact written about it. The problem is the color black. The problem extends, even as Galahad notes in his own way, all over the world. Resigned and defeatist, we recognize, even if Galahad does not, that if this is the case, there is nothing he can do. He can no more change his color than can black turn to blue, red or green. Black, by virtue of itself, will "infuriate" non-Blacks and cause "misery" to Blacks. Galahad falls into that lonely realization, perhaps following Moses and the others to the point of fatalism and hopelessness over their circumstances and prospects in Britain.

In many ways this scene typifies the novel. Selvon has given over the greatest social and political statement he intends to make to Galahad, not Moses. His purposes in

doing so are not immediately apparent, but for the obviously embittered Moses such a statement would perhaps be ringed with its own prejudice and defeat, so losing some of its force. That the hapless Galahad, young, new and at this point too inexperienced in the manner and shape of life in the city, diagnoses the problem so succinctly, yet in such an apparently innocent way gives it all the more impact. John McLeod reads this juxtaposition of whimsy and sadness as the mark of further clever artifice on Selvon's part, suggesting that "*The Lonely Londoners* restlessly shifts between different views of the city which modulate between affection and disenchantment, exuberance and despair,"[33] but he concludes that this restlessness is a symptom of Selvon's own restlessness and a negative shift on the part of the reading public in the attitude towards migrant affairs in Britain. In general, McLeod argues that the author's feelings about Britain also gradually darkened over a period of twenty years. Instead, the evidence within this early novel suggests that Selvon's attitude was consistent; there are darker moments in *The Lonely Londoners*, lest we forget Moses's fatalist attitude as he goes to pick up Galahad at the station. In contrast to Galahad, he seems so bleak and unpleasant, and Galahad does always seem to land on his feet, making him an endearing n'er-do-well. *The Lonely Londoners* is not sunny; the novel has a subterranean and grittily realistic attitude of disillusion, yet despite Moses's occasional grumpiness, he is unwilling to take the excitement of emigration away from Galahad, even as Selvon is unwilling to take it completely away from the reader. One gets the feeling that the same novel might have been written, set some ten years earlier, with a younger Moses getting off the boat-train and a wiser, less-enchanted analogue to himself waiting at the

station. Galahad will not *become* Moses; however, he will come to understand him. That attitude, expressed continually throughout *The Lonely Londoners*, may look like indecisiveness to McLeod, but in reality it reflects a consistency in attitude and approach. For a moment, Galahad's seemingly ridiculous condemnation of a color appears comical, but it is ultimately revealed as one of the more telling expositions of personal philosophy in the work.

That approach seeks to resolve the complicated distinction between being "in" the city and being "of" the city. Living in London, Galahad, Moses, Selvon himself as well as all the other characters feel increasingly settled with time, but they are constantly reminded of their status as outsiders. The narrative relates a particular instance in which Galahad, feeling confident and happy, has an odd encounter on the street:

> This is London, this is life oh lord, to walk like a king with money in your pocket, not a worry in the world.
>
> Is one of those summer evenings, when it look like night would never come, a magnificent evening, a powerful evening, rent finish paying, rations in the cupboard, twenty pounds in the bank, and a nice piece of skin waiting under the big clock in Piccadilly Tube Station. The sky blue, sun shining, the girls ain't have on no coats to hide the legs.
>
> "Mummy, look at that black man!" A little chile, holding on to the mother hand, look up at Sir Galahad.
>
> "You mustn't say that, dear!" The mother chide the child.[34]

The happening, thus described, is an odd one. Galahad, feeling good about himself and the city, takes no offense, in fact he bends down to pat the child on the cheek. The child responds by cowering, shrinking and begins to cry. The "uneasy" mother hustles her child along, refusing even to speak to him. What exactly has given offense, and to whom? Galahad is self-assured and jaunty, the child points out a man who is, in point of fact, black, and the mother reacts quickly to silence the child. Awkward to say the least, neither Galahad nor the child sees anything wrong with the exchange; he accepts the child's curiosity about his difference with geniality, seeking to assuage any feeling of guilt in the child with a kind gesture. The mother, whom the narrator relates might have actually spoken with Galahad had they been alone, chooses to hustle on, clearly aware that there are "so many white people around."[35] The anecdote closes with Galahad, "knowing how it is," turning and walking on. He is happy, comfortable, and at home in the city, but many within it are not comfortable with him.

At home, therefore, he must be reminded occasionally that he is not an insider. Sandhu reports that: "Only after the first decade of mass post-war immigration did Black people cease to be considered curious and novelties. Some of the men who settled in London during the 1950s recall having their trousers tweaked by children and cheeky women keen to see if they had tails."[36] George Lamming relates a similar story, featuring his friend Selvon, from his own early years in London:

> [Selvon] came to see me about a project he was commissioned to do for one of the Sunday papers. He had been asked to interview a poor Jamaican who was utterly disorganised in feeling by some of the things

> which had happened to him in England. Sam related one incident which had to do with English factory girls creeping up behind the Jamaican, trying to lift his jacket in the hope of discovering his tail. The Jamaican peasant was deeply shaken by this reduction of his person to the status of an ape. They had colonised him by their particular kind of interest; and he was too scared to realise that those girls knew he had no tail.[37]

While no one is tweaking Galahad's trousers in *The Lonely Londoners*, it would seem that the curiosity and novelty of his presence has not worn off. There may be no checking for tails, but he will not be allowed to forget his outsider status. As Lamming reads the situation, the young Jamaican has had his confidence so undermined by living in London that he cannot handle the situation with any confidence. Galahad contradicts this assumption somewhat with his jaunty response to the child, and it is London that seems to embolden him. Still, despite the possibility of a true momentary breakthrough, the accepted stereotypical modes of interaction between a white woman and a black man intervene; she hustles on, embarrassed; the child cries.

In addressing such standardized notions of inter-racial social interaction, the prevailing discussion in most areas of post-colonial literatures features the frequent and extensive use of the terminology and concept of an "Other" or "Others." In Selvon's London, the concern is not over otherness; after all, Britain is a land full of so-called others and has been for hundreds of years. "Other," in this case, a particular type of other, the outsider, is a collective notion used to manage the presence of so many non-British Britons entering the city. Caryl Phillips argues beyond such oversimplified and

generalized concepts of exclusion and separation as "othering"; Phillips indicates that the circumstances and expressions of racism are particular and unique in the case of those moving to Britain from the West Indies:

> The difficulty that postwar Britain had with Caribbean migrants, as opposed to immigrants from the Indian subcontinent or from Africa, is that as an ethnic body Caribbean migrants were far more in tune with what Orwell might have understood to be the British character. They were English-speaking Christians, who had studied their Shakespeare and Wordsworth at school, and while they might like saltfish and ackee, or curried goat and jerk chicken, they seemed to be able to synthesize these peculiar ethnic aberrations with a broad understanding of the ways of the British. In other words, to many white Britons these Caribbean migrants were uncomfortably and surprisingly British, and in order properly to exclude them and reinforce their alien status white Britons needed to accentuate the one aspect of their identity which these people could do nothing about—their race.[38]

Galahad's earlier dispute with the color black is mirrored here, if not literally, then very nearly so. Subdivision of racial categories is designed to clarify and classify for ease of encounter and management. Phillips surmises that even if these Caribbean migrants seemed at least superficially British, they could still be marginalized through a convenient fixation on skin color. Doing so would eliminate the need for any effort of understanding and accommodation. If each Trinidadian, Jamaican or Barbadian were

easily apprehended as another black person from the "West Indies," and the "West Indies," is considered a single, homogenous place, all "West Indians" the same, then there is nothing remarkably different for which one must adjust. "They" do not have to be dealt with as individuals. These are all notions that Selvon works to dispel in both his fiction and nonfiction. Encountering this particular attitude frequently in his early days in the city, Selvon was himself shocked:

> The stories – the actualities – are manifest, but I'll only say this: not Buckingham Palace, not the West End or the Tower of London, or the glitter of Piccadilly Circus – not even white men performing menial labour as porters or roadsweepers, nor the fact that there were so many whites who could not read or write – struck me as forcibly, or rather impressionably, as this appalling ignorance about my part of the world, when I had been led to believe that I was coming to the fountainhead of knowledge. Though I was from a small island that might be flicked off the map like a speck of dirt from a jacket, I felt ten feet tall.[39]

Only, rather than experiencing this "appalling ignorance" as an insult or as something that might make him feel less important in the imperial center, just like Galahad "knowing how it is," Selvon walked taller, prouder as the infallibility of London, of the empire itself is revealed, becoming a sign of his own potential superiority and open-mindedness. As an individual, he is able to have some mastery over his circumstances in a city in which he may well be socially marginalized but intellectually quite self-sufficient and proud.

Of course, the social circumstances of the emigrant community are far more complicated than a simple us-and-them mentality, and Selvon deals with this also. Within the community of migrants, there are individual distinctions and prejudices, based upon island and national affiliations back in the Caribbean. These distinctions are not of entirely the same kind as those experienced in a racial context, but they are illuminating nonetheless because it is quite clear that those distinctions and prejudices are produced in a fashion quite similar to the outsider-insider mentality of the "native" Briton. Very early in the novel, when Moses encounters Tolroy at Waterloo station, waiting for the same boat-train, the two men exchange niceties and laments over a lack of money, prompting Moses to comment, "Ah, I wish I was like allyou Jamaican."[40] This distinct notion of Tolroy as an outsider is based upon a stereotype that Moses shares and indulges; Jamaicans are thrifty, parsimonious. Tolroy, "taking offence" as Selvon writes, replies, "What I do is my business."[41] The encounter at the train station is full of further instances revealing Moses's own preconceptions and assumptions about others. He too is guilty of drawing hard-line distinctions between himself and others with no information or particular experience. His frustration and prepossession are revealed through Moses's own feelings about the morning's agenda: "He had was to get up from a nice warm bed and dress and come out in this nasty weather to go and meet a fellar that he didn't even know. That was the hurtful part of it – is not as if this fellar is his brother or cousin or even friend; he don't know the man from Adam. [. . .] it look to Moses that he hardly have time to settle in the old Brit'n before all sorts of fellars start coming straight to his room in the Water when they land up in London from the West

Indies."[42] Moses hardly seems alone here. He's been inundated with new contacts, run down by a long list of those seeking his help to find housing, jobs, and the comforts of community. Lonely sounds like something Moses only wishes he could be. Moses's grumpiness is born of his frustration at the assumption that simply because he is Trinidadian he should help another Trinidadian to get settled. The stance is subtle, but Moses resists being collected under island affiliation, then immediately employs the same attitude in his conversation with Tolroy. These situations permeate the novel and work to demonstrate Selvon's complicated rendering of the community and civic mixing going on in the city and the manner in which the individual must fight for his own identity in the midst of all this.

Nevertheless, the weary way Moses is described, dragging himself away from home on a grey, grim evening, introduces him as a character of certain weight. Only later do we discover that this acedia-riddled, creaky old man is relatively young himself; London life has apparently aged him. Concerned about the influx of immigrants from the West Indies, Moses exhibits consternation over a type of immigrant he sees with suspicion: "Now the position have Moses uneasy, because to tell truth most of the fellars who coming now are real hustlers, desperate; it not like long time when forty or fifty straggling in, they invading the country by the hundreds." He is already becoming sympathetic to the 'party line' in Britain, as expressed widely in the newspapers and radio that "rule the country": "In fact, the boys all over London, it ain't have a place where you wouldn't find them, and big discussion going on in Parliament about the situation, though the old Brit'n too diplomatic to clamp down on the boys or to do

anything drastic like stop them from coming to the Mother Country."[43] Moses's perspective is superficially odd. The assumption most often made, as Paul Gilroy has noted, is that the black, colonial immigrant population in Britain is homogenous, yet Moses's attitude here suggests that is not the case. Gilroy explains that the earliest groups of arrivals "were comparatively few in number" adding that: "beyond the British educations which were their colonial inheritance, they lacked a single cohesive culture which could bind them together."[44] Ultimately, Gilroy speculates that the disparate nature of these individuals and groups is something they overcame through proximity and identification against the endemic population, yet Selvon's depiction of Moses in this scene quite clearly challenges that assumption by depicting Moses engaging in his own form of social segregationism.

Instead, Samuel Bonhomme reasoned in 1971 that the concatenated sense of self and place that emigrants in the middle part of the century inevitably experienced were the predictable results of a juxtaposition of colonial education and real-life experiences in the city. On this issue, Selvon's work comes closest to the sustained project of his friend and fellow emigrant George Lamming. Lamming recognized that the imported culture of Britain to the West Indies was but one facet of a sustained focus on creating within the colonial subject a sense of belonging to the mother country, a matter quite distinct from belonging in the mother country. Selvon and Lamming, like most all West Indian immigrants, had been raised in the belief that they were, each of them, British subjects, yet they rarely found themselves treated with equanimity. The assumption many of them made, when examining the situation, was that the more immoral, criminal

or lazy among the immigrant population were damaging the reputation of the whole and ruining their opportunity for successful integration into a home they had never seen. Bonhomme goes on to suggest that:

> Because of the white man's teachings, the West Indian in his struggle to denounce his past is now completely demoralised. He is a man at war with himself, a person rejected by the very people who, for the past 400 years and more, he tried desperately to change himself into. The West Indian in more ways than one tries every day psychologically and in some cases physically to transform himself into a white man in order that he may not be identified with Africa.[45]

The hesitation and frustration that Moses feels may then be understood not only as an annoyance to him personally, after being dragged away from home yet again for the purpose of helping a stranger, but also as an annoyance with the continuing stream of new arrivals, complicating the social situation further by their constant upheaval of the uneasy balance the community sought to maintain. That his attitude on the matter is hypocritical is irrelevant to him; Moses made the decision to migrate to London. He benefitted from the experience and community of those who migrated before him while disrupting it initially himself. With a feeling for the city, an understanding of what he believes to be the 'old Brit'n' character, and a sense of himself in relation to it, he has now become a protector. Reluctant to go and aid yet another newcomer who will undoubtedly disappoint with his failure to understand the "way things are," Moses laments the general nature of immigration in Britain as if he were a native Londoner

himself. Grudgingly, he will help yet another young West Indian man make his way into the big city, but not because of any sympathy he might feel from being at one time a newcomer himself.

Selvon describes Moses as "like a welfare officer," working to "scatter the boys around London, for he don't want no concentrated area in the Water – as it is, things bad enough already."[46]After this comparison, the narrative displays a more compassionate, perhaps altruistic Moses. Through his transformation into an officer of the crown, a representative of the institution that is Britain, he becomes a man of compassion. Like MacInnes's Pew, his adoption of an official capacity affords beneficence. Representing not himself, but crown and country, he will assist the poor outsiders coming to find their way an a big, scary city, and he will feel good about it, assured in the knowledge that he is not prejudiced or without compassion. His affiliation within the system of the mother country has given him the ability or the desire to behave kindly. Yet at this moment of superficial connection to the institutions of his adopted home, Moses experiences another shift. Apparently self-assured and confident in his role as a guide and initiate, Moses steps into Waterloo station: "right away in that big station he had a feeling of homesickness that he never felt in the nine-ten years he in this country."[47] Selvon draws back from the self-assured colonial officer Moses and shows again the uncomfortable, still-making-his-way Moses who might almost jump on the next "boat-train" home, even after ten years in London. The narrative goes on to describe how "the station is that sort of place where you have a soft feeling. It was here that Moses did land when he come to London, and he have no doubt

that when the time come, if it ever come, it would be here that he would say goodbye to the big city. Perhaps he was thinking is time to go back to the tropics, that's why he feeling sort of lonely and miserable."[48] The narrative voice does not know for sure what Moses is thinking. His rapid shifting of perspective and self has confused both him and the narrative voice. The text offers conjecture based upon experience and familiarity with the character, but "perhaps" is not suggestive of the voice of Moses. Judgement about his feeling "lonely"also comes from an external, presumptive perspective. Moses seems bothered, annoyed still by the station and how it makes him feel, but his own confusion and frustration creates distance and generates a lack of perspective.

Jed Esty concludes that this scene and others like it provide proof positive that Moses is a fictional or totemic Selvon. His suggestion that, "through Moses, Selvon maintains a broad sympathetic perspective on the urban disillusionment of the West Indians in postwar London, including the recent arrivals who, like the ambitious provincials of so many Victorian novels, come to the city with great expectations,"[49] is fairly indicative of the general response to these moments in the novel. But when Esty argues that Moses achieves a kind of "ironic urban detachment, even atomization," and that despite his disillusionment he still maintains a sense of the "romance of arrival," subsequently something he identifies as "Selvon's own aesthetic," he goes too far. Selvon's prose tempts this reading, but only if you never go further than surmising that Moses *is* Selvon. While Selvon tempts us with that assumption, however, he never offers solid support or proof for that opinion. Moses, undoubtedly the focus of the narrative, is no hero. His bitterness, his own occasional tendency to want nothing more than to

squash or see squashed the optimism of newcomers like Galahad, may well represent the occasional thought of Selvon, but Moses is ultimately revealed to be a character of similar consequence to most others in the novel. He is not selected for narrative focus so much because he is unique or is a special case, but precisely because in myriad ways he is neither. In moments such as this the ironical symbolism of his name comes to the fore. Rather than leading his "people" to a "promised land," this Moses seeks primarily to edify himself. Selvon suggests by so naming the character that perhaps this Moses's journey will end without his ever having reached a hoped-for goal. He is destined to wander in the "desert" that is contemporary London, and only watch as others perhaps reach the "promised land": complete integration into the city and nation.

Moses is special only insofar as he is one voice among others, any of whom may be chosen for the narrative focus, yet Esty further contends that it is "Moses's own stabilizing perspective"[50] that centers the novel and gives it concentration. Still, Selvon suggests his position may be a common one, were one to dip similarly into the minutiae of the lives of any number of other experienced, jaded characters in London. The ideology is stable because it is focused, a narrative chosen by the author conscientiously, not because the character himself is either stabilized or focused, particularly. This condition is not unique to Moses. *They* are *all* Lonely Londoners, together. Any one of them may have been the focal point. Any one of them may have become a vehicle for depicting the anxieties of emigration and city-dwelling, mixed with the triumphant moments of celebration and mastery over the city. Moses is special because he has been singled out in this case, and *The Lonely Londoners* would be a different novel were Cap,

Galahad, Tanty, Five-Past-Twelve or any of the others the locus of narrative energies, but no less interesting and no less valuable as a perspective on the complicated negotiations of hope and struggle in the mother country.

Many readers, like Esty, have taken Moses's primary place in the narrative as a sign that he is meant to be seen as a character unique among the others, someone who offers a philosophical perspective aligned with that of the author, providing Selvon with a mouthpiece for espousing his own thoughts on the city and those living within it: "Selvon's formula is not simply a single black subjectivity forged in the ethnographic crucible of white London. Indeed, Selvon takes pains to situate Moses's interiority within a collective West Indian identity formed against white Englishness."[51] Dissimilar as they may sound initially, the two statements above are hardly any different from one another. Moses has interiority even within his own social group, he is a single subjectivity. He associates himself with other West Indians, but not always by choice, not always positively, and not always *against* anything. Selvon's novel works to undermine the kind of reading offered above. However you describe it, the idea that the character(s) are interior and yet still thinking of themselves as a group 'against' something is what the complicated musings of Moses resist. He is, himself, the interior within a collective of *everyone else*, just like *everyone else*. London features many individuals, themselves individual and interior, hence the title of the novel. The narrative breaks off to follow Galahad to Piccadilly Circus, Cap to his rooms and seagulls, and at the fête Moses becomes just another character in what reads as little more than a play. None of them is seeking, Dedalus-like, to forge anything. They simply

want to live their lives against the struggles of everyday life in a city that each believes to be his home.

One of the greatest of such struggles is simply finding a space to live. The problem with housing in the city was not so much a lack of space, but the nature and quality of the space afforded to the emigrant population. Tom Vague describes the circumstances of London life at the time:

> The slums of Notting Hill characterised the England which the majority of Caribbean immigrants at the time encountered. Housing was readily available. Sub-standard housing at luxury prices. If a landlord was prepared to rent to blacks he or she could charge what they liked, even before the day of the notorious Peter Rachman and his clones. But, for most immigrants, landlords of this kind were the only game in town, and blacks began to concentrate in the Grove. Life there at the start of the sixties was a perpetually difficult and precarious round. Finding a place to live, keeping an exhausting job so you could pay the rent, avoiding assaults on the street by white racists or policemen, and putting up with a dozen daily pinpricks of harassment or insult.[52]

Whether under the thumb of one of Britain's most notorious slum lords and suffering under the daily suppression of Rachmanism or simply working endlessly for low pay to afford heat and food, most of the Caribbean immigrants found the "housing problem" to be a particular and stark reality. Discussion and opinion in the periodicals of the day

supports Vague's dire assessment. As early as 1951, Mervyn Jones recognized in *The New Statesman*:

> A Negro to-day has the utmost difficulty in finding accommodation in London. Things are both better and worse than before the war. Better, in that more and more liberal-minded people are alive to the problem; [. . .] [W]orse because the Negro population is much greater, and so therefore is the number of those rebuffed and insulted. [. . .] The position is worse, above all, because distinctively Negro quarters, on the American model, are coming into existence to replace the cosmopolitan neighbourhoods normal before the war. [. . .] The process of separation is in its early stages; but it is developing. As a further insult, landlords charge excessive rents, scam and cheat, and overcrowd rooms. Many of the Negroes, faced with this, buy their own homes and rent out rooms to newly-arrived people. This, too, leads to overcrowding. And, above all, this is how Harlem was created. The root of the Negro problem, however, is poverty. The Colonial with the initiative and means to come to England is likely to have been a skilled worker at home, or to have learnt a trade in the Services. When he gets here, he is imprisoned in the lower-paid jobs. They do not get equal pay for equal work, and they are rarely offered any position other than entry-level or "general labourer."[53]

Selvon's work makes a subject of this reality. The brief, humorous "p.s. episode" featuring Cap, related near the end of *The Lonely Londoners*, brings into focus the

desperate nature of the living conditions for some emigrants. Reduced to trapping seagulls outside his window for sustenance, Cap has fallen upon desperate times: "In fact, he fall asleep and get up in the evening feeling so hungry that his head giddy and he frighten to get out of bed and exert himself."[54] As humorous as the descriptions of Cap chasing a seagull around his room may be, there is a note of desperation that belies the real trouble he and others have in the city.

Apart from desperation of the physical, nutritional sort, many in the emigrant community experienced isolation anxiety as a result of their living conditions and the conditions within the city. In his short story "Basement Lullaby" Selvon recreates an all-too-familiar atmosphere:

> All the sounds of the outside world unheard in that basement room. Even sounds in the house can't be heard: is as if down there the two boys cut away from life. [. . .] As if the whole world dead, eh, you can't hear anything down here in the basement. Life in London really different from back home, boy. Imagine how we here, living under the earth, with the street above our heads! If you tell them so in Trinidad they laugh at you.[55]

Selvon's commentary on the underground status of the emigrant communities, here made literal, speaks to the larger issue of the concomitant feelings of loneliness, marginalization, and restlessness. The quiet, demonstrated throughout the lyric prose of Selvon mostly as an absence, is something the garrulous and social West Indian character cannot abide with much patience. Wanting nothing more than to identify himself through conversation, Bar 20 aggressively pursues sociable contact and context.

Segregated from the activity he imagines on the street, the excitement of living that he believes to be happening upstairs, Bar 20 is cut off from life, but it is not the case, despite his being for all intents and purposes buried underground, as though he were dead himself. Rather, the whole world is dead. The very idea is only possible in London. In Trinidad, there would be laughter at such an outrageous proposition. This state of affairs, this ennui, acedia, or even simple post-performance let-down is only a possibility in London, Selvon suggests, and is the greatest danger to the psyche of the new Londoner. Housing shortages, racialism, inability to find work–all of these things place as auxiliary concerns. The real concern is being disconnected, truly alone. Fred has his letter from a girl, Bar 20 has only Fred. Slight as it may seem, "Basement Lullaby" is far more than a slightly comical one-act sketch depicting typical West Indian "chaps" on a typical evening.

The very same concern is expressed more fully and more problematically near the end of *The Lonely Londoners*. After one of any typical Sunday evening in Moses's basement rooms the group comes to "lime," "together for a oldtalk." He sits, and as is sometimes the case "he hardly say a word, he only lay there on the bed listening to them talk." These Sundays are not so much about what is said or who says it, just that something is said. For all his protestations about their noise, using his gas meter, eating his food, Moses needs this. The silences are too much; "Sometimes, after they gone, he hear the voices ringing in his ear, and sometimes tears come to his eyes and he don't know why really, if is home-sickness or if it is just that life in general beginning to get too hard."[56] For Moses life in London is sometimes too much for him to bear alone. His

existence is predicated on being identifiable in relation to others. For all the marginalization and degradation implied by basement-dwelling, the community that exists in this liminal space is one that seeks out or creates vitality and life. Without it, alone and lonely in a basement room, neither Moses nor any of them by implication of the novel's title, can be anything other than cripplingly lonely in the midst of a crowd.

The ringing of the voices in his ear does it. Moses cannot distinguish between causes for his sadness; it is the absence of his friends or a yearning for home. These causes are one and the same, though he does not realize. He comes to define his life through those Sunday mornings: "It look to him as if life composed of Sunday morning get-togethers in the room," yet his dissatisfaction twists these meetings as well. When he is unhappy in the depths of his loneliness those days are the problem; he begins to feel that "Lock up in that small room, with London and life on the outside, he used to lay there on the bed, thinking how to stop all this crap, how to put a spoke in the wheel, to make things different."[57] He goes out seeking general community, away from his basement rooms into the London night. There, a moment of possibility:

> The old Moses, standing on the banks of the Thames. Sometimes he think he see some sort of profound realization in his life, as if all that happen to him was experience that make him a better man, as if now he could draw apart from any hustling and just sit down and watch other people fight to live. Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-is-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same

> spot. As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country.[58]

Grim though the ultimate realization may seem, there is salvation of a kind in it for Moses. By drawing apart, removing himself from the Sunday basement gatherings, going upstairs into the anonymous streets, he recognizes in the London night the truth of the matter is that for all the sound and fury of the music, talk, community, for all the potential energy waiting to become kinetic, for all the bluster of youth and the wisdom of age, all of them are left "standing in the same spot"—Lonely. Not lonely by himself, lonely in concert with all others, everyone. The awareness was transitory, not yet something he can process fully, but "still, it had a greatness and a vastness in the way he was feeling tonight, like it was something solid after feeling everything else give way, and he though he ain't getting no happiness out of the cogitations he still pondering, for is the first time that he ever find himself thinking like that."[59] The impulse is immediate, once again, Moses wishes to communicate, not only in Sunday morning convocation, he is lonely, they are *all* lonely. He stands of the banks of the Thames, "wondering if he could ever write a book like that, what everybody would buy." Having now moved from desperate sadness in his basement rooms, through peripatetic philosophy on the river, to a realization of the tautological common loneliness of life in London, Moses's first thought is to communicate through writing.

That compulsion to write, the urge to communicate in his loneliness, his disconnected feelings bubbling to the surface, makes both Moses and Selvon yet another pair in a long line of those preoccupied and affected by the notion of a separation, a real

disconnection from the world and their fellow man. Bar 20, Cap, Moses and Galahad all live underground, like the title character from Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground* (1864) or Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952). In their marginalized homes, buried like the outsider deep in underground accommodations, the men feel simultaneously alienated from the world and foundational to it. That recognition is both an affliction and a solace. Their lives in dark subterranean dwellings are only fitting in some sense as they are marginalized and forgotten socially, yet that same alienation is recognizable as a common condition. Opening his work of estrangement and solitude in the midst of a crowd, Dostoevsky writes: "Both the author of the notes and the *Notes* themselves are, of course, fictional. Nevertheless, such persons as the writer of such notes not only may but even must exist in our society, taking into consideration the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed."[60] The condition of desolation, Dostoevsky suggests, and Ellison, Joyce, Beckett and so many other twentieth century authors, including Selvon agree, is not only a function of the modern world and the social order, but is in fact a necessary constituent part of it. Loneliness, experienced as an individual, is itself an act of social formation, shared by many or all, primary to the exceptional spirit of alienation and disconnection inherent in the twentieth century. Selvon's recognition of this great tautology is clear; the novel closes with the second thought: "It was a summer night: laughter fell softly: it was the sort of night that if you wasn't making love to a woman you feel you was the only person in the world like that."[61] He has not slipped back into false notions of social or sexual congress bringing fulfillment, but what Moses knows is that being alone—alone in London, alone in Trinidad, alone on

the banks of the Thames—means that you are a part of everything. There are no contradictory impulses; being with someone would not cease his being lonely, nor would it her, but they would each experience their own iteration of lonely, together.

Tied into the contradictory impulses of being solitary and being collected as a member of a group first established in the title of the novel, Selvon also engages in a tradition of another sort involving the city itself as a fictional space and character. From the Victorian novels of Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson, through turn-of-the-century works by Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells, right on to the novels of Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Waugh, and Elizabeth Bowen only a few years before, *The Lonely Londoners* can be spoken of in line with a long tradition of inhabiting and viewing the city of London as a space of fictional construction, focus, definition and fascination of self. Rewriting the city from a perspective new and unique to the 1950s, Selvon uses it as a vehicle for revealing much about the emigrant psyche. London has always been a fictional space for the West Indian native. John Clement Ball determines that the colonial subject has been encouraged to conceive of the city as a literary production from his earliest knowledge of it. Growing up in relation to a colonial center, known only through stories both fact and fiction:

> Postcolonial literature's most significant and substantial 'London' is the composite portrait that emerges from fictions about those who do make it past the immigration desk and then spend part of their lives–sometimes the rest of their lives–dwelling in the metropolis. [. . .] Many who travel to London perceive it as a place of struggle against overwhelming obstacles:

> marginalization, segregation, and solitude; and alien climate and built environment; racism poverty and cultural conflict. [. . .] The metropolis frequently fails to deliver the freedom, personal renewal, and worldly access that, in time-honored big-city fashion, it is seen to promise.[62]

Selvon does focus on the city to a great degree, like many colonial authors and to varying degrees like a long history of authors before him, and as Ball reminds that London is often seen to offer great promise, all the while failing frequently to deliver. Moses, alone and lonely, would seem disappointed by the city; it has failed him, true enough, but Selvon's understanding of the city does not allow unmet expectation as the final word. London is often cruel, but in so being it is also never short on excitement, both demanding and formative of a fuller realization of self.

The realization is one of such importance that Selvon explores it frequently in his work. In response to a question from the titular 'Girl' about why he loves London, the young lover from "My Girl and the City" describes:

> The way St Paul's was, half-hidden in the rain, the motionless trees along the Embankment. But you say a thing like that and people don't understand at all. How sometimes a surge of greatness could sweep over you when you see something.
>
> But even if I had said all that and much more, it would not have been what I meant. You could be lonely as hell in the city, then one day you look around you and you realize everybody else is lonely too, withdrawn, locked rushing home out of the chaos: blank faces, unseeing

> eyes, millions and millions of them, up the Strand, down the Strand, jostling in Charing Cross for the 5.20 [. . .].[63]

In this case, unlike Moses, the young man experiences his loneliness while with a woman and yet cherishes it as that which seems to connect him with all those "millions and millions." With a crashing realization that smacks first of sadness and separation, both Moses and the young man are able to come to a moment of clear reckoning. It is their loneliness that makes them Londoners. That shared separation takes away difference. They are not lonely black men, lonely Trinidadians, Guyanese, Jamaicans, Barbadians, or countless other permutations. They are, all of them, lonely *Londoners*. In contradiction, then, to Ball's comments, it is not the case that *all*, or even *any* other big cities have this capacity. London is unique.

Selvon certainly feels it; behind almost all of his works one reads a deep and abiding love for the city. This love differs from a colonially-born awe. All the promise and wonder and myth-making surrounding the capital of the mother country has a long and well-established history not only in the work of Selvon but in the work of countless other colonial and Commonwealth citizens. Before arrival, during arrival, even for a time after arrival, witness Galahad, the excitement of being "home" for the first time leads to all manner of effusive declarations—literature, music, exclamations of widely varying description—yet a real love of London, something not all newcomers ever get to experience, cannot be achieved through the rose-colored glasses of that first-blush excitement, no matter how long it may last. A genuine love of the city, as Selvon

communicates it, is a real appreciation for London, good and bad. That appreciation must be experienced, it cannot be explained:

> What it is that a city have, that any place in the world have, that you get so much to like it you wouldn't leave it for anywhere else? What it is that would keep men although by and large, in truth and in fact, they catching their royal to make a living, staying in a cramp-up room where you have to do everything—sleep, eat, dress, wash, cook, live. Why it is, that although they grumble about it all the time, curse the people, curse the government, say all kind of thing about this and that, why it is, that in the end, everyone cagy about saying outright that if the chance come they will go back to them green islands in the sun.
>
> In the grimness of the winter, with you hand plying space like a blind man's stick in the yellow fog, with ice on the ground and a coldness defying all effort to keep warm, the boys coming and going, working, eating, sleeping, going about the vast metropolis like veteran Londoners.[64]

Almost seeming at times to talk himself out of love with London, Selvon here demonstrates in yet another way the unaccountable nature of the individual's relationship to the city. Emigrant or native, London possesses an enigmatic and unaccountable hold over so many. Why, if "green islands in the sun" are your birthright, would you be in London, cramped and cursing? Selvon's answer is clear. That cramped, cold, lonely city is a birthright and a solace.

London is home, even for those who have not yet traveled there. Once arrived, it feels as if it infects you. For all his grumbling and threats about going home, even Moses recognizes this, telling Galahad within the first few minutes of his arrival at Waterloo station, "I would advise you to hustle a passage back home to Trinidad today."[65] He says so not because the city is awful, but because he recognizes that once the city has its hooks in Galahad, he is done for. Undeterred, just as was Moses upon his arrival, Galahad refuses, and the love of the city captures another. A counterpoint to the jaded yet caught Moses, Galahad represents most often in the novel the voice of unrestrained love for the city. One wonders if he will eventually come to the same place of complicated frustration and attraction as Moses, but for now he is the representative of wonderment not yet tempered by experience and circumstance:

> Always, from the first time he went there to see Eros and the lights, that circus have a magnet for him, that circus represent life, that circus is the beginning and the ending of the world. Every time he go there, he have the same feeling like when he see it the first night, drink coca-cola, any time is guinness time, bovril and the fireworks, a million flashing lights, gay laughter, the wide doors of theatres, the huge posters everready batteries, rich people going into tall hotels, people going to the theatre, people sitting and standing and walking and talking and laughing and buses ands cars and Galahad Esquire, in all this, standing there in the big city, in London. Oh Lord.[66]

Galahad's ode to Piccadilly Circus demonstrates the same circumstances as Moses's earlier elocutions. He stands there, alone, among throngs. Rather than feeling alone, Galahad feels unique. All the advertising, all the people, all the activity rages with or without him. Feeling that same intense sense of self, however, does not lead Galahad to the same conclusions as Moses. Excited by his selfhood, Galahad stands and exults. His feelings are not opposite Moses's, no matter how tempting that presumption may be. Moses has felt this too, only he is unable to speak of it directly any longer, it seems. Grumbling about the city, the cold, the crowds, the isolation, he still asks, "what it is" about London that keeps one there, away from the "green islands." Galahad "Esquire" has for the moment identified the answer himself. The "it," appearing here and in the very opening lines of the novel, is Piccadilly, the Thames, the Embankment, the people, the theatre, the Guinness—the *city*.

In this respect, Selvon makes a space for himself as one of the most unique novelists of his day. Sandhu observes that "Selvon's characters, more than those of any other colonial writer of this period, are not ashamed to speak of their deep-rooted, sorely-taxed but, in the final run, unceasing love for London. They're often slighted or bad-mouthed, yet they never grow so disenchanted that they abandon the capital."[67] In this case, Sandhu must clearly have both Moses and Galahad in mind. But in *The Lonely Londoners* Selvon peoples the novel with all types, suffering through the same or similar indignities, each different from one another, but each the same in their difference from so many others. They each suffer, either in silence unapparent to the reader or publicly,

yet most are not given the opportunity to express through narrative, or have expressed for him by the narrative, their individual difficulties.

Author Caryl Phillips, himself a denizen of London, has also recognized the inner conundrum of such conflicting impulses. He argues that embodied in the, "contradictory tension engendered by Selvon's attraction to and rejection by England" is a "sense of being both inside and outside Britain at the same time. The literature was shot through with the uncomfortable anxieties of belonging and not belonging."[68] Such anxiety permeates *The Lonely Londoners* and is manifest most directly through Moses, but the continual wonder and truckling over the city that Galahad practices, covered with a patina of braggadocio and self-aggrandizement, is symptomatic of the same concerns, ultimately.

Saying that such attraction and repulsion to the city are conflicting is not a suggestion that the love of London is any less real or any less meaningful. As an indicator of self and place, that love of the city also is described in ways that underscore the role that tension between the two simultaneously existing impulses plays in constituting the feelings in the first place. Jed Esty argues that "by moving rapidly among several characters and by alternating between the raw thrills of first contact and the mature reflections of long dwelling, the novel generates a kind of collage of arrival that reconciles these two modes and culminates in Moses's jovial irony."[69] The "raw thrills" depicted primarily through the experiences of Galahad, and the "mature reflections" of Moses may represent a "collage of arrival," but they never reconcile the two "modes." One point of the novel is that the two impulses never are reconciled.

Grumpy and jaded as Moses may be, he still has his moments of love for the city; young and energetic as Galahad may be, he still has his moments of feeling the cold, grey spirit of the city. The irony is not in the mock-joviality of Moses, but in the narrative juxtaposition of the two characters within the same proper, collective noun, "Londoners." As in the writings of MacInnes, Selvon recognizes and writes of the complex nature of relations between the variously-mixed social groups within the city, recognizing that the complicated interactions and fraught events occurring in the 1950s have defined each individual and each group in ways they are not always capable of apprehending for themselves. The city challenges them; they challenge one another. The results are complex; Selvon's friend George Lamming also took up the challenge, expending much of his authorial energies during the decade attempting to unravel the sinuous and complicated notions of self and social interaction within the contexts of London, exile, and individual hopes for a space and place to reside. Also like Selvon, Lamming would only find these hopes complicated, often stymied, but also always revived by a city remarkable in its variable character, plurality of voices, and that ironical ability to discourage and encourage simultaneously.

Chapter 4–

There's More in the Mortar than the Pestle:

George Lamming and the Great Design

On the same voyage to Britain in 1950 with Samuel Selvon was a young Barbadian and fellow author, George Lamming. From the moment of their arrival, the two men were often spoken of in the same context: West Indian authors who were among the first wave of immigrants in the middle twentieth century. David Dabydeen describes the early days of their relationship as unique and spirited:

> And so the writers boarded the *SS Windrush* and later boats, equipped with little except fierce ambition, individual talent and, in the case of Sam Selvon and George Lamming, a shared 'Imperial' typewriter. Both Selvon and Lamming had had some literary experience: Selvon was a sub-editor of the *Trinidad Guardian*'s magazine supplement, and Lamming had acted as an agent for the Barbadian cultural journal *Bim*. Both were in the process of writing their first novels, and the boat trip to England allowed both some time to continue their work. Selvon talks of how Lamming would come to his cabin to borrow his typewriter, which he lent him reluctantly. Lamming would then conveniently forget to return the typewriter, or else would lock himself in his cabin and refuse to come out. Selvon would curse him in vivid Caribbean language and threaten to

> break down the door and choke him. The squabbling over the typewriter continued when they arrived in London and shared accommodation in a men's hostel, until Lamming bought his own second-hand machine.[1]

Surviving the crossing and one another, the two men continued to share housing in London for a brief period before circumstance and opportunity separated them.[2] By the end of the 1950s, Lamming had become such a figure of literary and cultural significance that his old friend Selvon, himself a well-known author, could not help offering him up in a joking fashion in his own novel *Moses Ascending* (1975). In that work, a now militant Galahad ridicules Moses: "In any case, who tell you you could write?... You think writing book is like kissing hand? You should leave that to people like Lamming and Salkey. You don't even know that we have created a Black Literature."[3] Later, again in homage to his friend and literary contemporary, Selvon describes a disappointed Moses at the welcome-home celebration for "his man" Bob; "this is a rather riff-raff lot. Couldn't you of asked Lamming and Salkey and some of their English contemporaries?"[4] While these references may be meant primarily as clever jabs between friendly rivals, they are a fair indication of the level of significance Lamming held in the literary community in London in the middle part of the twentieth-century. Selvon, himself well-known in literary circles, would have been confident that his friend and one-time traveling companion would be familiar to his readers and that such name-dropping would be received with good humor and understanding.

Furthermore, Lamming's appearance, if only by name, is not simply social. Set within the atmosphere of the Black Power movements in Britain in the late sixties and

seventies, Selvon's novel is mostly a comic rendering of Moses's unintentional involvement in the aggressively-fought struggle for space and place in the home country. Lamming has been interpreted by many as the more unpeaceable of the two authors and is accordingly adopted as an icon for Selvon's proto-militant characters. It is certainly true that Selvon's work more often offers comments on present affairs in Britain and that Lamming spends more of his literary capital critically assessing the past and considering how it has constituted the present circumstances of alienation and segregation. It is not, however, the case that Lamming is only a political figure characterized by militant attitudes. Selvon makes that point ironically in *Moses Ascending*. By making Lamming a totemic figure in the minds of ill-guided militants and then displaying their ignorance of anything about him other than his name, Selvon undermines such oversimplified reading.

Lamming implicates history, narrative, and storytelling itself in the colonial process and works through the very same channels to try and accomplish a proper reckoning. His aim would be that such a reckoning would afford the outsider emigrant and the insider Briton alike the knowledge and understanding to escape inculcation in a centuries-old system that encourages denial of self and subjugation to a mechanism of cultural hegemony, part-and-parcel of the colonial project. Beginning in the 1950s and running through the present day, Lamming's efforts have been at times non-fictional criticism, at others novels and short stories, but he has consistently approached the same task throughout his career. Despite his avowed skepticism over the education he received in Barbados, Lamming has used his literate upbringing as a tool to upbraid the

system itself. His novels reject the notion of collective identity and stereotypes born of a sense that individuals can be easily collected according to nationality or skin color, yet he simultaneously tests the nature of the fictional narrative to represent both the individual consciousness and the collective. His efforts to understand himself as a West Indian and as a British citizen are worked out in the pages of his writing, not because he desires notoriety, but because, as the product of a public and functional system of colonialization, he recognizes that the means of regaining himself as an individual lie in both the public and collective organization.

The greatest danger to Lamming himself, his home, his adopted home, and all the people involved in constituting each of those places is reductivist thinking. Human relations, whether local and individual or global and social, are complicated and various, according to Lamming, literary excursions into this morass must be themselves complex and layered. Such oversimplification is frequently a concern in relation to one of the most often-applied literary references in Lamming's body of work. He makes frequent and repeated use of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as both inspiration and critical context for discussing the colonial condition. Employed liberally in both his fiction and non-fiction, *The Tempest* has provoked many critical analyses that seize upon the play as the key to Lamming's work because it is familiar—more familiar, in any case, than much of Lamming's subject matter may be to most. *The Tempest* becomes a convenient angle of approach for most investigations and investigators otherwise uncomfortable with the direct style of Lamming. Rarely do these investigations go further than the most superficial of applications. Lamming, or the emigrant in general, plays the role of the

savage Caliban; Prospero represents the colonizer, or Britain. Lamming's application of the play's themes to his own theories about colonial practices and outcomes may begin with a similar reading, but through extended exercise his interpretation becomes far less simple. As he explains in the introduction to *The Pleasures of Exile*, "it is my intention to make use of *The Tempest* as a way of presenting a certain state of feeling which is the heritage of the exiled and colonial writer from the British Caribbean."[5] Far from being a cut-and-dried application of an oversimplified reading of the play, Lamming investigates the possibilities of the play as a crystallization or clarification of his own status as an exiled "colonial." The interpolation he provides has as its goal an interior clarification. In Lamming's theoretical "trial" of the impulses of self-construction and heritage against the prosecution's regularizing law and order, he presents a "witness" who

> arrives claiming extraordinary privileges. He wants to assume Prospero's privilege of magic, while arguing in his evidence that no man has a right to use magic in his dealings with another. On the other hand he sees himself as Caliban while he argues that he is not the Caliban whom Prospero had in mind. This witness claims a double privilege. He thinks he is, in some way, a descendant of Prospero. He knows he is a direct descendant of Caliban. He claims to be the key witness in the trial; but his evidence will only be valid if the others can accept the context in which he will give it. For it is only by accepting this special context that his evidence can reveal its truth.[6]

No equations so simple as "colonized=Caliban" and "colonizer=Prospero" should be proposed, according to Lamming. The complication he acknowledges is that there is a conundrum within himself, the subject of colonial co-optation and eventual agent of "reverse colonization" via emigration. He has claims on both Prospero and Caliban. Therein lies the necessary adjustment Lamming makes in the application of this play to his literary activites. Most critical assessments of the work go little further than recognizing in Lamming a kind of now-literate Caliban, a savage using the language of the oppressor, Prospero's own language, against him.

Lamming's own interpretation of the play continually brings pressure to bear on this too-simple reading of the play as a bland metaphor for colonialism. In an essay entitled "A Monster, A Child, A Slave," Lamming argues that there were unforseen consequences, unintended by either party, of Prospero's colonialist-style interactions with Caliban:

> Only the application of the word to the darkness of Caliban's world could harness the beast which resides within this cannibal. This is the first important achievement of the colonising process. This gift of language is the deepest and most delicate bond of involvement. It has a certain finality. Caliban will never be the same again. Nor, for that matter, will Prospero.
>
> Prospero has given Caliban Language; and with it an unstated history of consequences, an unknown history of future intentions. This gift of language meant not English, in particular, but speech and concept

> as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self that could not be reached in any other way. It is this way, entirely Prospero's enterprise, which makes Caliban aware of possibilities. Therefore, all of Caliban's future—for future is the very name for possibilities—must derive from Prospero's experiment, which is also his risk.[7]

Prospero tricks Caliban out of his island and his birthright, Caliban, first servile, then uses the language and intelligence he has been afforded by Prospero to betray his master in an attempt to regain his island. Since the mid-twentieth-century, this simplified analysis has been employed to demonstrate everything from the evils of the colonial system to the evils of those 'savage' colonials who must be 'taught' how to act properly. Lamming recognizes the relation between the magician and the savage is far more complicated than such simple analyses might afford. Caliban is first the dupe, Prospero clearly the master; such an interpretation is often as far as many consider.

What Lamming recognizes in the play, particularly in what the play coveys in relation to language, is that if Prospero is to be read as incarnation of colonialism and empire, then he must also be recognized as responsible for the dissolution of empire and the invalidation of colonialism, for in the transmission of language and self-knowledge, he transmits awareness and the very mechanism for his own eventual downfall. This move is difficult for many to reconcile with parental and pastoral notions of colonial intercourse, particularly for those in Lamming's time who are too blinded by their preconceptions of Prospero's goodwill toward Caliban. The magician did, after all, bring language and civilization to the savage. Recognizing already the usefulness and import

of the play's totemic role in race relations and theory of the day, Colin MacInnes wrote parenthetically:

> While on the subject of the Swan of Avon, I would like to shoot off on yet another tangent and say that I believe this Prospero-Caliban analgogy [sic] has been much misapplied. Chiefly for this reason, that a careful reading of The Tempest seems to me to reveal, once again, an ambiguity (or deliberate duality) in Shakespeare's vision of his two creations: that is to say, it seems to me that the 'case' for Caliban is put more strongly than readers generally realise (so closely and instinctively do they identify themselves with Prospero), and that one may even think that C and P are really the 'same' person – or two divided, but indisoluble [sic], aspects of the human soul.[8]

MacInnes's analysis appears similar to Lamming's insofar as the former recognizes that a proper application of this play as critical context for the colonial encounter requires both the English reader and the colonial reader to reconcile within themselves that each is defined by the other and also includes the other. Britain, the colonial center, depends upon the colonies for identification and eminence. The colonial, defined as a citizen of the empire, depends upon the centre for relation and embrace. If either denies the other, it is as if he denies part of himself. Making either of them incomplete, that denial will not afford opportunity for true self-awareness or definition either on an individual level or on a social level.

The tension thus created is formative not only of the literary work but of the self. However, as Lamming argues in his legal conceit, that tension is not self-perpetuating; it is only afforded as long as it is actively sought and cultivated. The "witness" must "assume Prospero's privilege of magic" while simultaneously maintaining his "double privilege" as a descendant of Caliban. Such an exquisite balance is not easily maintained. As a descendant "of both Prospero and Caliban, Lamming explore[s] and celebrate[s] artistic hybridity and syncretism, asserting the presence of difference, the ambiguities of selfhood and the potentialities of transformation."[9] Lamming takes the syncretic approach quite personally as essential. The combination of Prospero and Caliban is one that almost always threatens to pull itself apart. To be a useful mechanism for self-definition and assertion of individual temperament, it must be watched and maintained over time so as to afford the inspiration and become a vehicle for movement forward.

Mary Chamberlain has taken this analytic one step further, suggesting the very idea of a "dialectical *relationship*," one in which the "colonised and coloniser stood not simply in opposition" emerged first in Lamming's work, both fiction and non fiction, as a result of a clear design on the author's part to communicate the shared experience of the exile.[10] As with Selvon's Londoners, and MacInnes's "Spades" and teenagers, the colonized subject of Lamming's work remains always restless and never at home, either within himself or within public space. Lukács "transcendental homelessness"[11] is presented in Lamming's works as a conflicted and self-contradictory collision of both Caliban and Prospero within an individual, the colonial citizen is always at odds within

himself and always at odds with his locale, "for both Caliban and Prospero were exiles. It was Caliban who reminded Prospero that his ambitions were temporal, that his actions were limited by what was humanly possible, and that Caliban himself embodied those parts of Prospero's past which he disavowed."[12] Lamming made this dichotomy, this contradiction, a major lifelong theme in his work. As he explains in "The Occasion for Speaking":

> The exile is a universal figure. The proximity of our lives to the major issues of our time has demanded of us all some kind of involvement. [. . .] We are made a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society whose past we can't alter, and whose future is always beyond us. [. . .] Sooner or later, in silence or with rhetoric, we sign a contract whose epitaph reads: To be an exile is to be alive.[13]

Lamming does not inculpate exile as a condition of life; rather, he means that by virtue of being alive, one is always already an exile. One can never be entirely at home in a world in which colonization, emigration, cultural trade and exchange, or territorial expansion has taken place. If the writer is true to his mandate to communicate the world around him, as he sees it, as it need be seen, he has little choice. Chamberlain summarizes Lamming's argument thus: "The role of the colonial writer, was (is), to make colony *and* metropole strange. West Indians were strangers in the nation which called itself the mother country and, as residents abroad, strangers equally to their country of birth. Colonised and excluded: the pleasure and paradox of exile."[14] While certainly a fair summary, it is incomplete. Lamming's mandate for the colonial author, to

communicate his hybridity and exile, should be the province of all writing. To paraphrase his own summary statement: "To be an exile is to be a writer." Further, in the estimation of Lukács, to write novels, recognizing this paradox inherent in being forever an exile, is to engage in creating the "epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality."[15] Understanding the failure always already inherent in the search for complete understanding of self, Lamming is still committed to writing and searching, despite the assured knowledge that the project will never be complete.

A particular type, a migrant intellectual, one with an apparently full understanding of home and self prior to emigration and exile, combined in equal measure with a full understanding and knowledge of the colonial "home" he has not yet been to, is the type Lamming sets out to become. Only, after arrival he discovers that the greater obstacle before his understanding of a theoretical colonial home he has never seen is not an incapacity for processing the culture and spaces of England, nor is it any inability to understand the "English," but instead is a resistance on the part of the natives to understand or accept him, a resistance born of ignorance of both themselves and him.

C. L. R. James, coming to Britain and writing eighteen years before Lamming, encountered and documented the same baffling phenomenon. The shock over the apparent ingenuousness of most native-born Britons he encountered was utterly unsuspected:

> What surprised me most was that I had read more and had absorbed more of English literature and history than almost every English person I met. My knowledge astonished them and I was astonished too because I thought I had been reading what the average educated person in England read. I only realised the width of my reading and the range of my memory by coming to England and meeting educated people at the universities.[16]

The irony he discovers in this revelation is staggering. In its best formulation, the immediate sense of superiority afforded the colonial citizen would give him a strong start toward making his way successfully in the home country. In its worst, the feeling that he had been misled or lied to, that the whole idea of the colonial center, that the moral, intellectual and cultural superiority of England was a careful fabrication could leave the emigrant foundation-less. James elsewhere argues that those emigrants for whom this disparity would be most jarring would likely be the West Indian colonial citizens, many of whom are doubly-removed from either Africa or Asia, now in Britain. Those individuals "in language and social customs, religion, education and outlook are essentially Western and, indeed, far more advanced in Western culture than many a European community."[17] The community of which he speaks includes Britain itself, of course. Lamming would encounter a similar scenario as he pursued a career in writing and political and social commentary in London in the 1950s. It all begins, according to Lamming with a colonial education program that denied local heritage and instructional

focus in favor of an Anglo-centric perpetuation of "myth-making" through a strict diet of British culture:

> The West Indian's education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada. Since the cultural negotiation that was strictly between England and the natives, and England had acquired, somehow, the divine right to organise the native's reading, it is to be expected that England's export of literature would be English. Deliberately and exclusively English. And the further back in time England went for these treasures, the safer was the English commodity. So the examinations, [. . .] imposed Shakespeare, and Wordsworth, and Jane Austen and George Eliot and the whole tabernacle of dead names, now come alive at the world's greatest summit of literary expression.[18]

Taught to recognize the language of England and her literature as something that defined him and belonged to him as much as to any citizen of Britain, Lamming is only in a position to make this critical assessment of the curriculum presented him retrospectively. Only as an adult after his arrival in Britain, as C. L. R. James predicts, was the anaemic, myopic range of his schooling revealed to him. Further, just as Selvon has recounted, the stunning lack of this same "education"among most of the English people met upon arrival was something of a revelation, wherein nothing "struck me as forcibly, or rather impressionably, as this appalling ignorance about my part of the world, when I had been led to believe that I was coming to the fountainhead of

knowledge."[19] A particularly tense moment in Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) illustrates a comparable and general level of pat nescience concerning the colonial citizen. After Higgins's arrest at Marble Arch on suspicion of drug sales, the policeman immediately visits the barber shop, Higgins's admitted destination:

> "You sure he say this barber shop?" the barber asked.
>
> "You're the only one around here," the policeman said.
>
> "What make you think so?" the barber asked. "There's plenty more barber shops 'bout this part of London."
>
> "It's the only one your people come to around here," the policeman said.
>
> "Which people?" the Jamaican asked again. He was earnest.
>
> "I mean the coloured folk," the policeman said. He looked at the Jamaican with a mixture of kindliness and bewilderment.
>
> "There's coloured people and coloured people," the Jamaican said.
>
> "Would you say he's one of my people?" the barber asked, indicating the African. The policeman felt a trap had been laid for him. He hesitated, appearing to think out his answer, and then he said very calmly: "Yes, I would say all of you here are the same people."
>
> "Doan' make that mistake," the barber said. "'Tis a bad mistake to make."

"Aren't you all the same people then?" The policeman looked round at the men and the back at the barber.

"Let's say we are," the African said.[20]

The "kindliness and bewilderment" of the policeman is telling. The man clearly has a vague notion that he has said something potentially offensive, self-incriminating, or endangering; he feels "a trap" and hesitates, but he ultimately forges ahead with an assured assumption that all the black men in the room are "the same people then." Lamming makes it clear that they are not, in point of fact, the same. If by no reason other than the emphasis placed on nationality, "African" and "Jamaican" joining together to interrogate the witness, the narrative makes a special indication of their differences, yet the point made, they simply concede to the argument; "Let's say we are." This moment, which mirrors in several key ways Selvon's collection of West Indians and Africans in Moses's basement rooms, displays the possibility of solidarity between the disparate individuals. Together, they are individuals of African, Jamaican, Trinidadian and Barbadian beginnings, just as are "the boys" who make up Selvon's lonely London, yet in the presence of a white outsider in the space delineated as their inside, their haven and solace, they engage collectively to repel an outsider. They are not the "same people," but in the presence of the doubly-outside white policeman, they will "say" that they are the same. The accusatory presence of the policeman effects not homogeneity but solidarity in a way that otherwise is studiously avoided within the group. They are therefore successful in rebuffing the advance and incriminations. The officer quickly realizes nothing will be gained in this instance by forcing the point, and both the man's

hesitation and the shift in the rhetorical advantage are proof positive that in this case the movement of solidarity constitutes a win.

Further, the jolting discovery of what presents in this case as willful ignorance takes some time for most of the newcomers to the city to accommodate, but the fact that not all Englishmen belonged to an Oxbridge-educated elite with a deeply-ingrained understanding of world geography and cultures seemed directly to contradict the notion of the literary and cultural hegemony of Britain that had been spoon-fed to colonial citizens from their earliest and most formative days of their development as educated individuals. Apart from taking the empire down a peg, this realization elevates both the individual and the groups of disparate individuals, affording them the knowledge through collective action of their own capability for self assertion, previously denied them.

Still, for all the indignation, Lamming reveals that the newly-arrived emigrants can be found guilty of the same reductive thinking, also based upon his own limited range of experience and knowledge afforded through the colonial system. That the English were themselves a collection of cultures of much variety and of many classes and vocations was literally and figuratively a foreign concept. Lamming illustrates this with an anecdote from his own life, relating a conversation he had at the docks with a recently-arrived Trinidadian:

> Suddenly, there was consternation in the Trinidadian's expression.
>
> "But . . . but," he said, "look down there."

> I looked, and since I had lived six years in England, I failed to see anything of particular significance. I asked him what he had seen; and then I realised what was happening.
>
> "*They* do that kind of work, *too*?" he asked.
>
> He meant the white hands and faces on the tug. In spite of films, in spite of reading Dickens [. . .] in spite of all this received information, the man had never really felt, as a possibility and as a fact, the existence of the English worker.[21]

The cumulative effect is to place the West Indian colonial or Commonwealth-raised emigrant at a double disadvantage. First, he does not understand his own country as well as he might, because he has been starved of its history and culture in the British educational system.[22] Second, his image of British culture has been so adulterated with images and a false understanding of the "typical," acculturated, white-collar, well-read and sophisticated "Englishman" that he is incapable of making good sense of the England he encounters upon arrival. This double disadvantage plays itself out in Lamming's career in predictable directions, according to Nair:

> But for a writer who was trained more thoroughly in the British Literary canon than in any indigenous one, and whose conventional British colonial education eased him into the literary circles of London in the early fifties, the conditions under which he first began writing in what was then commonly called the West Indies made it impossible for him to bypass the colonial period.[23]

The colonial writer, particularly the West Indian, has begun at a severe disadvantage. Lamming spends the majority of his time discussing his own life in his literature, either directly or indirectly working through and attempting to clear himself of the influence of his deprived beginnings. Assertions of influence and dominance over him and others are a form of continued colonialism that he intends to resist, but this is a tall order. Influence from and dominance by the colonial master is implanted, firmly and nearly inextricably, in the lives and minds of all colonized children from the earliest age via a carefully planned campaign of colonial education.

The created fictions of a colonial history are evidence of the power of fiction to alter or guide the movements of reality and circumstance. As Lamming comes to realize, the fictive power of historical accounts is little different from the power of the novel when it comes to generating a sense of self and action within the real world. Among many of the West Indian writers in Britain in the 1950s, this realization became a major subject and motive for composition. Just as Selvon suggests that a system of aggressive and totalizing instruction works to communicate a hollow sense of imperial belonging in young Trinidadian children, leading to the false expectations of home and security in London, Lamming too examines critically the colonial education programs of his own childhood in Barbados. These programs generated a sense of discomfort as much as the intended filial comfort on most occasions. The juxtaposition was no accident. According to Louis James:

> These writers were paradoxically both intimate with, and alienated from, British culture. Their education in the Caribbean had been an intensively

> British experience. At school, their poets were Wordsworth and Keats; their novelists Dickens and Charlotte Brontë. Their history and geography were those of Europe. Yet they lived in a tropical world, and they were nurtured by an emotional and cultural milieu that their intellects were taught to deny. England was a world in which Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square and Marble Arch were as exotic as the Taj Mahal or the acropolis might have been to British imaginations.[24]

The effect of the system, intentional or no, was simultaneously to communicate a sense of belonging in and to the colonial center as well as cultivating a powerful awe or reverence, characterized by a sense of separation and unattainability. In the end, colonial students were removed from an understanding of both their birth homeland and their colonial "homeland" long before they ever physically traveled from the former to the latter. That vacated understanding was not to be filled with a sense of complete belonging again but by a hushed, museum-quality reverence for a place that they would come to find did not exist as it had been portrayed.

In the Castle of My Skin (1953) depicts several installments of classroom and educational experience from Lamming's native Barbados as a vehicle for explaining how the project of colonial inculcation begins very early and quite cleverly within the schools system. Presumably long before the youths are self-aware enough to resist or question the authority of those accounts, they have been inculcated. Throughout Lamming's recreations, exhibited largely from the perspective of the nine-year-old G., colonial methodology and teleology are in full view. The young black men of Barbados are

indoctrinated from an early age into the idea of a beneficent, motherly, yet stern Britannia who knows them better than they do themselves and knows what is better for them than they do as well. In one particularly illuminating episode, G. relates the arrival of a schools inspector wearing a "red, white and blue badge on the lapel," standing at the front of the room with the head teacher, "grinning jovially as if he and the inspector were part of a secret the others were to guess."[25] The inspector, union badge displayed proudly, and the head teacher, dutiful colonial officer, appear iconic and exclusionary; they are parties to secrets not shared; the young men of the school are beholden to these avatars of colonial potency. The secret is nothing less than the stuff of propaganda:

> My dear boys and teachers, we are met once again to pay our respects to the memory of a great queen. She was your queen and my queen and yours no less than mine. We're all subjects and partakers in the great design, the British Empire, and your loyalty to the empire can be seen in the splendid performance which your school decorations and the discipline of these squads represent. We are living, dear boys, in difficult times. We wait with greatest anxiety the news of what is happening on the other side of the world. Those of you who have read the papers may have read of the war in Abyssinia. You may have seen the pictures of the king of Ethiopia, and the bigger boys may have wondered what it's all about. The British Empire, you must remember, has always worked for the peace of the world. This was the job assigned it by God, and if the empire at any time has failed to bring about that peace it was due to

> events and causes beyond its control. But, remember, my dear boys, whatever happens in any part of this world, whatever happens to you here in this island of Barbados, the pride and treasure of the Empire, we are always on the side of peace. You are with us, and we with you. And together we shall always walk in the will of God.[26]

The speaker's rhetoric nearly collapses under the weight of its own jingoism. An occasion for celebrating the birthday of Queen Victoria becomes a vehicle for the confirmation and rededication of colonial bonds. Forced afterwards to parade into the school before the approving eyes of the inspector, the young Barbadians are included in a great "we"; that "we" rhetorically encompasses all present, and the language utilized would have them all believe that they are valued and needed in the work of God that Britain has set out to accomplish. That "great design" commands "loyalty"–read here as submission to order and participation in the march of the colonial before the scrutinizing eyes of the home country. Far-flung wars, engaging Britain in conflict with Mussolini and threatening the authority of the League of Nations were communicated as a threat to Barbadian children.[27] Once again, the movement of the empire is revealed to be above and beyond the simple understanding of colonial peoples, in this case even all people. Almost as much a recruiting advertisement as a birthday celebration, the inspector's language seeks to reinforce the moral certitude and rightness of empire with sanction from God. Failures, like that in Abyssinia, are then explained by causes incomprehensible to man.

Throughout, Lamming's Barbadian youth is reminded of his essential role in the machinery of empire. Together, the implication is of equality while the praxis is not, the British and the colonial British will "walk in the will of God," championing virtue and right throughout the world. They are reminded of their favored status, something the skeptic cannot help but imagine must be afforded to whomever the inspector or his dopplegangers elsewhere happen to speak. To examine such practiced linguistic manipulation, Lamming reveals, is to look behind the curtain at the constitutive mechanism of both fiction as a form and the empire as a construction of it. Almost as if it were a religion, thereby making the invocation of God no coincidence, the young men are taught to worship the beatified, saintly, deceased heads of "church" as exemplars of true virtue and colonial honor, all the while positioning themselves as supplicants and supporters in relation to the movement and righteous activities of a present-only-in-description deity. As the "pride and treasure of Empire," they are to find happiness in having pleased their absent lord while striving always still to maintain their favored post, a never-ending task meant to be joyously undertaken by the fortunate petitioner.

Taught to deny their allegiance to home and island culture in favor of obeisance to a deified notion of Britain, this crafty extrication of any sense of self and place takes great care to supplant what has been removed with a false notion of the empire as benevolent parent-figure. In Lamming's novel, the young men of "Groddeck's Boy School" are certainly subject to this learned behavior of denial and surrogation, if only one examines the scene above. Giving themselves over wholly to reconstitution as colonial citizens, the moral and cultural superiority embodied in the great, sweeping

mass of the British empire, symbolized in its literature becomes the very substance of who they are clearly meant to be. All of the evidence can be found in this axiomatic, nationalistic language, and to their purported benefit the boys have been brought into the fold.

The violent methods of this indoctrination are not immediately evident during this first encounter with the inspector, yet the potential for violent correction is always a possibility. Lamming illustrates this consonant mechanism in an episode during which the head teacher, himself a black man and colonial citizen, dutifully admonishes the young men to remember always that "Victoria was a real queen." When his statement is met with "a loud giggle from the corner of the school," suddenly the entire body of students "felt the terror of the change that had gone over him."[28] What follows is nothing short of disturbing. Calling for a confession from the giggler, the teacher stands at the front of the room, and tension grows. Coming forward, a terrified boy can no longer stand the anticipation of violence and "Suddenly [. . .] in terror leapt over the desks and benches." Lamming describes the manner in which the teacher looked at him, "as if he were a human symbol of the blackest sin." Subsequently, the young man was caught and brought forward:

> He could not speak. Four boys were summoned, and they bound him hands and feet and stretched him flat over a bench. The head teacher removed his jacket and gripped the leather. The first blow rent the pants and left the black buttocks exposed. The boy made a brief howl like an

> animal that had had its throat cut. No one could say how long he was beaten or many strokes he received.[29]

The brutality of this episode is shocking, particularly in direct relation to the cheerful, if only superficial munificence demonstrated by the inspector only moments before. The message is clear: The queen, alive or dead, is not to be the subject of mirth. One must learn proper respect for the station of the monarchy and by extension the body of the state, and young men who refuse to do so will have their inferiority demonstrated publicly, with their peers and fellow islanders as conscripted agents of that demonstration. There hardly could be a more effective method, one imagines.

As if to underscore this point, Lamming reveals in the following pages that the young man, so beaten, was not in fact the perpetrator of the great disrespect the station of the Queen. When pressed by his classmates later, the young man replied simply, "I could see it din't make no difference. He ad to beat somebody, and he made sure with me."[30] In so relating this episode, Lamming has deftly accomplished a clear depiction of the deliberated machinations of empire at work, even in the earliest educational activities of the young Barbadian. Simultaneously, in the unaccountable actions of the young man, he suggests a positive paradox. Recognizing that some young man was destined for a beating, the unnamed boy undermines the violence of the colonizer's lash by demonstrating that very violence is arbitrary, disproportionate and once diffused has done more ideological damage to the punisher than lasting physical hurt to the punished. At this moment in the narrative, the young men are incapable of recognizing the circumstances in such a political manner, concluding only that the teacher's behavior

is excessive and odd, but Lamming has already demonstrated the mechanism by which the colonized may begin to undermine the colonizer, effecting his agenda with cunning and sophisticated manipulation of a system that has instilled the knowledge and skill for its own dissolution. Intuitively, the young men understand how to resist the colonial mechanism by affecting an apparent submission to it.

Lamming's depiction of that realization, an unintended yet unavoidable result of the education of the colonial citizen in the colonial fashion, may be fictional, but the ideology it promotes was only to be echoed in the following years by many works of the anti-colonialist movement throughout the West Indies and the world. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is a polemic which has as its backdrop the French colonial rule of Algeria, yet the standardized mechanisms of colonial subjugation work in the same fashion in most any language. One may easily see the shade of the red, white and blue-badged schools inspector in Fanon's description of how "the settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is the extension of that mother country. Thus the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves."[31] In the very act of forcing the young men of Groddeck's Boy School to participate and formulate themselves as part of the beneficent empire, all while threatening or enacting violence against them, the "settler" inspector makes clear the tenuous nature of his position. His very presence there is dependant upon the continued belief among the colonized that there is some benefit to their participation, yet the

increasingly desperate and violent efforts of the empire's representative to maintain that illusion make it clear that the façade is crumbling. The young men are already learning how to take advantage. By revealing the arbitrary nature of the head teacher's brutal actions, they undermine his position. That subversion may only be moral, but it may also afford the possibility of resistance at the level of consciousness. As anti-colonialist Aimé Césaire would write some two years after Lamming published *In the Castle of My Skin*:

> The colonialists may kill in Indochina, torture in Madagascar, imprison in Black Africa, crack down in the West Indies. Henceforth the colonized know that they have an advantage over them. They know that their temporary 'masters' are lying.
>
> Therefore that their masters are weak.[32]

True and sophisticated recognition of that weakness, the kind of recognition that would allow for rejection of colonial occupation would be some time in coming, if ever, for many of the young men. In most cases rejection of the role a colonial system would seek to assign any individual would not be a prerequisite for freedom in the West Indies; European interests began a withdrawal under the duress of the World Wars and the ensuing economic crises. Nevertheless, the seeds of a studied, active rejection were being sown.

Lamming's depiction of the violence of colonialism and the boys' innate rejection of it reveal that from a very early and formative age one may have already begun an education in political awareness and activism, despite what one's school masters may

wish. Nair identifies this as a foundational aspect of Lamming's entire career, explaining that he "seems, for the most part, equally concerned with a critical deployment of the imagination, but [. . .] refuses to absolve colonial history," of responsibility for its violent outbursts, forcing it instead into "dialogic encounter with both historical and literary accounts of its passage."[33] A conclusion of this sort must presuppose that Lamming has no particular compunctions against conflating imagination and history. What colonial education and Lamming's discerning view of it allows is a recognition that history consists of far more than "significant events exclusive of everyday life" that can be and should be challenged by literature, which is itself capable in its better moments, of being a "a kind of imaginative record that paradoxically substantiates and challenges historical narrative."[34] Lamming does not just look at history as a monumental accounting of great acts by great men; literature can resist this sort of apotheosis by being interpretive and critical, even if it cannot be forensically complete.[35] Autobiographical literature, as in Lamming's case, must be especially critical. The need is not to learn more about himself, but through a combination of fictionalizing and historicizing, novels such as *In the Castle of My Skin* or *The Emigrants* can be composed of both critical truths and imaginative applications of those truths. Properly done, this type of fiction would challenge colonial narratives of history while engaging the reader and author in a dilemma of the fabulist or realist dichotomy. The novel can present an ideal while simultaneously recognizing that such an ideal is not a genuine possibility due to the vagaries and complications of real life. Rather stopping only at such failed imaginings of an ideal way for things to be, Lamming generates a fictional re-vision of

the manner in which the real past has bearing upon the real present. It is romantic in the sense that the reader has ho direct experience to confirm it ever happened and may then exist only as a fictional construct, but it is realist in that it does not seek only the ideal result, instead acknowledging the sometimes unpleasant truth of this romanticized retelling of historical and present or future "fact."

Such a conclusion does not necessarily mean that the creative and historical are symbiotic in Lamming's work. They are not at all interdependent in the most obvious and literal sense, perhaps in any sense, but Lamming seeks primarily to confuse all possible distinctions between the two. That scheme can only be described as a seamless application of realism and invention, history and narrative. Lamming's focus on beginnings rather than on endings can be seen simply as a matter of simple reason. He cannot write about what will happen, as it has not happened. He does not purport ever to know what cannot yet be known to happen, and is generally uninterested in the future as a concept for hope. More can be learned through a careful consideration and reckoning of the past, which includes the present, than via speculation about possibilities. The desire to compartmentalize the past must be avoided. Thinking of historical periods in terms of peaks and valleys: the beginning of colonial occupation . . . the end of colonial occupation . . . the beginnings of independence, is textbook monumental history. Doing so eschews proper recognition of the millions of shades of grey between these signpost events, the causes and ongoing effects, and such a survey instead discourages learning and fosters ignorance in many ways. Compartmentalization of thought and interpretation is the upshot, disciplinarianism is

the foreseeable result. A creative, critical realist, Lamming seeks to educate and inform only in the sense that he seeks to represent in true-to-life detail what exactly has happened, even if he has to make it up. In order to represent the reality of the colonial world in which he has grown up and made his literary way, Lamming portrays the truth of colonial life by drawing upon his own experiences as a child, those of others, and making additional imaginative connections in order to accomplish verisimilitude. Certainly, this mechanism might first appear as tautological, but upon deeper reflection it becomes clear that Lamming is on the same path as that traveled by both Selvon and MacInnes, negotiating the balance between the realist and fabulist narratives in works like *The Lonely Londoners* and the London Novels.

Lamming displays particular concern and attention throughout his career to the difficulties encountered in his attempts to incorporate colonial history, revealed as fabulation, and his own social agenda, again a type of fabulation, into his work, most of which is ostensibly autobiographical. The conundrum is an important one for Lamming. Utilizing his own past experiences, but impressing upon them now the mark of adult understanding and experiential knowledge is itself a kind of revision of what has occurred, a retelling in which the events of his youth are afforded significance and depth that likely were not apprehended at the time or did not in point of fact exist. The obvious conflict, then, is that he may fall into the trap of patently false storytelling with the aim of misleading or indoctrination the audience. History, whether personal or institutional, was the mechanism both of his indoctrination and potentially his liberation and the liberation of others.

Recognizing this dual possibility in history, Lamming selected Joyce's "History [. . .] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake,"[36] from the "Nestor" episode of *Ulysses* (1922), as the epigraph for *The Pleasures of Exile*. Lamming was in a unique position, certainly, to understand and appreciate Joyce's struggles with the force and nature of history. Like Stephen from *Ulysses*, struggling with his own self-composition, G. from *In the Castle of My Skin* works desperately to compose a portrait of himself and his race against the backdrop of the British colonial presence and the machinations of a social and political systems seeking to inculcate him as a commodity rather than an individual. Also like Joyce, Lamming shared a sophisticated understanding of the language of his colonial master, but possessed it as his own. He was not using British English self-consciously as a mechanism for shoring himself against colonial delimitation while aggressively or subversively establishing individuality via the language of colonial subjugation. Instead, he has utilized British English because as a British colonial subject, it is the only language he has ever known. It is therefore not the mechanism of language itself, as it seems with Caliban, that affords Lamming the space to identify himself and work for a sense of individual self while under the homogenizing, capitalizing and generalizing influences of colonialism and its revisionist tool, history. Lamming's personal accounts and individualized narratives make him unique, not the language in which they are communicated.

Lamming wished to inculcate his reader into the very same acts of rebellion and removal, believing that: "The reading of fiction involves a certain conspiracy of feeling between the writer and his reader. They have both agreed to accord every act of

imagination the status of an absolute truth. And the world of fiction must work toward this end."[37] Lamming's apology makes clear his essential assumption of the presence of an opposite in any composition. As an author, he always already presupposes the presence of a reader, recognizing that the two are complicit in producing the final result: the work of fiction. That work, then, is the sum total of the efforts of two individuals, not the exclusive right of the author, nor the purview of the reader to possess. Discussing the world of the novel, Lamming goes on to explain: "This world is not really the creation of individual wills. There is no privacy since the secret of each household can never escape communal scrutiny."[38] This constitutive theory of the work of fiction is best seen as Lamming's method of affording the greatest possible range of meaning and detail to his work while at the same time collecting such breadth into a singular voice, affording the possibility of direct communication and supporting a sympathetic and focused response from the reader. Having done so, Lamming wishes to effect depth and breadth while appearing to maintain a local and immediate sense of narrative. A similarity naturally develops, then, to the bifurcated project of a novel capable of producing a sovereign construction of self and a colonially constituted one. Just as the colonial master and the individual work toward and against one another, the author and the reader work together to imagine individual will under the scrutiny of the communal.

For Lamming, these constitutive conundrums can be adapted well through the particular form of the novel. As a result,

> The Novel has had a peculiar function in the Caribbean. The writer's preoccupation has mainly been with the poor; and fiction has served as a

> way of restoring these lives—this world of men and women from down below—to a proper order of attention; to make their reality the supreme concern of the total society. But along with this desire, there was also the writer's recognition that this world, in spite of its long history of deprivation, represented the womb from which he himself had sprung, and the richest collective reservoir of experience on which the creative imagination could draw.[39]

Lamming clearly aligns the novel with a sensibility for the rejuvenation and the resurrection of both the individual and collective consciousness in his former homeland. The possibilities in his native Caribbean are the very possibilities for identification, assertion of self and escape from an oppressive regime of history and colonial definition. From "down below," the novelist might affect an upheaval by way of the novel. Bringing the lives up to a "proper order of attention," the novelist makes good his own assertion of self and a reality defined by him, not externally. The novel can then afford a rebirth; such escape would be borne on the motive force of a personal history, which is itself both part and the whole of a history long since denied by the overbearing narratives of a colony/colonizer dichotomy.

In Lamming's case, that rebirth may be effected or demonstrated best by a peculiar method of narration. Sandra Pouchet Paquet suggests that Lamming's first novel utilizes a manipulative and crafty narrative method, arguing that the novel locates a "polyphonic design" within the narrative voice. She points in particular to the seemingly restless shifting between the voice of G., Ma and Pa, and the disembodied

voice of the community as examples of this design at work. Paquet submits that in the "contrastive juxtaposition of first and third person narrative modes" there lies further contradiction when one accounts for the frequent interruptions of the village voices that mute the individual narratives. Through these shifts, which may appear restless but are actually quite artful, can be seen the "transformational nature of Lamming's novelization of childhood and autobiography."[40] Lamming is aware of these contradictions, and acknowledges them as artifice and design, not as accidents or indicators of an inelegant narrative scheme:

> In this method of narration, where community, and not person, is the central character, things are never so tidy as critics would like. There is often no discernible plot, no coherent line of events with a clear, causal connection. Nor is there a central individual consciousness where we focus attention, and through which we can be guided reliably by a logical succession of event. Instead, there are several centers of attention which work simultaneously and acquire their coherence from the collective character of the Village.[41]

The occasional intrusions of colonizing voice, the voice of the colonial representative, or even the voice of the authority of age and experience as represented in Ma and Pa are the most clear instances of community narration throughout *In the Castle of My Skin*, and rather than complicating the narrative and confusing the issue of the individual self, G., they only serve to underscore his presence as autarkic and uniquely focused. That Lamming would make this polemical argument in connection with *In the Castle of My*

Skin is enlightened by the fact that this novel in particular is built primarily from his own adult understanding of his own colonial upbringing as a child. Lukács argues that the problem of these attempts at narrative is generated via the "inexpressible" nature of "the concrete idea of the whole, because only the polyphony of all the voices can carry the full wealth of the content concealed in it. For life, the problem is an abstraction; the relationship of a character to a problem can never absorb the whole fullness of that character's life, and every event in the sphere of life can relate only allegorically to the problem."[42] Lamming's trouble is then a difficulty inherent to the novel form. His novel attempts to work around the problem with multiple abstracted layers of narration. Focusing at once on G., then turning to the perspectives of elder characters for experience and guidance, communicating his own knowledge and thoughts through a distant, past self, then pushing on to a collective voice, full of contradictory impulse and conflicting narratives, Lamming seeks to alleviate the abstraction, oddly enough, by adding to it.

This work certainly incorporates abstractedness as a method for communicating a wide range of experience, yet Lamming generally expends his energies within the relation of the reader to G.; all events and experiences are ultimately filtered back through the character as a lens, even if they are narrated elsewhere as well. Lamming makes *In the Castle of My Skin* a narrative of convoluted and problematic record primarily through his complex, layered rendering of the young man. The assumption that the character, G., is George Lamming is a welcomed and frequent one, supported by the author's own comments. Still, the novel works assiduously to ensure also that he is

recognized simultaneously as many others, also. Rather than asserting that G., or himself, or some amalgamation of the two, represents a personal history that is entirely and utterly unique to Lamming, the author instead employs narrative confusion, complication, linguistic trickery and an ability for retrospective analysis that not only problematize the narrative chronologically but force a crisis concerning the scope of knowledge and interpretive ability afforded the young man. G. knows more than he can know, understands more than he should, yet is simultaneously naive, moving from each formative experience to the next, learning and becoming a more and more complicated individual, while speaking at times with the voice of one who knows how this will all turn out.

Lamming, himself speaking retrospectively, describes the manner and mode of his composition: "In the desolate, frozen heart of London, at the age of twenty-three, I tried to reconstruct the world of my childhood and early adolescence. It was also the world of a whole Caribbean reality."[43] Lamming's language belies the complicated nature of his undertaking. There is no "smithy of the soul"[44] here, but the thought Lamming expresses is one sympathetic to the fraught *raison d'etre* of Dedalus. Different though is Lamming's clear recognition that his project begins with a redefinition, perhaps even a first definition of self. His goal is not a grand one. The goal is intensely personal; *through* coming to understand and chronicle his own naivety Lamming will subsequently and simultaneously produce an entire "Caribbean reality." The idea is not an aggrandizing conception of himself as the sole repository of the sum total of a reality encompassing millions of people and thousands of miles of geographically,

linguistically and culturally varied terrain. Lamming argues that the entirety of the tale can be found through forensic examination of any individual consciousness from the locale. Even though so much may be contained within the individual, such volumes may be as yet unknown to the teller himself. The task before him is to learn of himself and in so doing to unleash a greater, older, longer narrative history of a collective consciousness that pre-dates him, forms him, subsumes him, and will carry on well after him. No mean feat, one recognizes, but one which Lamming believes is the particular honor and burden of the West Indian writer.

Fortunately, that burden is not entirely his own. Lamming has often been accused of self-aggrandizing behavior, but it is important to note here the good fortune that the project of West Indian identity has been given over to a whole generation of novelists. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming lists many authors beside himself, all of whom have participated in their various ways in this unspoken project of reclamation. Edgar Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon, Roger Mais, Andrew Salkey, Jan Carew, and Derek Walcott all share positive assessment from Lamming and to varying degrees with many others. Theirs is the terrible good fortune of being essential to the beginnings of a renaissance in West Indian identity effected by literature. Recognizing, as he puts it, that "The West Indian novel, by which I mean the novel written by the West Indian about the West Indian reality is hardly twenty years old,"[45] he contends that in a very short space of time much has been accomplished by an enterprising few. Primarily that success has been due to a simple fact:

> The West Indian novelist did not look out across the sea to another source. He looked in and down at what had traditionally been ignored. For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labour. He became, through the novelist's eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality.[46]

The novel has afforded the West Indian author a chance not to erase the colonial learning and inculcation that has been forced upon him, but an opportunity, to work back through and past that indoctrination to a point at which he can begin to educate himself about his own identity in relation to a past and heritage that was suppressed. Lamming identifies the "discovery of the novel" by the West Indian as one of the three foundational events in British Caribbean history. Following behind colonial "discovery" and the dissolution of slavery only chronologically, this "new dimension" is of inestimable importance: "In the Caribbean we have a glorious opportunity of making some valid and permanent contribution to man's life in this century. But we must stand up; and we must move."[47] The West Indian novelist, that particular creation of the congress between colonial education and global mobility, will make his mark not simply at home in the Caribbean, for "the West Indian writer does not write for them; nor does he write for himself. He writes always for the foreign reader. That "foreign" does not mean English or American exclusively. The word *foreign* means other than West Indian whatever that other may be. He believes that a reader is *there*, somewhere. He can't tell

where, precisely, that reader is."[48] Apparently, he need not be able to answer that implied question.

According to Richard Wright's introduction to the 1983 American edition of *In the Castle of My Skin*, the unlocatable foreign audience is also in many ways the subject of the work: "Notwithstanding the fact that Lamming's story, as such, is his own, it is, at the same time, a symbolic repetition of the story of millions of simple folk who, sprawled over half the world's surface and involving more than half of the human race." Wright observes that Lamming has done nothing short of constitute a narrative of millions through composing his own, and proposes that in doing so Lamming has communicated the "turbulence" of the twentieth-century. Lamming suggest that the potential for conveying that upheaval was always there, simply waiting for activation. He argues that the turbulence and its accompanying anxiety have "catapulted" those subjects into an assertion of their own history. They are "engaged in a global war to liberate their villages, rural and urban, from the old encirclement of poverty, ignorance, and fear."[49] That conflict is "fundamental"and essential.

One reason for such urgency may well be the avowedly long-term but potentially homogenizing effects of migrancy. Ian Chambers has suggested that the eventual lesson is that migrancy "involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation."[50] Over time, from indistinct points of departure to indistinct destinations, the danger might be that the collective is uniformly shiftless. Thought out, the urgency is thus explained: the

emigrant, particularly the West Indian emigrant in Lamming's theory, must take advantage of his learned aptitude for language and historical reckoning in order to reflect upon and assert his own identity and that of his native home in order to resist the inexorable decline of that home as a result of colonial withdrawal, cultural dilution, or economic irrelevance. The novel can accomplish all three tasks. In order to do so, the novelist must aggressively maintain his sense of self and place as constructions of the influences of home and the influences of the adopted home. Such efforts require exile, it seems. The result is an individual not-at-home within himself, always feeling the pain of leaving and the anxiety of arrival. James Louis thus suggests that: "To a large extent, West Indian writing has grown out of the pain of 'leaving,' out of a sense of deprivation. Its sharpness of focus has often been produced by the fact that it is a literature about belonging, seen across a void of oceans."[51] That literature of belonging, the assertion of village and home, is paradoxically only possible for the exile.[52] One must leave home in order to understand what home is. There is nothing about this realization that is exclusive to the West Indian author or reader, yet the manner in which the colonially-repressed West Indian subject may be not so much recovering as inventing that home as a distinctly literary locale speaks directly to the singular nature of the novel form employed in the West Indian context.

The leaving is dangerous. Apart form the physical perils of the journey, there are emotional, spiritual and mental threats to the sovereignty of the individual in exile. Lamming dramatizes these threats and the reactions to them throughout his work. In the first few pages of the section entitled "A Voyage" in *The Emigrants*, the sense of hope

and trepidation-laden expectation is communicated in the repetiton-with-variation of the phrase, "We were all waiting for something to happen."[53] As the eponymous group of characters depart for Liverpool, they display an acute level of anxiety. Over the many, many days of their voyage, that expectation waxes and wanes, but finally culminates in a curious disquiet, described as England, their destination, finally lay before them: "As the ship drew near the next stop, which was England, the need for company became greater. It happened to all of them."[54] The reason is clear, they huddle together, suddenly ignoring the disparities between them, in an attempt to feel some security. What is before them is suddenly quite daunting. The inexorable nature of their trip takes on a new tone of fear, even violence, demonstrated by the ship's engine:

> The ship's pace seemed to quicken to a speed that was reckless. It cut cruelly through the water as though it had found a new pleasure in its power and possession. The rumble of the engine would not subside and the waters opened to the thrusting keel as the ship cut accurately through the receiving surface. Receptivity was strained to the utmost as though every nerve had been exposed to the invading pleasures for the ecstacy of a single moment held, and kept and squeezed till the energy had spent itself, and desire dwindled to a limp and harmless thing.[55]

Conflating imagery of conquest, colonization, intercourse, and even rape, the ship taking them to England comes to represent the colonizer, with "power and posession" cutting through the colony. The pent-up energies, fears and frustrations of the emigrants on board, becoming sexualized and physical, here echoing their expectations, "waiting for

something to happen," as before, are both spent and made impotent in the end. The passengers, represented through collective narration, are left huddling in the darkness of the ship's dormitory, awaiting the final part of the journey.

Their position is a fraught one, as Lamming describes it. Physical journey over, disembarkation imminent, Higgins cowers:

> He was crying over himself and the others. For in the dormitory, it was as though they were in a cage with the doors flung open, but they couldn't release themselves. Beyond their enclosure was *no-THING*, Nothing mattered outside the cage, because there was *no-THING*. So they remained within the cage unaware of what was beyond, without a trace of desire to inhabit what was beyond. It was unnatural and impossible to escape into something that didn't matter. [. . .] The only tolerable climate of experience was reality which was simply an irreversible instinct to make things matter. [. . .] Life was what mattered, and reality was part of the instinct that gave the life some meaning. The instinct could make no claim on what went beyond, for beyond there was *no-THING*. *No-THING* that mattered. The door remained open and the cage festered with its reality which mattered for innumerable reasons and in innumerable ways.[56]

Again, the ship and its journey come to represent, like a reverse Middle Passage, the escape to freedom of the colonial with his history of enslavement, the subjugated. That freedom, the departure from the safety of the colonial "cage" that is a Caribbean home,

is terrible. Cage though it may be, the colonial home with all of its "realities," themselves constituted by and founded on the colonial relationship, false though they may be, are the familiar, the *some-THING* by implication that England is not yet and may never be. Fear is not only reasonable but perhaps the only logical reaction. If home and its reality are what make life "matter," then what may happen if immersion in the "beyond" home takes that away? Higgins's panic, though at first disproportionate, is revealed to be utterly justifiable as an indication of the fear the individual must reasonably feel in relation to the truly unknown void.

Lamming's depiction of their particular trepidations and the suggestion that they are not the first to experience such fear is not meant to belittle them. Instead, their dread serves a proof positive that they are members of a larger community of exiles in the world, people who have themselves felt fear and pressed on. Despite such warranted dread, they must leave the boat. Higgins, Collis and the others must take up their place among the many other emigrants who have already made this journey and are attempting to make their way in England. As he prepares for the step to land, Collis asks innocently and socially whether a Yugoslav traveling companion has any brothers. The man replies "Millions, millions, and the family has only just begun to grow. Brothers in every land, of every race and age. I've never felt a greater hope for mankind." Taken aback, "Collis was silenced."[57] The Yugoslav refers to his fellow migrants, to the wind-blown seeds of a now-global community of international, inter-cultural citizens, but Collis can only think of him now as a lunatic. In an inelegant sweeping attempt at magnanimity, the man has apparently threatened Collis with yet another normalizing

definition. His inability to apprehend the man's meaning or appreciate its sentiment is symptomatic of the same problems afflicting Higgins in the dormitory below decks. For Lamming, according to Chamberlain's reading, "Being-there, existing in-and for-yourself" were difficult and perhaps impossible ideals, even in the best of circumstances, but "as Lamming insisted, for the black West Indian it was not even possible to imagine what these might mean in constructing the self." The ability to formulate a self, such a "freedom was both a personal and a public choice, and neither could be achieved while colonialism corrupted the psyche *and* the polis."[58] These depictions of existential crises in the novel are in each case perhaps fictional embellishments of circumstances Lamming experienced himself while en route to Britain. At the very least, he witnessed them second-hand. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, he describes a change that came over his traveling companion:

> Selvon and I, like members of some secret society, were always together. But this comradeship turned to a strange reticence during the last few days of the journey. Sam had taken to walking alone in the more remote parts of the ship. Sometimes he would be seen working in odd corners: a small grey typewriter on his knees and long black locks of his hair fallen forward, almost screening him from view. He would go up on the deck as if no one was there. He would take refuge in the dormitory whenever it was empty.[59]

Lamming never spoke to Selvon of this change in behavior, at least not that either of them have mentioned in their respective work, fictional or otherwise, but based on the

understanding and sympathy the narrative descriptions of Collis and Higgins display, it would perhaps be fair to assume that Lamming understood the causes of Selvon's melancholy to be various and personal but ultimately tied to an uncertainty about his arrival in England. His portrayals of Higgins, stripped of all will to venture forward outside of the colonial constructions of self and home, and Collis, who is willing but unable to do so, are documentary in some way. The criminality and corruption of the system has perhaps rendered them incapable of actions or decisions. The reality of his own crossing has become the fiction of his novel, but the fear is genuine in either case. The events may be dramatized as a crisis of self external to the reader and author, but they express the similarity between the circumstances of reality and creativity.

Such a conclusion is but a different formulation of Lamming's argument that the Caribbean has been "repopulated and manufactured."[60] The "West Indian,"and the native home of such, the "Caribbean," is no more a collective social or cultural entity than are the constituent parts of the "United Kingdom" or the member states of the "European Union." Certainly they have a laundry list of things in common, most of all geography, as would any Trinidadian and Barbadian "West Indian" immigrant in London, but as both Lamming and Selvon go to great lengths to explain, these people are only West Indian by virtue of their presence in London or abroad. The idea of the "West Indies" as a geographical and quasi-cultural delineation had of course been around for as long as European explorers had insisted that the passage to the west across the Atlantic was simply a short cut to the Indies of trade fame and fortune. The concept saw a reprisal as a totemic identification in the 1890s, and spurred on in the

1920s, when the federated cricket team of the "West Indies" was afforded full Test status.[61] For Lamming and Selvon, the terminology was literally foreign at first, Selvon never quite came to embrace it as readily as Lamming, but both of these "West Indian" authors mention on many occasions that they had absolutely no idea what that meant before they came to the city. Even then, it was a characterization Lamming conscientiously inhabited, over time.

For a young man like Lamming, arriving in London in 1950 at the age of twenty-three, the desire to begin writing about the experience of migration was compelling. As a producer of a commodity, in this case literature, Lamming would come to feel that he did have something particular to offer to England and to the world. What he offered early on in his first two novels was rather bleak, by any account. That apparent bleakness is but an effect of the reality of West Indian life at the time. Lamming argues that the "almost unbroken bleakness of these novels is meant to suggest not the 'death of the West Indian,' but 'the death of empire,' although it detonates amidst the migrants, who cannot escape the devastation."[62] Given that so many identities were founded upon the notion of the colonial and colonized in relation to the force of empire, a destruction of that institution would leave behind many individuals in search of a social location or relation. Lamming is doubly-affected. The devastation he speaks of is visited on the West Indian populations of both the Caribbean and Britain; he is part of both. Rather than bleakness for its own sake, the portraits offered in Lamming's work convey the cold reality of a mutually dependent mid-century *in media* devastation. Bruce King addresses this catastrophe:

> By the mid '50s England was in a paradoxical situation; while not wanting people of colour it had become dependent upon them in many areas where whites would not accept employment or where there were shortages of those with professional qualifications. Both industry and public services required the new immigrants who were resented by many, especially by a working class which already felt disenfranchised and now felt in competition with those of a different colour.[63]

The weakened empire has become dependent on those it had at one time either exploited or developed, depending upon one's ideological positioning. The peace was an uneasy one. Lamming's goal was to negotiate that unease:

> What I want to do . . . quite simply is to try and locate the context in which this arrival of writers from the Caribbean took place in London in the 1950s. Can you imagine waking up one morning and discovering a stranger asleep on the sofa of your living room? You wake this person up and ask them "What are you doing here?" and the person replies "I belong here". . . On the one hand, the sleeper on the sofa was absolutely sure through imperial tutelage that he was at home; on the other, the native European was completely mystified by the presence of this unknown interloper.[64]

Gail Low interprets the metaphor as one particularly apt to describe the "high drama" and "paranoia" on the part of many native Britons in reaction to the presence of colonial citizens, made all the more acute as it is depicted as taking place within the private and

domestic spaces of home and hearth."[65] What this analogy does not account for, however, is the rather important fact that the couch-owning interrogator has only just returned home from having spent the last three hundred years installing couches all over the so-called interloper's part of the world, in the process discarding any "native" furniture he found. This particular new arrival has only come to sleep on the couch under immediate scrutiny because he had been raised to believe it was his inheritance, as much his as anyone's. In simple terms, what Lamming fails to address in his conceit is the fact that the English "couch" owner simply has no right to complain. Lamming sought to identify a space from which he might work to further his own identity and the identity of his culture, a hybrid of island home and colonial birthright. As an emigrant, reactions to Lamming are perhaps predictable; false though the analogy may be in its lack of completeness, he is that "stranger" sitting on the couch in the middle of the living room. Given the context of the complex relations between the colonizer and colonized and the rapidly shifting interactions in the mid-century, the criticisms of Lamming as a writer were occasionally predictable, although still often shocking in their simplicity and short-sightedness.

In *The Spectator*, Francis Wyndham assessed Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* thus: "This is a minor book by a remarkable writer. George Lamming does not seem to realize that being a remarkable writer is more important than being a remarkable West Indian writer. By insisting on seeing himself as part of a self-conscious group, of which he is the official spokesman, he unconsciously fosters an attitude both pointless and patronising."[66] Wyndham's judgement, then, is that while Lamming shows great talent,

he simply speaks too much and too openly about being a West Indian, something Lamming has made quite clear is his responsibility. Wyndham's ideas might easily be accounted for via accusations of stereotyping, but Lamming is intensely self-aware in his work. What Wyndham reads as accident of incapability on the author's part is actually a consciously-activated strength. Such an assumption that a West Indian author writing in English would want to hide his nationality and background is problematic, to say the least, colonialist to put it mildly, yet such suppositions have been made frequently. In his own slightly awkward appraisal of *The Emigrants*, G. R. Coulthard, oddly enough writing for a publication of the Institute of Race Relations in Britain, judges that "The difficulties encountered by Lamming's West Indians in London seem to derive mainly from the temperamental disaffinities with the English character."[67] The problem has little to do with a hundreds of years old colonial occupation or a systematic undermining of local history and culture; the miserable plight of many of Lamming's emigrants can all be put down to a simple disagreement of temperament. Coulthard goes further even, suggesting that the fortunate thing about Lamming and those like him coming to Britain and composing novels will allow them to shake the bad habit of indulging in depictions of "local colour, general folksiness and 'rurality' to which West Indian writers at home are prone. Writing about West Indians in London, New York or Paris will make them aware of a greater complexity of human relationships than those that exist in the small town, village, or completely rural environment of the West Indian islands."[68] In essence, then, the hope expressed in this essay is that the West Indian novelist will become *more* English and cosmopolitan in sensibility, allowing him to

"write about a greater complexity of human relationships than those that exist in the small town, village, or completely rural environment."[69] Fortunately for the reading public, he has resisted such "normalization."Lamming demonstrates throughout his career that he is capable of containing the multitudes of both "here" and "there."

As a self-consciously inside-outsider, Lamming gains an imaginative mastery over Britain, London in particular, to which both he and Selvon aspired. Following the same juxtaposition of polyphony and individuality found in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, and employing the same sensibility of mercenary honesty and youthful uninterest in rules and the status quo, Lamming's work speaks in a singular voice to and through the experiences of many individuals. Lamming has simultaneously demonstrated the power of the novel to communicate the local experience of the subject, while at the same time establishing clearly the possibility that the novel can convey a greater range of social possibility in the narration of particular events. Bruce King contends that Lamming's "concern with the politics of colonialism is a concern with the precise quality of individual experience, as it reflects the weight of history on the total society. As Lamming conceives it, this is the proper function of the novelist and the responsibility of the Caribbean writer in particular."[70] Lamming's concern with the individual is generated by a realization that for the individual outsider to come inside the spaces and places of the colonial and metropolitan home, the maintenance of individual perspective is essential. Each of them, inside and outside, must be defined always and only in relation to one another. As with segregation, artificial separation can only guarantee that neither will be in full possession of itself. In combination and careful

respect for one another, the inside and the outside can effect a re-narration of the British identity that will in many ways determine the sense of the nation's role in the changing post-war world. Moving into the latter twentieth century, there must be a balance between an individual's right to a sovereign sense of themselves and the realization that maintaining any such right also requires a sense of all others.

Chapter 5–

Grown from Old Roots:

The 1950s Novel in Retrospect

Scarcely moments after the novel begins, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) features an inverted and falling Gibreel Farishta imagining the figurative and literal impact he and his companion are about to have on an unsuspecting and unprepared city below: "Proper London, bhai! Here we come! Those bastards down there won't know what hit them. Meteor or lightning or vengeance of God. Out of thin air, baby. *Dharrraammm*! Wham, na? What an entrance, yaar. I swear: splat."[1] While Gibreel's glee appears odd given his predicament, the sentiment is not without a certain accuracy. As the works of MacInnes, Selvon and Lamming carefully document, the arrival of first hundreds, then thousands, of Britain's colonial citizens in the late-1940s through the middle decades of the century made a dramatic impact on and within the culture of London and Britain and, as has been argued here, in the literary community, specifically. Decades before Rushdie's Gibreel made his appearance, MacInnes's Fortune, Selvon's Moses, and Lamming's Collis each arrived in the city with little ceremony, no pomp, and in desperate circumstances. Presenting these characters to the city and the city to them, each of the three authors brings new definition to a difficult and complex moment in British identity. The publicly-discussed fear of a British decline was in actuality a misplaced fear over a lack of certitude in old, now outdated, ideas of

what Britain *was*. These novels prove how misplaced that fear has been. Britain was not in decline so much as Britain was in transition from being the Britain of empire to becoming the Britain of the post-war world.

In recovering the city from such outmoded historical considerations and individually-motivated or obsessively self-focused description, all three authors studied here are in their own ways predecessors to a kind of "redemptive approach to the city" envisioned by Gibreel in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Remarkably, Gibreel's great fall ends with a relatively safe landing in London, and he indeed finds a city that does not know what has hit it. Fractured, various, Rushdie's London seems to be populated, too, by lonely and disconnected individuals in search of a sense of themselves. Notions of the collective "Britain" are to be eschewed; the city and the nation are not preconstituted molds to which all must conform, they are themselves created by the collected individuality of all the inhabitants, past, present and future. As Ian Baucom surmises: "Gibreel wishes to save the city for multiplicity, for the abundance and superfluity of the thousand and one narratives that are the substance of England's migrant history. He intends to reveal that England is not unitary, that England's spaces of inhabitation are not interrupted or vandalized by the returns of the post-colonial migrant, but that Englishness [. . .] is constituted as an imperfect and perpetually incomplete construction."[2] Rushdie employs the same notions of a multiplicitous self and nation in his seminal *Midnight's Children* (1981), and while the focus is on another of Britain's colonial holdings, India, the idea that one can, in this case quite literally, create a new vision of the nation by starting within himself comes to the

fore. This notion, as formulated in both works, can clearly be reconciled with the notion of Selvon's London of multiple narratives, MacInnes's pop-cultural wildness, or Lamming's exilic and transcendental homelessness.

Freed from the concerns of fidelity to a notion of Britain they had discovered was no longer accurate, if ever it was, and by their own outsider status, Selvon, Lamming, and MacInnes each chose to write instead about a new Britain. That Britain was one they sought to document faithfully as the one in which they were living: the Britain of their everyday lives in the city. As has been demonstrated in the proceeding chapters, these authors have themselves been individually and socially formed by old institutions of colonialism and cultural hegemony, but they nevertheless endeavor to depict a country and culture that are heading in new directions. They are resolute in their dedication to depicting that newness as positive, no matter how despairing their works may occasionally seem. Returning home for the first time, coming to the inside, to what is meant to be familiar and their own, they are all resolved as outsiders to the disparity. The purpose, going forward, is to take what they have learned about themselves and the various institutions to which they have been subject, and in the words of T. S. Eliot, "to grow a contemporary culture from the old roots."[3] Doing so, Lamming, Selvon and MacInnes represent a new inside. All maintain outsider status, and display through their works the continued ability of the novel to construct a space for commentary and meaning in a time very much in need of both. That time advances beyond that of Eliot, one of the last great representatives of a pre-war British canon. The new growth passes

beyond what Eliot must likely have had in mind to something cultural and literary criticism had not yet learned to evaluate.

The current body of criticism considered under the mantle of "post-colonial" theory certainly represents a sustained effort at making just such evaluations, and Baucom's reading of Rushdie's Gibreel is a fine example of post-colonial studies at work in interesting and considered approaches to works broadly considered representative of a new British literary canon, are probably quite different from that imagined by Eliot. The "thousand and one" histories that Baucom discerns in the London of *The Satanic Versus* are preceded by the same type of multiplicitous narratives in the work of MacInnes, Selvon and Lamming. For Baucom to say also that "Englishness," and in this case one must broaden the proposition to include "Britishness," is "constituted as an imperfect and perpetually incomplete construction" is to encounter again the representational conflicts both Selvon and Lamming encountered upon their arrivals in London. The city, itself a representation of both England and Britain, was revealed to them as a kind of literary construction itself. What they had been taught as colonial subjects in Trinidad and Barbados is not, by their accounts, what they discovered upon immigrating. MacInnes addresses the same tension within the narrative of his absolute beginner, who struggles to reconcile his own notions of youth, power, and possibility with the grim reality of a city full of tension, or worse: utterly indifferent to eroding possibilities of cultural and social revitalization. For all three authors, bold statements and revelations about the reality of life in the city and in the colonial center were the best

and only way of combating fictionalized, ahistorical, and therefore misrepresentational accounts of the nation at mid-century.

Many subsequent British authors would begin to build a similar understanding of the nation or the city based upon the same principles examined within these 1950s texts. The fracture of old institutions, the conflict of identities as the old order was overturned or at the very least unsettled, has, in the words of third-generation West Indian emigrant author Mike Phillips, offered"the possibility of recreating a single culture with very different facets."[4] Such singularity is only possible, ironically enough, by submission to the regularizing mechanisms of the novel form, the encounter of author and reader, the hegemony of the us/them dialectic. As an author who submits to being loosely definable as a "black British novelist," Phillips is one of a select few who has given great consideration to the legacy of the 1950s writers who have come before him. His own understanding of the complications of self and society, quite obviously informed by the same forces as MacInnes, Lamming, and Selvon, suggests that:

> any individual consciousness is determined or over-determined by compulsory relationships and external processes. No one is a simple and autonomous unit. This is the point at which we all emerged from the long transformation of the post-Enlightenment world. In the case of the black British, we were obliged to be conscious (aware) of the sense in which our selves were characterized by compulsory relationships with the people and the environment we found in the United Kingdom.[5]

The logical connections between Phillips's assessment and those of Selvon and Lamming are likely generated in large measure by a shared experience of colonial emigration. Both Lamming and Selvon had the opportunity to work through those experiences intellectually and as adults well before Phillips did as a child, and each wrote of those experiences throughout their careers. Selvon's Moses interacted habitually with fellow lonely Londoners in spaces both communal and private; such interactions are a redeveloping of the potential for over-determination that Phillips describes here. Lamming also recognizes the formative and regulatory activities of the imperial center as well, whether he displays them through semi-autobiographical re-tellings of his days educated in Barbados or through the daily re-education of colonial status he receives in the metropole.

Perhaps less obviously but no less significantly, MacInnes observes a personal agenda for which Phillips's description is also apt. Himself a figure of studious individuality, MacInnes takes great pains to create or encourage careful consideration of emerging and vital methods of escape from the same external definitions and ordering that Selvon, Lamming, and Phillips have encountered. The unnamed narrator of *Absolute Beginners*, Johnny MacDonald Fortune, and Montgomery Pew all are representatives of a capacity for challenging compulsory interactions and external processes, ultimately rejecting them in favor of individuality and escape. In many ways, all three of the authors studied here have sought to indulge the individual conscious or unconscious as a way of establishing or re-establishing a true historical self in lieu of a self prepared for them institutionally. Having done so, they do not fall into the trap of fetishizing the self

thus created. Each works to maintain autonomy while at the same time affording the possibilities of growth and change as the public spaces of home begin to make their impression on them and they on it.

As the preceding chapters have shown, these impressions become the raw materials for their novels. By focusing rigorously on particular individuals as well as those individuals' interactions within a group, MacInnes, Lamming and Selvon produce accounts of fictional lives that are complete and are immediately of import within the real, untidy world with all its discontinuities and inexplicable events. MacInnes's fragmented and disquieting accounts of the Notting Hill riots, Selvon's descriptions of Moses's anxiety of place and role, and Lamming's depictions of both G. and Collis's individual struggles for self-definition in the face of historical and cultural assimilation and are each rumbustious, cluttered yet accurate representations of life in 1950s Britain. These works include fictional elements and historical events in an indistinguishable blend, but such is proven to be the most appropriate method of communicating the age.

The mid-century novel has a complex relationship with its own history, by which we must mean not just the events preceding it as much as the cultural changes, political maneuvering and social events with which it was concurrent. Appropriately comprehending the legacy of a previous Britain and simultaneously maintaining focus on the present is demonstrably difficult. The novel in mid-century Britain was not an "uneasy part" of history, rather our understanding of its relation to that history may be uneasy. Authors may have themselves been occasionally uneasy about how best to proceed in communicating a complex range of feelings, circumstances, and changes, but

that unease is not a failing of MacInnes, Selvon and Lamming, nor of their novels. It is rather a present-day fact, a historical attribute in and of itself. Critical examinations that seek to recognize this truth and to consider these works in and of their own time–not anachronistically or nostalgically–are better prepared to measure their place within the substantive allotment of twentieth-century British literature. This study has, then, attempted just such an informed literary historical reading of the type Paul de Man identifies in his 1971 essay "Literary History and Literary Modernity":

> All the directives we have formulated as guidelines for a literary history are more or less taken for granted when we are engaged in the much more humble task of reading and understanding a literary text. To become good literary historians, we must remember that what we usually call literary history has little or nothing to do with literature and that what we call literary interpretation–provided only it is a good interpretation–is in fact literary history.[6]

Ultimately, the goal of this examination has not been to read these authors' works as formative of the period in which they wrote but to suggest that they are themselves uniquely formed by and within it. Interpreting the work of MacInnes, Selvon and Lamming properly demands a contextualized understanding of the time-period and the social situations in and of which they wrote. In so doing, a literary history built of a literary interpretation, in de Man's description, is the desired result.

Through such an interpretive mode, the preceding chapters have shown that the condition of the novel in Britain in the 1950s was characterized by a profusion of unique

voices from various authors who themselves had keen observations to make about the nature and manner of a revision of British identity already underway. These re-considerations are demonstrated variously through the gritty re-imaginings of MacInnes's London as a "city of any dream" for those who could learn to manipulate perspective, as a conflicting impulse for sovereignty of self in conflict with an inescapable need for social context in the work of Selvon, or as a direct confrontation with the methods of historical definition and hierarchy in Lamming's work. There can be little doubt that all three of these novelists each develop remarkable and successful methodologies applied in an effort to bring redefinition and clarity to a time they saw lacking in both. While it is true that, as Bernard Bergonzi has said, "the relation between the small world of a novel and the large world from which it draws its life is rarely simple and can be remarkably complicated,"[7] it is also true that the novelist need not be always concerned with the "large world." If he can instead consider his particular locality, delineated by the boundaries of himself and his own experiences, then a faithful representation may convey a sense of the much larger whole. None of these novelists' experiences, taken alone, may illustrate the totality of the contemporary scene, but they recognize that any "complete" illustration, in whatever capacity one might attempt to construct it, could only ever be a compilation of multiple personal narratives. The modernist rejection of grand narrative and sense of fundamental disconnection was certainly communicated through their works, yet independent of literary enterprise, their experiences on the margins of society had given that disconnection form before they began to write.

Rather than introducing a problem, the writing that results from such closing off presents an opportunity to shape an understanding of the new conditions of British culture. Hundreds of years into nationhood and with the weight of countless artists upon it, the recreation of what it means to be British was afforded not only by colonial withdrawal, emigration and cultural upheaval but also simply through a profusion of new voices who felt themselves unbeholden to previous literary tradition. The benefit of doing so, as described by Jed Esty, is that in new "representations of Englishness" the goal can finally be not to avoid the old failures caused by a tendency to "fetishize national tradition and to recognize and come to terms with its limitations."[8] Instead, these three authors, freed of any fidelity to old, dearly-held insider notions of what Britain has been, begin in their own ways to document the emergent social, cultural and political realities of the nation. In refusing the fetishistic impulse spoken of by Esty, MacInnes, Selvon, and Lamming simultaneously acknowledge the limitations of that tradition as primarily responsible for the crisis of British literary conscience that many have subsequently concluded is the only legacy of the 1950s.

Such reflection and introspection is made possible through these authors' liberal application of the insider/outsider dichotomy as a way of making sense of the world they inhabit. A more generalized post-colonial version of the old colonized/colonizer dialectic, the insider/outsider dyad is revealed in deeper examination of these author's works to be a useful way of thinking about how the novel can communicate difference and individuality while still maintaining applicability and significance to the reader who may himself feel distanced from the material, author, language, or culture of the novel.

Selvon's depictions of the peripatetic wanderings of lonely Londoners, MacInnes's reportage of his absolute beginner's frenetic attempts to regenerate a neighborhood and a city, and Lamming's description of the individual emigrant seeking his own mastery over the former colonial hegemony all are precursors to the work of some of the most well-known "post-colonial" authors of today.

Beyond Rushdie, already mentioned here, the literary legacy of the three authors under consideration can also be traced through to a capacity for narrative interaction and speaking on both sides of the racial divide. Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) accomplishes this in common with MacInnes's work, affording both Jamaican and white English perspectives on life in the *Windrush* era. The alternating narrative structure is obviously reminiscent of MacInnes's *Mr. Love and Justice*, and Levy's clear design for depicting a superficially divided country while implying the possibilities of common ground in the struggle for daily subsistence is nothing if not reminiscent of Selvon's London as well.

Following generations of West Indian novelists are also directly influenced by the work of Selvon and Lamming, in particular. Phillips makes clear his allegiance to the narrative projects of these two, but others including even the oft-mentioned Naipaul clearly owe a literary debt. As discussed in the beginnings of the Selvon chapter, Naipaul will at the very least acknowledge a small obligation to *The Lonely Londoners*, but in a larger sense it is possible certainly that for him, as with many other second-wave West Indian novelists in Britain, like Wilson Harris and E. K. Braithwaite, that the earlier efforts of Selvon and Lamming were a revelation of the remarkable capacity for

an outsider to write substantially and importantly about life in London. Yet, far too often in critical examinations of Lamming and Selvon their works are studied only in light of what they have contributed to the literary scene in the 1950s as emigrants, as blacks, or collectively as Black British emigrant authors. While it would be unfair to suggest that there is no value whatever in such considerations, it must be acknowledged that such evaluations subject each of them to the same level of assumptions that their works fight to supersede. Interpreting their work as key components toward the formation of some Black British canon reduces their considerable influence far too much and is itself indicative of a preoccupation with race. Of course, they are black authors, they are emigrants, they are members of that intrepid first wave of colonial citizens who "come home" for the first time to a British mother country known to them only through institution and literature. Their individual perspectives on that experience are invaluable, but as they would make clear in their own work, even that significant fact is not entirely constitutive of who they are.

That this study ultimately considers these authors in relation primarily to one another is not to be taken as a suggestion that they must be considered thus. You *need* not talk about any one of them in relation to any other, or in relation to the most obvious other, based upon preconception of race, gender, or any one of an endless string of qualifiers. Freed from the tyranny of consideration according to predeterminations, movements or constructed nationalities, they should be considered properly as remarkable writers with a keen eye for the shifting landscape of 1950s Britain.

These novels reveal that it is not the self that is constituted socially, but the *sense* of ourselves that is. David Lodge concludes that this subtle yet significant adjustment to the previous order of things means now that: "Art can no longer compete with life on equal terms, showing the universal in the particular. The alternatives are either to cleave to the particular—to tell it like it is—or to abandon history altogether and construct pure fictions which reflect in an emotional or metaphorical way the discords of contemporary experience."[9] Lodge concedes that there may be no other way forward: "The increasing demands for social and psychological detail that are made upon the novelist can only be satisfied out of his own experience. The forces which make him an outsider focus his observation upon himself."[10] According also to Iris Murdoch, the same atmosphere and expectations have forced literature in the middle and latter half of the twentieth-century to "represent a battle between real people and images; and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex conception of the former."[11] That conception can only be strengthened via experience and individual action. It cannot be constituted, packaged, and consumed institutionally or collectively. These conclusions are decidedly premature. There were novelists in the mid-century working studiously on both sides of that fence. The works of MacInnes, Selvon, and Lamming reveal that there are those, in fact, who through observation of the particular in the universal, are able to "tell it like it is" through fictions based solidly in the real *and* simultaneously replete with fabulation.

Chapter 1–
Wither, the Novel?

1. Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction (*Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 2.

2. Rubin Rabinowitz, *The Reaction Against Experimentation in the English Novel: 1950-1960* (New York Columbia University Press, 1967).

3. Consider in particular typical critical works from this period, such as Malcolm Bradbury's *The Novel Today : Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction* (London : Fontana, 1990) and *No, not Bloomsbury* (London : A. Deutsch, 1987), both of which purport to examine the state of the novel mid-century, yet neither of which devote more than a portion of a chapter to the 1950s.

4. Bernard Bergonzi, "The Novel No Longer Novel," *The Listener* 70, no. 1799 (19 September 1963): 415.

5. See Andrzej Gasiorek, *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

6. See Rabinowitz.

7. Cyril Connolly, *The Unquiet Grave: A Word Cycle by Palinurus* (1944) (New York: Persea Books, 1981), 7.

8. T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), 17.

9. Bernard Bergonzi. *The Situation of the Novel* (1970) (London: Macmillan, 1970), 57.

10. Bryan Appleyard, *The Pleasures of Peace: Art and Imagination in Post-War Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 93.

11. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

12. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Said's work has been cited by many as the foundational text of post-colonialist studies. Yet his argument is a troublesome one for the discipline because it suggests that as a materially-

produced artifact of Occidental culture, the "Orient"–that is the "other" in almost any encounter–is being judged and measured itself by the artificial system of its own making. Therefore, artifacts judged by such artifice provide conclusions that are themselves always-already provided for within the system, affording no meaningful understanding. The need for an *a priori* tearing-down of the artificial mechanisms at work must be met, but material and cultural learned/generated behaviors make this precise need the most difficult task to accomplish from the very beginning.

13. Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 14.

14. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 11.

15. Naipaul did, in fact, write some short work in this direction, but the effort was brief. In *Punch* 234, no. 138 (9 April 1958): 486-87, Naipaul published a short story entitled "Boots in the Corridor" It described his first night in the city as a young man and represents his first published "London work." Not until *The Mimic Men*, eleven years later, and *Enigma*, twenty-nine years later, did Naipaul return to the subject of his own emigration to the city.

16. Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge, eds., British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

17. Bernard Bergonzi,"The British Novel in 1960" in MacKay and Stonebridge, 211.

18. Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 10.

19. Sukhdev Sandhu, *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), 113.

20. Ibid, 141. See also J. D. B. Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Expansion and Attrition, 1953—1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 341.

21. Blacks had been in Britain, in fact, for hundreds of years; rather, the issue in the 1940s and 50s had primarily to do with visibility and numbers of those collected in the cities, working in factories and service industries. See Sandhu for a more complete history of colonial citizens in England, beginning in the 15th and 16th centuries.

22. The origins of this phrase have been treated variously, but the most likely is the poem by Jamaican Louise Bennett Coverley, entitled "Colonisation in Reverse," first published in *Jamaica Labrish* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1966), 170-80.

23. "News of the Week," *The Listener* 183, no. 6315 (8 July 1949): 33.

24. Enoch Powell, *Freedom and Reality* (Kingswood: Elliot Right Way Books, 1969), 55.

25. See Chapter 14, J. D. B. Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Expansion and Attrition, 1953—1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

26. Ibid, 343.

27. "Colonial Citizens," *The Spectator* 182, no. 6313 (24 June 1949): 843.

28. V. H. Hodson, "Racial Problems in the Commonwealth," *The Listener* XLV, no. 1143 (25 January 1951): 123.

29. Robertson's Marmalade used golliwogg characters for various marketing purposes well into the late twentieth-century.

30. Cf. Sir Miles Thomas "Australia – Land of Opportunities," *The Listener* XLIII, no. 1109 (27 April 1950): 725. As well as Dudley Barker, "Is Mass Emigration the Answer?" *The Listener* XL, no. 1018 (29 July 1948): 157.

31. "Immigration and Racial Feeling," *The Spectator* 193, no. 6594 (12 November 1954): 566.

32. "Rachmanism" became the general term for this type of unscrupulous housing activity. Peter Rachman was the most notorious landlord in the Notting Hill area of London in the 1950s and 60s. See Tom Vague, *Getting it Straight in Notting Hill Gate*, (2007).

33. "Avoiding a Problem," *The Spectator* 194, no. 6606 (4 February 1955): 114.

34. The archetypal source for the history of this "racialism"in Britain is Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1991.

35. Samuel Bonhomme, *Enoch Powell and the West Indian Immigrants* (London: Villiers Publications Ltd., 1971), 11.

36. Bruce King, ed., *The Internationalization of English Literature*, Vol. 13 of *The Oxford English Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22.

37. Eliot, 49-50.

Chapter 2–
An Absolute Beginning:
Colin MacInnes and the Constitution of a New Britain

1. The archival research formative to this chapter was conducted at the University of Rochester, Rochester New York, thanks in large measure to a travel grant presented by the University of Georgia Graduate School Dean's Award.

2. John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 27.

3. Alan Travis, "After 44 years secret papers reveal truth about five nights of violence in Notting Hill," *Guardian* (Saturday, 24 August, 2002), 1.

4. Ibid.

5. McLeod, 27.

6. Bernard Bergonzi, *Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background, 1939-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 176-77.

7. McLeod, 43.

8. Ibid., 43-44.

9. See McCleod, *Postcolonial London* and Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain, (*Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1997) in particular.

10. Box 14, Folder 6; from the Colin MacInnes papers collection at the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY. "Taping the Truth," a clipping from the periodical *Ink* (no dates or publication information recorded).

11. Peter Leese, *Britain since 1945: Aspects of Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 50-51.

12. Colin MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners* (London: Alison & Busby, 1958), 12.

13. MacInnes was known to constantly borrow money from others; often such requests were accompanied by lengthy letters describing the hard times that had beset him. In the hospital, convalescing from an illness contracted in Africa, MacInnes was visited by a representative from the tax office, threatening him with bankruptcy proceedings. For further discussion on the complicated accounts of MacInnes, see Tony

Gould, *Inside Outsider: The Life and Times of Colin MacInnes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983).

14. Gould, 101.

15. Personal interview with Causley; Qtd. In Gould, 101.

16. In a letter from MacInnes to Eric Dadson, his old publisher, dated 20 January 1955, MacInnes claimed of his time on the BBC Programme *The Critics*: "I took this job on like any other. The real reason was financial. The annual stints of six programmes on *The Critics*, with 'repeats', earned me a great deal more than I had for either of my previous two novels; and incomparably more than the 'serious' periodicals I really wanted to write for exclusively could afford to pay me." Qtd. in Gould, 102.

17. Memo to Reg-Davis Poynter, (22 January 1960). Qtd. in Gould, 146.

18. Gould, 118.

19. Colin MacInnes, "Pacific Warrior," qtd. in Gould, 81.

20. Gould, 114.

21. MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 188.

22. Ibid, 189.

23. Ibid, 188.

24. Gould, 134-35.

25. Box 1, folder 1; MacInnes Papers, Rochester. The work to which MacInnes is referring is unknown.

26. Colin MacInnes, *England, Half-English* (New York: Random House, 1961), 146-47.

27. Colin MacInnes, *No Novel Reader* (London: Martin Brian and O'Keeffe, 1975), 24-25.

28. MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 189.

29. Ibid, 16.

30. Ibid., 17.

31. MacInnes, *No Novel Reader*, 21-22.

32. Leavis's major theories on the poem/poet's responsibility to represent and communicate to an age, as outlined first in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) are extended to the novel/novelist throughout his career, see especially *The Great Tradition* (1948) (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948).

33. F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950), 13-14.

34. Hans Robert Jauss, from *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory* in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Gen Ed., Vincent B. Leitch (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1552.

35. Ibid, 1553.

36. Harold Bloom, from *The Anxiety of Influence* in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Gen Ed., Vincent B. Leitch (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1797-1805.

37. Box 15, folder 14; MacInnes Papers, Rochester, "Letter to the Editor" *The Twentieth-century* 168, no. 1006 (December 1960): 575. In this letter, MacInnes rejects a request to write something in response to the November issue on youth.

38. Bergonzi, *Wartime and Aftermath*, 176.

39. Leavis, *New Bearings*, 14.

40. MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 24.

41. Ibid, 25.

42. MacInnes, *England, Half English*, 11.

43. Gould, 127.

44. MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 12.

45. Ibid, 14.

46. Ibid, 16.

47. Box 1, folder 11, MacInnes Papers, Rochester; letter from MacInnes to Elspeth Huxley, dated 29 May 1961. The letter was written in response to Huxley's essay on Africa in *Encounter*. The conversation begun here continues for many weeks over a series of letters.

48. Colin MacInnes, "The Fascination of Crime," *The Listener* 71, no. 1822(27 February 1964): 358.

49. McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, 48.

50. MacInnes, *England, Half English*, 206-07.

51. Jauss, 1564.

52. MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 202.

53. Ibid, 203.

54. Ibid.

55. Colin MacInnes, *City of Spades* (London: Alison & Busby, 1957), 9.

56. Ibid, 20.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid, 18.

59. Ibid, 19.

60. Ibid, 17.

61. Cf. the encounter between the young narrator and Mr. P. in *Absolute Beginners*, discussed above.

62. MacInnes, *City of Spades*, 16.

63. Ibid, 19.

64. Ibid, 20.

65. MacInnes, *England, Half-English*, 22-23.

66. Box 1, folder 11, MacInnes Papers, Rochester; letter from MacInnes to Elspeth Huxley, dated 29 May 1961.

67. Box 1, folder 11, MacInnes Papers, Rochester; letter from MacInnes to Elspeth Huxley, dated 19 May 1961.

68. Ibid.

69. MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 191.

70. Ibid, 173.

71. Ibid.

72. MacInnes, *City of Spades*, 177.

73. Box 13, folder 8, MacInnes Papers, Rochester; article clipping "Through a Glass, Darkly," from *New Statesman* (18 August 1967): 197.

74. Ibid.

75. R.A.A.S., spelling out a Jamaican swearword, was a group headed by Michael de Freitas that mirrored the attitudes and political direction of Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity, Muslim Mosque, Inc., and in his earlier career, the Nation of Islam.

76. Colin MacInnes, "Calypso Lament," *New Society* (6 April 1972), cited in Gould, 216.

77. Tom Vague, *Entrance to Hipp: An Historical and Psychogeographical Report on Notting Hill* (London: Vague 29, 1997), 46.

78. Box 13, folder 13, MacInnes Papers, Rochester; article clipping "The New British," clipped from *The Spectator* (7 June 1963): 729-30.

79. MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 177.

80. Gould, 134.

81. Box 1, folder 11, MacInnes Papers, Rochester; letter from MacInnes to Elspeth Huxley, dated 19 May 1961.

82. Colin MacInnes, *London: City of Any Dream* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), xviii.

Chapter 3–
Talking to the Colour Black:
Samuel Selvon and the Work of a Lonely London

1. From Stuart Hall's "In discussion of 'British Caribbean Writers'," radio broadcast on BBC Third Programme, (21 April 1958), quoted in Sukhdev Sandhu, *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), 142. Himself a controversial figure in critical assessments of world literature after the wars, Naipaul has at times demonstrated a stubborn reluctance to acknowledge any specific literary influences; thus, his identification of Selvon is particularly significant as an indicator of his significance.

2. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of The Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920), trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971), 29.

3. Lukács, 41.

4. Kenneth Ramchand, preface from Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), (Essex, England: Longman, 1985), 7.

5. Samuel Selvon, *Moses Migrating* (1983) (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1992), iii.

6. Ibid, ix-x.

7. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 21.

8. Samuel Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (1975) (Reading: Cox & Wyman, Ltd., 1984), vii.

9. Sushelia Nasta, "Setting up Home in a City of Words: Sam Selvon's London Novels" in Lee, A. Robert., ed. *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* (East Haven, Connecticut: Pluto Press), 1995, 53. Nasta argues that "In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon faced the problem of both dealing with an early and exploratory response to the creation of a black London as well as discovering a suitable literary frame in which to express this experience" (59), going on to suggest that the method and manner he devised for dealing with this was to make himself the narrative voice, suggesting that it is most obvious in *Moses Ascending*. Such an assertion is true only if Moses is definitively the *exact* same character in each of the three works. Moses may be his name, and there may be many similarities, but the Moses of *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* is not the same one as the Moses in *The Lonely Londoners* – the

assumption is thus based on a false premise. Nasta, of course, is not the only one to argue this point; Kenneth Ramchand also makes a similar argument in *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970). Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004., but both her and his logic ultimately fail to reconcile convincingly the differences in the characters in the three novels.

10. Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, xiii.

11. Samuel Selvon, "Finding West Indian Identity in London," *Kunapipi* 9, no. 3 (1987): 37.

12. Ibid, 38.

13. Peter Nazareth, "Interview with Sam Selvon," *World Literature Written in English* 18, no. 2 (1979), 422.

14. Nasta, 53.

15. Samuel Selvon, *Ways of Sunlight* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957), 188.

16. Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, xi.

17. Ibid, 23.

18. According to Sandhu, the poet Selvon 'admired most' was T.S. Eliot (177). Of course, London is a foggy place, but the similarity here to the opening lines of Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and the "brown fog" of the "winter morn" and the "winter noon" in "The Burial of the Dead" and "The Fire Sermon" sections of *The Waste Land* (1922) are inescapable.

19. Jeremy Taylor "Play it again, Sam" *Bwee (BWIA) Caribbean Beat* (Autumn 1994): 34., Qtd. In Louis James, *Caribbean Literature in English*, from the *Longman Literature in English Series*, eds. David Carroll and Michael Wheeler (London: Longman, 1999), 125.

20. Louis James, *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 19.

21. George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 45.

22. Ibid.

23. Sandhu, 145.

24. Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, 97. Ramchand wrestles with the narrative method as well, arguing:

> [. . .] it has become usual to speak of the narrator's stance in *The Lonely Londoners* as being similar to that of a calypsonian, a harmless enough fancy had it not been accompanied by a willingness to concede that this book is loose or episodic. The examination questions reflecting this approach covertly invite students to argue that the work relates to the oral tradition and that in performance it is given shape and coherence by the teller who is present to the audience throughout. [. . .] To discuss the narrator and the narrating technique of *The Lonely Londoners* is to engage in an enterprise that leads us to appreciate the book as writing, specifically, a novel. From looking at the narrator, we are drawn to recognize in Selvon's literary artefact a tightness of structure (the way the parts are put inevitably together); subtlety in the development and revelation of theme; linguistic cunning; and an appropriateness in the presentation and deployment of characters. The work is an admirable illustration of how writing can feed on oral literature and, further, on the stuff that oral literature itself also draws upon without losing its identity as writing. (Ibid p 95)

While Ramchand's argument here comes closer than most to avoiding the pitfall of reducing Selvon's linguistic design to nothing more than a recreation of some existing creole or dialect, he subsequently limits hi sown assessment of the design by suggesting it is a kind of adapted "calypsonian" method, which fails then in a different way to pay full credit to the truly remarkable artifice of Selvon's narrative.

25. Nasta, 52.

26. Ibid, 53.

27. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 24-28. Spivak's larger argument, whether or not the colonial subject (the "subaltern" subject) can speak concerns itself with whether or not the subject has either the ability or opportunity to speak or identify themselves, to constitute their own identity either inside or outside the colonial/imperialist locality. Her argument suggest that a formative step in this process, this ability, must be that the "subaltern" must be able to know his or her conditions external to experiencing them.

28. Ibid, 25.

29. Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1997), 126.

30. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 130.

31. Ibid, 88.

32. Ibid, 89.

33. McLeod, 34.

34. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 87.

35. Ibid, 88.

36. Sandhu, 138.

37. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 78.

38. Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order* (London: Vintage International, 2001), 273.

39. Selvon, "Finding West Indian Identity in London," 36.

40. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 26.

41. Ibid, 27.

42. Ibid, 23-24.

43. Ibid, 24.

44. Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 161.

45. Samuel Bonhomme, *Enoch Powell and the West Indian Immigrants* (London: Villiers Publications Ltd., 1971), 14.

46. Ibid, 25.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid, 26.

49. Jed Esty. *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 201.

50. Ibid, 201.

51. Ibid, 203.

52. Tom Vague, *Entrance to Hipp: An Historical and Psychogeographical Report on Notting Hill* (London: Vague 29, 1997), 30.

53. Mervyn Jones, "A Question of Colour," *The New Statesman* 42, no. 1066 (11 August 1951), 148-49.

54. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 134-35.

55. Samuel Selvon, "Basement Lullaby" from *Ways of Sunlight (*London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957), 178-79.

56. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 138-39.

57. Ibid, 140.

58. Ibid, 141.

59. Ibid, 142.

60. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes From Underground* (1864) , Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans. (New York: Random House, 1993), 3.

61. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 142.

62. John Clement Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 6-7.

63. Selvon, *Ways of Sunlight*, 186.

64. Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 137-38.

65. Ibid, 39.

66. Ibid, 90.

67. Sandhu, 179.

68. Phillips, 234.

69. Esty, 201.

Chapter 4–
There's More in the Mortar than the Pestle:
George Lamming and the Great Design

1. David Dabydeen,"West Indian Writers in Britain," in *Voices of the Crossing*, ed. Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), 68.

2. Lamming describes their time as flat-mates favorably in "The Coldest Spring in Fifty Years: Thoughts on Sam Selvon and London," *Kunapipi* 20, no.1 (1998): 4-10.

3. Samuel Selvon. *Moses Ascending* (1975) (Berkshire: Cox & Wyman, 1984), 66.

4. Ibid, 120.

5. George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 9.

6. Ibid, 11.

7. Ibid, 109.

8. Box1, folder 11, Colin MacInnes Papers, University of Rochester Library. Letter from CM to Elspeth Huxley dated 19th May 1961. The letter was written in response to Huxley's essay on Africa in *Encounter*.

9. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 67.

10. Mary Chamberlain, "George Lamming" In *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003): 180.

11. Lukács, 41.

12. Chamberlain, 186.

13. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 24.

14. Chamberlain, 186.

15. Lukács, 56.

16. C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 114.

17. C. L. R. James, "The Case for West Indian Self-Government" *The C.L.R. James Reader* ed., Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 48.

18. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 27.

19. Samuel Selvon, "Finding West Indian Identity in London," 36.

20. George Lamming, *The Emigrants* (1954) (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 162-63.

21. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 25-26.

22. West Indian history was not introduced into the school curriculum in Barbados until 1939. See Nair p 90-93.

23. Supriya Nair, *Caliban's Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 2.

24. Louis James, "The Disturbing Vision of George Lamming" in A. Robert Lee, ed. *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* (East Haven, Connecticut: Pluto Press, 1995), 36.

25. George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 38.

26. Ibid.

27. For detail on the "Abyssinia Crisis" of the mid-1930s, see A. J. Barker, *Rape of Ethiopia, 1936* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971) and David Nicolle, *The Italian Invasion of Abyssinia 1935-1936* (Westminster, MD: Osprey, 1997). The crisis was one in which a post-WWI Britain was roundly criticized and, many have argued, revealed to be largely unwilling or impotent to resist Fascist Italy. Not unlike the Suez Crisis in the 50s, the Abyssinian affair was publicly interpreted by many as an erosion of the colonial record and ideology of the British Empire.

28. Lamming *In the Castle of My Skin*, 42.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid, 43.

31. Qtd. in Nair, 79.

32. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), Joan Pinkham, Trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 10.

33. Nair, 14.

34. Nair, 2.

35. The three modes of history, as outlined in Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (1874), Peter Preuss, trans., (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980) are the monumental, the antiquarian and the critical. Of them, only the critical is to be encouraged, as the other two favor either needless detail of scant significance, in the case of the latter, or the assignation of supreme importance to events of dubious character for the sake of creating a narrative, in the case of the former. There is little question that Lamming's colonial and migrant narratives seek to accomplish critical revisionings of the events of his lifetime, amounting to a narrative history both personal and universal.

36. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922), (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 34.

37. Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, xxxv. The introduction is reproduced from the 1983 edition.

38. Ibid, xxxvi.

39. Ibid, xxxvii.

40. From the preface to the 1991 edition of *In the Castle of My Skin*, xxiii.

41. Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, xxxvi-xxxvii.

42. Lukács, 54-55.

43. Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, xxxviii

44. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 247.

45. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 38.

46. Ibid, 39.

47. Ibid, 50.

48. Ibid, 43.

49. From the 1983 introduction, Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, xlvi.

50. Ian Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

51. James, Louis. *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 155.

52. "For Lamming, the experience of exile is an essential and inescapable element in the histories of colonial peoples; it is, moreover, not merely a state of being but of incessant movement, of repetition and of transformation." Claire Alexander, "'Rivers to Cross': Exile and Transformation in the Caribbean Migration novels of George Lamming" in *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration,* Russell King, John Connell & Paul White, eds. (London: Routledge, 1994), 60.

53. Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 5. Subsequent instances: "We were still waiting for something to happen" (6); "We waited to see what would happen" (7); "We waited, sure that something would happen" (10); "We were all going to wait to see what would happen" (11); and "We had waited to see what would happen" (12) convey at times fear, boredom, excitement, and then finally, departure.

54. Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 88.

55. Ibid, 91-92.

56. Ibid, 105-06.

57. Ibid, 100.

58. Chamberlain, 182.

59. Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 212.

60. Nair, 3.

61. Ray Goble and Keith A.P. Sandiford, *75 Years of West Indies Cricket,1928-2003*, (London: Hansib Publishing, 2004).

62. Nair, 15.

63. Bruce King, ed. *The Internationalization of English Literature*. Vol. 13 of *The Oxford English Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17.

64. Lamming, "The Coldest Spring in Fifty Years," 4.

65. Gail Low, "Streets. Rooms and Residents: The Urban Uncanny and the Poetics of Space in Harold Pinter, Sam Selvon, Colin MacInnes and George Lamming" in *Landscape and Empire: 1770-2000*. Glenn Hooper, ed. (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 160.

66. Frances Wyndham, book review, *The Spectator* 205, no. 6891, 138.

67. G. R. Coulthard, *Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 112.

68. Coulthard, 114.

69. Ibid.

70. King, 2.

Chapter 5–
Grown from Old Roots:
The 1950s Novel in Retrospect

1. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1988), 3.

2. Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 209.

3. T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), 127.

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