

“BIG CITY, BOY, BIG CITY”:
GEORGE LAMMING, SAMUEL SELVON, AND THE
BLACK BRITISH URBAN IMAGINATION

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This is dedicated to my mother,
whose generous heart and unwavering strength
continues to both amaze and inspire me.
Love you more.

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ABSTRACT

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In the aftermath of World War Two, categories of British nationality were re-classified, often with an aim to encourage mass immigration from the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth to help with post-war domestic labor shortages. For example, the British Nationality Act of 1948, which created the status of “Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies,” enticed many from the West Indies to immigrate to Great Britain in search of better lives for themselves and their families. The arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush* in June 1948 at Tilbury Dock, Essex, in England marked the beginning of post-war mass migration; in time, the 492 passengers on board from the Caribbean came to be known as the “Windrush Generation,” many of whom were not only well-schooled in the literature and culture of the “mother” country but also equally wary of their status as subjects of British imperialism. While in many cases the movement of former colonial peoples from the periphery of the Empire to metropolitan centers such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool certainly contributed to the betterment of their own lives, not to mention the project of post-war reconstruction, the first wave of West Indian migrants often found themselves ill-prepared to deal with the hostility and resentment directed against their communities; the experience of which was captured in dynamic ways by a new generation of Black British writers and artists.

This project explores the representative fictions of Samuel Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and *Moses Ascending* (1975) and George Lamming’s *The Emigrants* (1954) and *Water with Berries* (1971) as central to the formation of an emerging Black British urban

poetics at the precise moment Britain's status as a global power was being radically challenged by an increasingly post-colonial world. Over the course of their extensive writing careers, Selvon and Lamming, who were already established writers in the West Indies prior to their arrival in Great Britain, produced experimental narratives in which the use of creolized English, or "nation language," for narrative as well as dialogue alongside Standard English serves as a means to imaginatively negotiate the lived experience of London as a key site of Black British urban modernity. In the course of celebrating London as an exhilarating space of possibility in which to create new identities, Selvon and Lamming also variously examine the complications and horrors that often attend the post-war immigrant experience, and in doing so re-imagine London as a charged symbol of Black British consciousness at the crossroads of a transnational world.

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INTRODUCTION

“There was life”: The Poetics of Black British Urban Literature

Those countries which share the most history, are the most important to each other, with respect to their future literatures.

T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948)

By the diversity of its time-structures, the city in part escapes the tyranny of a single present, and the monotony of a future that consists in repeating only a single beat heard in the past.

Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (1938)

From 1943-58, on Sunday nights, 7:30 p.m. Caribbean time, radios in homes across the islands would tune over to the British Broadcasting Corporation’s World Service program, *Caribbean Voices*. The program served as a forum for expatriate West Indian writers living in London to discuss and read their work and, ultimately, promote West Indian fiction and poetry. Beginning in 1939, the BBC produced the radio program *Calling the West Indies*, which functioned as a means for West Indian members who were serving for Great Britain in World War II to read letters to their families back home. Following the war, the program was renamed *Caribbean Voices*, with Irishman, Henry Swanzy, as producer. Frequent voices on the program included emerging West Indian writers such as V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Una Marson, Derek Walcott, and Edward Kamau Brathwaite. V.S. Naipaul would later take over as producer of the program. While *Caribbean Voices* was establishing camaraderie among the West Indian writers living in postwar London, the program was not entirely giving way to the distinctive, West Indian voice Swanzy hoped the program would nurture. As John Clement Ball notes in *Imagining London*, Swanzy worried that “the centre of gravity of West Indian Literature, and of his program, was shifting too much to London” (106). Swanzy wanted to see a “regional ethos,” the islands, emerging through their work (“Literary Situation” 272), suggesting a perceived tension between the culture of the metropole and West Indian writing. While these

authors did produce narratives with this “regional ethos,” a metropolitan consciousness was also trickling into the on-air content in the sense that London was rapidly becoming the city of the imagination for many of these writers. For example, on June 5, 1955, V.S. Naipaul opened up *Caribbean Voices* by introducing Samuel Selvon and his new short story, “Come Back to Grenada.”¹ The setting, Naipaul remarks, is “topical”: “the West Indian in London” (1).² Curiously, a large portion of the content in this story is similar to Selvon’s popular novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), in terms of its episodic structure and character development. In some sections of the story, the text is nearly identical to that of *The Lonely Londoners*, suggesting that *Caribbean Voices* was integral to the early development of black British writing.³

“Come Back to Grenada” begins in George’s basement-apartment, located in Bayswater, an area in central London, where his thoughts often drift back to Grenada during the cold, London winters. As the story progresses, the audience learns more about George’s immersion in the metropolitan experience: “But is as if London get in George blood, all the big building, all the big light and the big celebration, the trains that does go under the ground, and how nobody minding your business like in a small island” (6).⁴ While George laments over his routine life, the harshness of the winters, and the prejudice he often faces as a black man in London, he revels in the freedom and possibility London offers. He also recognizes the impact West Indians are beginning to have on the London scene. George states that he “can’t help thinking how things change a lot since he first come to England [...] And again long time think like saltfish hard like gold to get, George was to go in Soho what was the only place in London you could get that, but now it have out ten shop with it, because the English shopkeepers like they know the spades like they little fish” (8-9).⁵ George illustrates how West Indians were beginning to re-make urban space for their own needs. By bringing the metropolis into *Caribbean Voices* through their

writing, West Indian writers on the program pointed to the changing character of London and the Londoner.

While *Caribbean Voices* initial purpose was to market and advance West Indian writing in the islands, the program also provided these writers with an opportunity to make their writing known in London. For example, Peter Kalliney considers the implications of the BBC's endorsement of these emerging West Indian writers as follows:

The BBC was able to serve as a broker between metropolitan and West Indian writers because it was deeply involved in Britain's interwar modernist culture and had strong networks throughout the colonies. The institution, founded in modernism's signature year, 1922, exemplifies the close association between metropolitan modernism and imperial rule: staffed by cultural gatekeepers, it was an important disseminator of modernist art throughout the world [...] During the 1950s, in an explicit effort to maintain the cultural integrity of a vast, disintegrating empire, the organization became the most important patron of West Indian literature. (91)

The BBC, encouraged by the potential of these writers, became the springboard for a new literary movement in London. While the institution was the major facilitator in the remaking of the London literary scene in the 1950s through West Indian writing, its role in the production of West Indian literature is also inextricably linked to London's historic role and function as an established literary center. West Indian writers and contributors of *Caribbean Voices*, as Kalliney points out, were not opposed to the BBC's involvement in the production of their writing as they were also seeking to take advantage of London as a literary capital (93). George Lamming, in his autobiography *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), explains that in the West Indies there were few

opportunities for publication “so it was London, or nothing” (67). Given the historic scope of opportunities in the major metropolitan capital, these writers understood London was more likely to generate the networks and relationships that sustain creative innovation within and across artistic communities. For instance, Lamming, in *The Pleasures of Exile*, recounts his invitation to perform his poetry at the institute of Contemporary Arts in 1950 and in attendance were authors Stephen Spender and T.S. Eliot (64). Stephen Spender, among other English authors, started coming on *Caribbean Voices* as a result of the exposure West Indian writers were receiving in London (65). Peter Kalliney argues that, because of this exposure through *Caribbean Voices*, members of London’s traditional modernists scene “took an active interest in Caribbean literature. Just as important, Caribbean writers reciprocated by accepting this patronage and developing modernist techniques in new directions” (91). *Caribbean Voices* signals how to these writers infiltrated a pre-existing literary community, but it also appears that the interests of West Indian writers and patrons overlapped in the 1950s in terms of an openness to new ways of representing experience. Through *Caribbean Voices*, West Indian writers were staking out their place in the London literary scene and were creating through their physical presence and artistic works a “new” sense of Black British community.

In the aftermath of World War Two, categories of British nationality were re-classified, often with an aim to encourage mass immigration from the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth to help with post-war domestic labor shortages. For example, the British Nationality Act of 1948, which created the status of “Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies,” enticed many from the West Indies to immigrate to Great Britain in search of better lives for themselves and their families. The arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* in June 1948 at Tilbury Dock, Essex, in England marked the beginning of post-war mass migration; in time, the

492 passengers on board from the Caribbean came to be known as the “Windrush Generation,” many of whom were not only well-schooled in the literature and culture of the “mother” country but also equally wary of their status as subjects of British imperialism. While in many cases the movement of former colonial peoples from the periphery of the Empire to metropolitan centers such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool certainly contributed to the betterment of their own lives, not to mention the project of post-war reconstruction, the first wave of West Indian migrants often found themselves ill-prepared to deal with the hostility and resentment directed against their communities; the experience of which was captured in dynamic ways by a new generation of Black British writers and artists.

This project explores the representative fictions of Samuel Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and *Moses Ascending* (1975) and George Lamming’s *The Emigrants* (1954) and *Water with Berries* (1971) as central to the formation of an emerging Black British urban poetics at the precise moment Britain’s status as a global power was being radically challenged by an increasingly post-colonial world. Over the course of their extensive writing careers, Selvon and Lamming, who were already established writers in the West Indies prior to their arrival in Great Britain, produced experimental narratives in which the use of creolized English, or “nation language,” for narrative as well as dialogue alongside Standard English serves as a means to imaginatively negotiate the lived experience of London as a key site of Black British urban modernity. In the course of celebrating London as an exhilarating space of possibility in which to create new identities, Selvon and Lamming also variously examine the complications and horrors that often attend the post-war immigrant experience, and in doing so re-imagine London as a charged symbol of Black British consciousness at the crossroads of a transnational world.

In historical terms, London has always been an iconic, metropolitan capital both politically and culturally. As Jerry White notes in *London in the Twentieth Century*, “From the first century to the fifteenth century this city reflected its position as one of the premier ports of northern Europe [...] the seamen and adventurers of every trading nation on the globe knew London as their main port of call” (103). Black people have also been in London long before 1948. Peter Fryer notes that London was “deeply involved” in the West Indian slave trade which is why “the entire strength of the West Indian interest in London would be mobilized to defend the slave trade against the mounting campaign for abolition” (50). London in the eighteenth century, as Fryer illustrates, also offered small groups of black people, from both sexes, meeting places to talk about their concerns in regards to abolition and even organize “much bigger and more elaborate affairs, with music and dancing, at various taverns [...] there was also community observance of christening, weddings, and funerals—precisely those events in the human-life-cycle” (68-69). Young students from the islands were also encouraged to come to Britain for university.⁶ Fryer notes though that wartime signified a shift for the black community because so many West Indian men and women were contributing to the war effort: “[the black community] had grown in numbers; it had grown in self-confidence; above all, its expectations had grown” (294). A large number of men from the West Indies served for the motherland in World War II, particularly in the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, which inspired the BBC to develop *Calling the West Indies*. During World War II, as White remarks, “[E]ngineers and seamen from the West Indies were recruited into active service or the munitions industry, some of them settling in London” (116).⁷ However, both expectations and racial tensions were raised during war leaving many West Indians with “unfavorable impressions” of Britain’s cities (Patterson 38). For example, in Lamming’s *The Emigrants*, the first section of the narrative, set on the boat from the

islands to England, illustrates such unfavorable impressions among those who had previously journeyed to Britain before postwar immigration. Tornado, a central character who was formerly in the Royal Air Force during WWII, describes in great detail the frustration and alienation he experienced in England, and more specifically on the city streets: “You pass me in the street or sit next to me in the train as if I come from a next planet. If you hungry you keep it to yuhself and if you rich the same thing. Nobody asks questions and nobody gives answers. You see this the minute you put foot in London (74). London, however, elicited a range of responses from its early black citizens and visitors, particularly among West Indian writers.

In 1932, journalist and writer C.L.R. James traveled from Trinidad to England at the invitation of a friend and West Indian cricketer, Learie Nicholas Constantine, where he recorded his early experiences in the metropolis, and which were later published under the title *Letters from London*. In one of the essays, “The Men,” he writes, “I stood in the Strand with a map in my hand, trying to find out exactly how certain streets went. It may have looked strange. I didn’t care. London is a blessed place where you need not care [...] I wished to place myself well in my own mind with a view to future wanderings in the same quarter” (James 111). For many writers from the Caribbean who were able to journey to the city, London often shadows their work. For example, Jean Rhys, a creole who moved from Dominica to Britain as a teenager for school made London a focus in her fiction. In *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), young protagonist, Anna Morgan, a creole, is relocated from her home in the West Indies after her father’s death by her stepmother, and then left essentially on her own in the city. Anna’s early impression of London illustrates the estrangement Caribbean immigrants often face in the imperial metropolis: “It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down

inside yourself was different [...] a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy” (7). As both James and Rhys demonstrate, London had made an early impression on the West Indian literary imagination.

For many of the immigrants who stepped off *Windrush* onto British soil, they had only previously journeyed to the city through the imagination. While emancipation from slavery in the colonies resulted from a series of conflicts, debates, and revolts dating back to the seventeenth century, British imperialism still reigned in the colonies through education, labor, and religion. Education in the West Indies played a key role in cultural imperialism. West Indians were exposed to Britain’s urban and rural culture not only through history and geography, but also through its national authors such as William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and T.S. Eliot. Stuart Hall explains that when he first traveled through England, he felt he had already seen its diverse landscape because of his education in Jamaica. He notes, “I’ve never seen it, but I know it. I read Shakespeare, Hardy, the Romantic Poets. Though I didn’t occupy the space, it was like finding again, in one’s dream, an already familiar and idealized landscape” (88).⁸ Exposure to the British system of education tended to vary in the islands depending on location. According to S.A. Hammond, elementary education in the West Indies was fraught with controversy as the schooling primarily took place within churches and holding onto instructors and teachers was challenging on a yearly basis due to economic instability in the Caribbean (440-441). Education beyond the elementary level, particularly for those in more remote, rural locations, tended to be a privilege.

For those who had the opportunity to attend secondary school, they would be exposed in greater detail to a European standard of education. Secondary schools required intensive study and examinations in all academic subjects, written in Standard English, as a means to maintain

“good standards” that could “compare well with many English schools” (Hammond 442). According to Lamming, the West Indian’s education was “imported” and therefore was, “Deliberately and exclusively English [...] So the examinations, which would determine the Trinidadian’s future in the Civil Service, imposed Shakespeare, and Wordsworth, and Jane Austen and George Eliot and the whole tabernacle of dead names, now come alive” (*Pleasures* 27). In terms of university, the product primarily of overseas aid, a liberal arts education focused extensively on “the classics and theology” (Hammond 443). Both Samuel Selvon and George Lamming were privileged to attend institutions of higher education in the Caribbean.

George Lamming, born in Barbados on June 8, 1927, to parents of mixed African and English ancestry, attended the Combermere School in Barbados on scholarship and later taught in Barbados and Trinidad before migrating to Britain. Samuel Selvon, born in Trinidad on May 20, 1923 to a father of East Indian descent and a mother who was half-Indian and half-Scottish, attended the Naparima College in San Fernando, Trinidad where he “excelled in English composition and literature” and refused to “learn Hindi” to establish himself as a “true Trinidadian creole” (Geofroy 4).⁹ Many schools like Naparima were still in development. As Selvon notes in one of his letters, San Fernando was still a small town with “mainly horse or mule-drawn carts” and attendance was often a problem “for lack of accommodation” (1).¹⁰ Selvon also writes that children of East Indian parents who worked on sugarcane estates attended Naparima in “large numbers” with the help of the “Canadian missionaries” who worked largely in these remote areas (1).¹¹ The relationship between higher education and culture in the Caribbean Selvon chose to explore in his Trinidadian short story “Cane is Bitter.”

In Samuel Selvon’s “Cane is Bitter,” Romesh, the educated son of Ramlal and Rookmin, two peasant farmers who work on the Cross Crossing sugar estate, becomes a foreigner within

his own community simply by attending higher education. Romesh is characterized in the story as being more creolized in terms of language and manners than his traditional East Indian parents and therefore permitted to transcend more cultural barriers, which is the source of tension between Romesh and his parents.¹² Creolization, according to Charles W. Pollard in *New World Modernisms*, is the process by which “something is created in the colonies that is neither indigenous to the region nor identical with its counterparts in the culture of origin” (5). To be a creole is to be a hybrid of Caribbean and European culture, whether through heritage and/or education. Selvon’s story, while reflecting on cultural difference in the Caribbean, more broadly demonstrates that the creation of the black British intellectual began much earlier, and far from London. Considering the historic black presence in Britain, the British standard of education in the West Indies, and London’s presence in the writing produced by Windrush authors, the postwar West Indian diaspora arguably points to a counter-creolization taking place in London.

The promise of citizenship and potential work prompted the West Indian diaspora, which would forever appropriate London as a space marked by significant racial and cultural experiences. G.C.K. Peach writes that “Race in the inner city is thus a post-war phenomenon for the British city. It is true that many dock areas of large port cities such as Cardiff, Liverpool and London have had black populations since the First World War [...] but the post-war phenomenon was both bigger and more widespread” (372). Samuel Selvon, in an article for Britain’s *Lilliput* magazine entitled “The Spades dig in,” took it upon himself to research the West Indian settlement in London where he remarks a large number of “coloured people” were living in central London, but also largely in particular districts of the city such as Brixton, a district of South London (13).¹³ Selvon himself lived in a small apartment in Bayswater when he first arrived in London and was working on *Caribbean Voices*, much like his character George from

“Come Back to Grenada” (4).¹⁴ In Shelia Patterson’s case study of the West Indian settlement in Brixton, *Dark Strangers*, she recounts her own experience of “colour shock” when she first witnessed large numbers of West Indians walking along the streets of this south London district. She notes that there were “two dozen men” outside the employment exchange in “flimsy suits of exaggerated cut” and “coloured men and women where I looked, shopping, strolling, or gossiping on the sunny street-corners with an animation that most Londoners lost long ago” (3). London, and other industrial centers, were the prominent areas of settlement for West Indian immigrants given most of them held public sector jobs such as in the Post Office and London Transport. Selvon writes that London Transport hired a large number of West Indians because “there is an arrangement with the Barbados government for recruits” (14).¹⁵ Patterson notes too that many of the black West Indian laborers held jobs in the private sector through engineering firms, construction companies, and automobile repair shops (101-130). The bulk of West Indian women who desired employment worked as machinists in the garment trade or found employment in cafés near their apartments and homes (Patterson 101-112).

While West Indians settled in certain areas of London, such as Brixton, where there were employment opportunities, it should be noted that they had limited options when it came to housing. As chronicled by many urban historians, London’s housing shortage in the 1940s and 50s was a direct result of wartime destruction and a lengthy process of postwar city reconstruction, but the housing crisis was used as a means of control in regards to West Indian settlement.¹⁶ The housing crisis facilitated a “racialized view that housing shortage and urban decay were a product of a black presence,” which led to various forms of prejudice against black immigrants searching for apartments or black tenets (Carter, Harris, and Joshi 28). Black immigrants generally had access to apartments and other accommodations in London that were

not ideal (28). The need to control West Indian settlement in London during the 1950s through prejudiced renting and housing practices can be attributed to, according to Chris Waters, “[T]he need to recast the representational configurations of nationhood [...] racial stereotypes and other received ideas from the nation’s imperial past informed popular racial attitudes in Britain” (216). Selvon notes though that West Indians continued to settle in London and eventually began to invest in houses, which were often condemned buildings they had to work on extensively (13-14).¹⁷ He chose to represent these later aspects of black urbanization in London through his novels *The Housing Lark* (1965) and *Moses Ascending* (1975). Selvon, in his personal letters, recounts his own urbanization so-to-speak in London, which influenced his decision not to return back to Trinidad when many West Indians were traveling back to the islands in the later 1950s and 60s. He writes in a personal letter that he remembers a close Trinidadian friend (unnamed) who had “shifted from job to job in England” but held the “same views [...] because here, in London, he felt, for the first time, a free man to do what he wanted” (11).¹⁸ Lamming and Selvon both acknowledge in their nonfiction work and in interviews that there was still much to be worked through for both the West Indian and London after postwar immigration, but they found that London remained largely a site of liberation against various forces that would seem to crush them. Their fiction records a variety of the challenges to the urban experience for the black immigrant, but through their novel they held the city up as an essential ground of existence for the West Indian.

While *Windrush* ushered in manual laborers to Britain, *Windrush* also brought over intellectual laborers. The array of West Indian writers in a major metropolitan center such as London recalls Paris, another literary capital, in the 1920s that played host to an array of American and European modernists. While these expatriate writers could find opportunities to

work and publish in the city, negotiating the cultural tensions of London as a West Indian was extremely challenging. Selvon writes in “Finding West Indian Identity in London” that he found the ignorance of British people difficult to reconcile with: “this was the country whose geography and history and literature I had been educated upon long before I knew that Port of Spain was the capital of Trinidad, so why did they ask questions like if people lived in trees [...] and, of course their amazement that I spoke English” (36). While Selvon provides commentary on the racism and opposition immigrants encountered, he also articulates how London continues to be a crossing point for cultural, national, and artistic boundaries. Doreen Massey, a geographer and an urban theorist, contends that cultural confrontation and mixing, however painful, will nonetheless create “something new” in the process (*City Worlds* 110). She argues that when two cultures, previously separated by geography, meet at a particular moment in a city, a space historically a site of cultural mixing already, new stories and therefore new histories will emerge as a result (110). These new stories contest cultural uniformity giving way to new modes of being, regardless of geographical origins.

Both Lamming and Selvon express in personal essays and interviews that their individual experiences in London helped them to cultivate their writing and explore a more complicated sense of self and community. In this regard, cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who also immigrated to Britain in 1951, notes that identity “is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past [...] transcending place, time, history, and culture” (236).¹⁹ Identity then transforms simultaneously within space and through historical time. Because cities are centers of social and cultural inspiration, the urban experience in London at this particular moment in history stimulated new ways of seeing as well as being for West Indians and particularly for the writers who would give voice to their experiences. The narratives by early

black British writers explore what London's new black community meant for both the individual and social identity. As Jerry White argues, the West Indian diaspora meant London was on the "brink of one of the greatest of all challenges experienced in its long history: the making and remaking of multiracial Londoners and of a truly multicultural metropolis" (129).²⁰ Both Selvon and Lamming used their narratives to explore this "remaking" of London. In doing so, they were creating "something new," as Massey writes, in the process. Because London itself was changing, the newly arrived immigrants could be part of its transformation, and in turn, reimagine the city in new forms through fiction that would make London the iconic city of a new black, urban experience.

London becomes both setting and subject for Selvon and Lamming casting them as representative city-formers, much like Bernard Shaw, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and George Orwell, among others. English author Ford Madox Ford writes in *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City* that an author's engagement with modern London "should be to make the Past, the sense of all the dead Londons that have gone to the producing of this child of all the ages, like a constant ground-bass beneath the higher notes of the Present. In that way the book might [...] forecast even the future and contain prophecies" (xiii). Selvon and Lamming, in writing the city during a turning point for modern London, were addressing Britain's cultural afflictions by way of text. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, argues that place is a distinct and fixed location: "place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence [...] the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines" (117). Space, on the other hand, is "*a practised place*" in that practices, or the actions and movement of the banal and everyday, denote the ways individuals

conduct themselves in the world and in turn alter that world (117-118). Place then signifies a collection of stories and experiences, a distinct location and history, while space signifies the actions or practices by which that representation and ordered perception is affirmed, contested, and even transformed. For instance, the West Indian immigrants' behaviors, movement, and journeys in London operate as new spatial movements that allow them to position themselves as active participants in the experience and production of urban space, and by extension, remake the metropolis their own space of settlement and belonging even in the face of opposition. Space operates as an arena of human action that can be transformed through time and even in "written text" (117). The city and the text are then interchangeable. Selvon and Lamming materially reconstruct the city through its streets and place-names, but then imaginatively shape and transform how London can be read, and understood, through the space of the narrative. The narrative becomes the space in which Lamming and Selvon inform the re-territorialization of a twentieth century London by imaginatively associating London as an essential ground of experience, struggle, and even, arguably, transcendence for black West Indians.

By negotiating London's transformation and potential as a city for new identities and experiences, Selvon and Lamming incorporate themselves into a long tradition of exploring the city as a key site of modernity. Charles Baudelaire considers how cities give expression to the experience of the modern in "The Painter of Modern Life" by analyzing Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Man of the Crowd*. In Poe's short story, an old man is followed by a nameless narrator/character in London as he moves through the city. Early in the story though, the protagonist sits at a coffee shop, smoking a cigar, and observes the crowd moving along the streets of London (682-683). Baudelaire uses this story, along with other examples from modern art, to consider how one responds to and experiences the modern environment. He argues that the

man in Poe's story, for example, is experiencing something "other" than simply pleasure or circumstance, which Baudelaire in turn labels as "modernity" (684). As Baudelaire notes, "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent [...] This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with" (684-85). The transitory, fleeting, and the ever moving, fluid dynamics to 'modernity,' as Baudelaire remarks, are often represented in modernist texts through the fleeting, moving, and banal of everyday urban life. The narrative responses by English authors such as Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot to London's complexity, its risks and opportunities, its heterogeneity and chaos, marked the city's identification with modernity. Much like these canonical modernists, whose narratives engaged materially and imaginatively with late-nineteenth century London's modernity, Selvon and Lamming similarly negotiate the protean cityscape they co-opt in order to iterate a new sense of cosmopolitan identity in London. Selvon and Lamming, as their characters move through and inhabit the city, engage with both the urban and the modern as a means to bring the city into conversation with its imperial past and its transnational potential.

Charles W. Pollard's *New World Modernisms* links the modernist tactics of Caribbean writers to the history of creolization in the Caribbean. Creolization, a process that stresses the heterogeneity of culture and languages, serves as a means for exploring how various Caribbean writers transform traditional "modernist principles" (5). Pollard particularly looks at poet Derek Walcott, to explore his remaking of various poetic techniques championed by T.S. Eliot. Wilson Harris also uses Eliot's techniques and style, but for new purposes, in his "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," modeled on Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" as a means to contest what is perceived as traditional. Harris, in order to promote West Indian literature, argues that tradition is "active at all times, whether secretly or openly, it participates [in] the

ground of living necessity by questioning and evaluating all assumptions of character and conceptions of place and destiny” (37). Peter Kalliney points to how many West Indian writers of Windrush were creating new methods of representation under the influence of previous modernist authors such as T.S. Eliot. Contemporary critics even consider some of Lamming’s and Selvon’s narrative techniques in relation to modernists such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, but they were also creating something “new” as a result of their experiences in the urban.

Creolization can be the means to understand what is particularly “new,” or modernist, in regards to Selvon’s and Lamming’s urban poetics. Both authors use language as a means to respond to the complexities of the immigrant experience in London and to, equally, as this project argues, give artistic representation to London’s black modernity. Salman Rushdie writes in his “Imaginary Homelands” that “[i]f literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provided us with such angles” (218). Because the writers of the 1950s regarded themselves as both “British” and “West Indian,” metropolitan and folk, their use of creolized English and Standard English becomes a form of technique to give representation to new and complex reconfigurations of blackness taking shape in the urban. Such linguistic inventions also give way to, as Raymond Williams explains, “remarkable new forms” of representing the modern and the metropolis that are dynamic and liberating (“Metropolitan” 46). Lamming and Selvon, by signaling to creolization through language in text, give representation to the urbanization of the West Indian in London, which ushered in a new epoch of metropolitan consciousness that in turn creolized the city. The process of creolization was being transplanted to the city through the West Indian diaspora in London, and by alluding to this process through language within the space of narrative, the authors reimagine London through a new cosmopolitan “local.”

By experimenting with the urban novel, Selvon and Lamming were introducing a new mode of narrative representation through language much like their modernist forbearers in order to move towards newness and possibility. Similarly to how modernists such as James Joyce were concerned with the effects “of language and with the possibilities of transformation” through text (MacCabe 2), West Indian writers were joining the modernist canon through an active investigation of urban modernity through language, which in turn created a new and creolized version of the urban novel. Susan Stanford Friedman argues that “[w]hat is modern or modernist gains its meaning through negation, as a rebellion against what was or was presumed to be” (“Definitional Excursions” 503). Modernity signals the search for transcendence in opposition to the forces of history, which manifests forcibly within cities as cities have always been centers of development and associated with the newness of life. Literary modernism then keeps track of these new oppositions and disruptions in time and space as modernism, according to Friedman, is the “expressive dimension of any given modernity” (“Periodizing” 435). To explore the creolization of both individual and city through language is to imaginatively explore the beginning of black British urban modernity. Friedman argues, though, that the common trend in the academy for periodizing modernism to a specific time and place often excludes other regions and cultures that are still establishing their own modernities. If modernism, to align this project with Friedman’s analysis, is a literary phenomenon that breaks with the past in order to give expression to newness and everyday life, or “modernity” (494), then to situate modernism within one particular time and/or space should be regarded with suspicion.²¹ Taken together, the recent scholarship by Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, Susan Stanford Friedman, and Charles W. Pollard reframe approaches to modernism through a geographical and international lens without specific temporal or spatial configurations. Friedman, similarly to Doyle and Winkiel in

Geomodernisms, resists a classical approach to modernism and rather argues for, “the possibility for polycentric modernities and modernisms at different points of time and in different locations” which in turn “fosters a move from singularities to pluralities of space and time, from exclusivist formulations of modernity and modernism to ones based in global linkages” (426). Therefore, whether one explores Virginia Woolf’s and T.S. Eliot’s London, James Joyce’s Dublin, or perhaps even the London of Selvon and Lamming, new modernities, and techniques for representing such modernities, emerge within these urban environments. In regards to Selvon and Lamming, by exploring the creolized spaces of urban modernity, they were respectively introducing a new hybridized version of modernism and British literature.

How to categorize the urban literature produced in postwar London by such writers as George Lamming and Samuel Selvon has generated extensive debate. Simon Gikandi’s *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* offers an insightful analysis into the classification of such experimental, modernist work produced by these writers. Gikandi argues that Caribbean narratives, written out of “exile,” give way to a modern “Caribbean” literature (91). Other voices in contemporary scholarship such as Mary Lou Emery and J. Dillon Brown, in their remarkable work, align authors such as James, Rhys, Selvon, and Lamming, among others, with anglophone Caribbean literature. This debate on how to classify the literature produced by such authors, and the variety of terminology it has facilitated, further demonstrates that the histories of immigration to Britain are crucial moments in terms of cultural reconstruction and literary production. Taken together, Gikandi, Emery, and Brown further contribute to the reconfigurations of modernism in an international sense. Brown reminds his readers too that categorizing terms such as “modernism” and “anglophone Caribbean literature” are “notoriously, imperfect: no classification, however fine-tuned, can fully exhaust the rich

network of meanings, connotations, connections, relationships, and literary lineage of even one text, let alone a proposed canon of texts” (300). Gikandi, Brown, and Emery engage with a larger history of Caribbean literature and align authors such as Lamming and Selvon with their contributions to a modern regional literature. Given the array of work produced by postwar West Indian immigrants in London, this project, to maintain specificity, aligns their urban, London-focused work with the debate surrounding the black British canon.

Debates surrounding the significance of a black British literary tradition have prompted the production of such popular anthologies as *A Black British Canon?* and *Black British Culture and Society*, among others. The debate on whether writers such as Selvon and Lamming should be considered as black British or Caribbean (as Brown, Emery, and Gikandi explore) remains ongoing and vibrant in contemporary discourse. John McLeod, author of the influential *Postcolonial London*, argues that a black British canon arguably constricts the impact of these authors and their work. He writes in his contribution to *A Black British Canon?* that by “locating selected writers and their work within a distinctly national paradigm, this national-canonical ‘technique’ [...] has unhappy consequences for the ways in which certain writers are mapped, remembered and read” (98). However Gail Low, in the same anthology, counters that by suggesting “black British” reveals how the stories of migration to Britain intertwine global communities and histories forming new relationships that are worth exploring (184). She also argues that “institutional and publishing histories” need to be considered when questioning such terminology as black British “for only then can we see not only why such writings matter, but how they matter. One should not take the name ‘black British’ and what it signifies for granted” (184-185). In Mark Stein’s influential *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, he allies himself with the position Gail Low takes because he too sees the idea of a ‘Black British

canon' as liberating rather than constricting. He defines Black British Literature broadly as follows,

[A] collective term that covers an imagined experimental field of overlapping territories. While at its narrowest sense it merely refers to writers with an African Caribbean background, as its widest it can include writing that takes recourse to domains such as Africa, Asia, or the Caribbean, and attendant cultural and aesthetic traditions. Britain, then, is being constructed as a part of, say, the Caribbean, if and when a writer chooses to fashion such an alliance, and the text draws on these distinct cultural traditions, thereby forging a new imaginary space. This new space denoted by the label *black British literature* is far from homogenous; on the contrary, its heterogeneity is one of its defining features. (18)

The Black British writing that emerged out of postwar London reveals how space acts as a crucial structuring agent in the reconfiguration of national and cultural identity. While it is important to recognize the transatlantic contexts of these texts in terms of modernism and canonization, as Brown, Emery, and Gikandi reveal, it is equally important to go back to privileged space of the city as central to exploring these texts. It is their focus on London that forcefully link Selvon's and Lamming's narratives with "black British" and modernism. Urban creolization presents a counter movement where there is no longer a center and periphery, but the periphery and the center, which creates a "new" hybrid version of culture, and by extension a new urban imaginary to be explored through the texts of black British writers of Windrush and its future generations. Writers such as Selvon, Lamming, Naipaul, and others who journeyed to the city in the 1950s, as Paul Gilroy notes in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, "stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages": West Indian and

British (1). However, these categories “have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations” (1), and this is largely because of centripetal force of the metropolis where new senses of the self take shape. The transgressive potential of the city, its collage of voices and symbols, forces participation in more complex identities and dreams for collective futures.

London, for Selvon and Lamming, is symbolic of the new ways in which West Indians were exploring city, self, and community, and in turn were making London a meaningful spatial location for black British urban modernity. Doyle and Winkiel acknowledge, similarly to Low, that the space in which these texts are produced and published is crucial. As Doyle and Winkiel argue, “[B]oth the creation and the interpretation of modernisms, so much depends on *which* modernism, written when and why and from what place—which city, which hillside, which seat on the train, which new nation or new colony, and before, after, or during which war” (2).

London becomes the collective tissue of the black and white British body, which encourages new approaches to modernism. In Raymond Williams’s “Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism,” he writes that it is not “the general themes of response to the city and its modernity which compose anything that can be properly called Modernism. It is rather the new and specific location of the artists and intellectuals of this movement within the changing cultural milieu of the metropolis” (44). Selvon and Lamming, through the representation of urban creolization in text, were reconfiguring London through a new black urban consciousness.

For Selvon and Lamming, their imaginative engagement with London ultimately seeks to redefine and reassemble the historically problematic relationship between the center and periphery through a new urban imagination. To explore Lamming’s imaginative engagement with London, the following chapter, entitled “Now it was my street”: George Lamming’s

Emigrants, considers how Lamming's *The Emigrants* and *Water with Berries* figures London as both a crushing and creative force in the black British consciousness using urban theorist and geographer, Doreen Massey. Massey argues that the identity of a particular place, such as London, is constantly being renegotiated through new spatial stories, which in Lamming's case is the story of West Indian urban creolization. Lamming's narratives explore a new break with history through the West Indian diaspora, which is symbolic of new movement, or a new story, through space. Chapter Three, entitled "The Boys all over London": Samuel Selvon's Londoners, explores how Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending* imagine a black London using Georg Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Finally, the conclusion, entitled "Bona Fide Londoners:" The Case for a Black British London, further considers how black British writing reaffirms London's importance through the literary imagination.

CHAPTER I

“NOW IT WAS MY STREET”: GEORGE LAMMING’S EMIGRANTS

Men, women and children, already universally battened down against the expected freezing weather by the ubiquitous wearing of *hats*. People, dressed up to the nines, formally, for ‘traveling’ and even more, for ‘arrival’. The expectant look – forward; open and outward, into something they cannot yet see. Not back, where they came from.
Stuart Hall, “Reconstruction Work: Images of Postwar Black Settlement”

The continual flux and change is one of the most disquieting aspects of the modern city. We expect permanence and stability from the city.
Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*.

In William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610), Caliban is a native of the island to which his master and educator, Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, is exiled along with his daughter, Miranda. In Act One, Scene Two, the audience is introduced to a bitter and resentful Caliban: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t/ Is I know how to curse” (366-7). Caliban is modernized so-to-speak through language and as a result recognizes his own enslavement. Miranda herself acknowledges what language has given Caliban as she states in this same scene, “When thou didst not, savage,/ Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like/ A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes/ With words that made them known” (358-361). Language means a certain level of self-awareness for Caliban, but it is this awareness that makes Caliban resentful towards Prospero. How to read Caliban has generated a great deal of debate in academic discourse. Bill Ashcroft argues, however, that one should look beyond Shakespeare’s play to understand Caliban. He notes, “Caliban as exemplar of the colonial subject is still imprisoned in the European imagination. We must follow him beyond the play, beyond the Shakespearean imagination [...] to see what he actually does with Prospero’s language” (*Caliban’s* 13). George Lamming engages with such a re-imagining of Caliban by exploring the connection between the West Indian and Britain, which serves as the framework for

Lamming's autobiography, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). As Peter Hulme argues, Lamming's autobiography was not written on the islands and did not cater specifically to a West Indian audience as it was "a reading that was coming 'home' [...] to the place from which Shakespeare had been made such a meaningful authority" (224).

Lamming, in his autobiography, illustrates the irony of Caliban taking up the colonizer's language. As Lamming remarks, "This gift of Language meant [...] speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way. It is this way, entirely Prospero's enterprise, which makes Caliban aware of possibilities" (109). Caliban, in taking up the language of the colonizer, opens up that same language to new forms and to the new identities those forms offer. Although Lamming addresses the terrible history of oppression and colonization in the West Indies, he also argues that the ancestors of Caliban are not, because of language, geographically and socially contained by such histories. As he notes,

I am a direct descendant of slaves, too near to the actual enterprise to believe that its echoes are over the reign of emancipation. Moreover, I am a direct descendant of Prospero worshipping in the same temple of endeavor, using his legacy of language—not to curse our meeting—but to push it farther, reminding the descendants of both sides that what's done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the gift endowed with different meanings, may grow towards a future which is colonised by our acts in this moment, but which must always remain open. (15)

The descendants of both figures, Lamming argues, must recognize not only the permanent relationship that has been forged through such a history, but also the possibilities this legacy

affords with regard to new histories. For the descendants of Caliban, who are for Lamming West Indians, the language of the colonizer is a means to reroute modernity, or in other words, as Friedman's writes, "the winds of radical disruption [...] the reflexive consciousness of newness spread" ("Definitional Excursions" 503), and in turn make the experience of modernity their own. Lamming's reflections on colonial history compliments Susan Stanford Friedman's argument that new cultural, national, and creative ruptures and transformations, or modernities, are being forged through an increasingly post-colonial world. As she writes, "The geography of mobility and interculturality [...] recognizes that the contact zones between cultures often involve violence and conquest as well as reciprocal exchange, inequality and exploitation as well as mutual benefits, and abjection and humiliation as well as pride and dignity" ("Periodizing" 428). For Lamming, *The Tempest* responds to the hybridization of West Indian and British culture, which West Indian writers living in London would use as a tool to explore black urban modernity in the "imperial" city. They transplant the terrain of recurred models of colonization, making the imperial center the ground for reimagining the city, nation, and self.

Newspapers, media, and iconic modernist figures recognized the impact of these expatriate West Indian writers on Britain. Francis Wyndham remarks in "The New West Indian Writers," featured in the June 1958 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, that a "handful of West Indian writers are producing fresh and interesting books, unusual both in content and in style [...] They do not, in fact, form a group; they are as varied technically as they are racially. It is their variety, their vigour, their individual treatment, of unhackneyed material" (112).²² Wyndham recognizes, however, that regardless of their different ethnic backgrounds or individual techniques, these writers were nonetheless forming into a collective group of writers, much like the Bloomsbury group, that signaled to a new trajectory of writing in "England" (63).²³ He writes that the "best of

them present a society (seen by Lamming in tragic force, by Selvon with lyrical charm, by Naipaul with sophisticated detachment) through the medium of a strong individual talent which brings its beauty, its pathos and its humour to permanent life” (112).²⁴ The West Indian writers were producing innovative content and style, but something collectively new in fiction. They began, as Lamming notes in *The Pleasures of Exile*, a “new situation—new in the historic sense of time—and I want to regard this situation as one example of a new force in the modern world” (23). Lamming particularly engages in a new representation of urban and cultural transformation in London. His powerful view of London and the West Indian diaspora projects the excitement, challenge, and horror of London as an achievement of the modern city and magnet to which West Indians were irresistibly drawn.

Both George Lamming’s *The Emigrants* and *Water with Berries* provide dramatically contradictory images of London through the conflicts West Indians encounter living in the modern city. According to Raymond Williams, however, the portrayal in “minority” art of “passing through a continuous dominance of certain metropolitan centres and a related unevenness of all other social and cultural development” leads to an “expansion of metropolitan forms of perception” (“Metropolis” 46). Both novels, by engaging with the racialized spaces of urban modernity, in arguably radical ways, allow for new ways to see London. Lamming’s *The Emigrants* is broken up into three sections: “A Voyage,” “Rooms and Residents,” and “Another Time.” Each narrative section follows a diverse group of West Indian emigrants from the moment they dock in London after having sailed the Caribbean, through their early experiences in England, and to their more settled lives in the metropolis. In *Water with Berries*, the story follows three black artists from the West Indies who have been living in London for several years; Teeton, a painter, Roger, a composer, and Derek, an actor. Teeton, the main protagonist

and a former rebel from San Cristobal, has exiled himself after his wife, Randa, slept with an American diplomat to secure his safety from persecution. After living in London for seven years, Teeton feels pressure to return to San Cristobal to rejoin the cause for nation liberation, but whether he wants to go back to the island remains ambiguous throughout the novel. Lamming explores the diverse lives of these black urban artists using themes and figures from *The Tempest*, which facilitates a very dark image of the city, but one that still negotiates for “possibilities.” Lamming, through *The Emigrants* and *Water with Berries*, gives representation to a London in a painful and meaningful process of negotiation and transformation through the black urban experience.

George Lamming, in an interview with David Scott, is asked about the relationship between living in London and his writing. Lamming in response to the question, remarks, “[F]or us our politics is central to our aesthetics” (112). For Lamming, it is both the history and language between the Caribbean and Britain and how this history and language have been shaped through immigration that are central to exploring Lamming’s aesthetics. Lamming’s experimentation with the urban novel is a means to explore the lived politics of identity and place. According to urban historian Lewis Mumford, “The city is both a physical utility for collective living and a symbol of those collective purposes and unanimities that arise under such favoring circumstance. With language itself, it remains man’s greatest work of art” (5).²⁵ The city then is a vast, material entity, but also is a source of inspiration in literary space as it facilitates, because of its kaleidoscopic environment, new forms of creative expression through language, and by extension, new ways of perceiving life through the urban. Lamming uses language and the innovative techniques of his modernist forbearers to represent London’s new hybridity.

Language plays a key role in Lamming's urban imagination. For example, the first section of *The Emigrants* charts the voyage from the ports of the West Indies to England. During this voyage there is a scene where Dickinson, a schoolteacher from Barbados who is well versed in the language and culture of the motherland, has a "misunderstanding" with Collis, a writer who is widely associated with the phantom-like narrator of the novel, in the dormitory of the ship. Collis, looking to establish relationships with fellow West Indians, approaches Dickinson at his bed to ask him what he is reading (28-29). When Collis first asks Dickinson what he is reading, he speaks in Standard English, but when Dickinson, who is suspicious of Collis, refuses to give him the answer he is looking for, Collis asks again. He speaks this time though in a West Indian creole as a means to get Dickinson's attention: "Say man, what's it you reading" (29). Dickinson looks at Collis as though "a sin had just been committed" (29). This "sin" suggests Collis has committed some form of linguistic and cultural transgression. By having Collis alternate between these two forms of language, "West Indian creole" and "Standard English," Lamming reveals both the tension and connection between these two categories of identity, "black" and "British." In giving representation to this tension and connection, Lamming advocates a new consciousness, a recognition and valuation of differences, and articulates the embracing of ambiguity and paradoxes that attend the creolization experience. In *Water with Berries*, Lamming's black urban artists are more embedded in the life of London and in turn speak largely in Standard English. However, the language shifts during the brief sections when the narrative perspective focuses in on "The Gathering" meetings, which consists of a group of revolutionaries that Teeton is secretly a member of from San Cristobal who have been plotting their return back to rejoin the cause. These figures speak in more of a West Indian creole dialect (43). Teeton, Roger, and Derek have cultivated a different relationship with London than the

members of “The Gathering,” which is not only emphasized through language, but also through the limited narrative perspective during these “Gathering” scenes.

Central to Lamming’s urban poetics is his engagement with traditional modernist techniques such as stream of consciousness and an unstable, shifting narrative point of view. For example, when Higgins discovers on the ship that the cooking school in Liverpool he was invited to attend has closed, the narration shifts from Higgins’s reaction to that of the collective group. As Lamming writes, “He was now a part of their bewilderment [...] The world was against them, and from this awareness they had taken a strength more terrible than the sun” (91). The narrative perspective then juxtaposes this collective uncertainty with the movement of the ship where the ship “quickened its pace and the rumble of the engine grew louder. The quiet was routed, relaxation had given way to a new condition [...] It cut cruelly through the water as though it had found a new pleasure in its power and possession” (91). The narration then shifts once more at the end of this section to Lilian and the Governor engaging in some form of a romantic rendezvous. The narrative perspective only shifts fleetingly to their point of view, and therefore the full extent of their actions remains unknown to the reader. Such narrative jumps constitute, as Baudelaire proposes, the “fleeting” nature of consciousness.

Perhaps the most explicit portrayal of Lamming’s re-use and re-working of modernist technique occurs in *The Emigrants* when the West Indians travel on the train and first experience the London cityscape. Lamming devotes a series of pages at the end of “A Voyage” to illustrate the initial experience of the city for the West Indians. The abrupt breaks and shifts in perspective give the impression of the fast-paced metropolitan life the immigrants now find themselves experiencing. Lamming though not only brings in an array of voices from the immigrants, as demonstrated through the West Indian dialect, but then English passengers filter into the scene as

demonstrated by their Standard English. One voice asks, “Where do you chaps come from? The West Indies? Been there several times myself” (111). Another passenger breaks in and asks “Do you know if there were any stowaways on the ship?” (115). Through such dialogue, Lamming reinforces the superiority of London by reminding the reader, through the question of the stowaways, of the inferiority status of the immigrant as “other.” Lamming also faithfully represents the urban and modern in this train scene, and more specifically introduces London as emblematic of the West Indian exposure to modernity.

In the midst of this disorder and the fleeting impressions of London among the West Indians is their surprise at the remnants of war left on the city. Lamming himself remarks in his autobiography that West Indians were journeying to “an expectation” of England and London (211), and therefore this scene points to an already changed London. As Jerry White notes, it was in the 1950s “that the twentieth century firmly began to impose its will on the recalcitrant legacy of the nineteenth. In the process it made its own version of London absorbing the old in the new and making the division between the two a battleground on which London’s identity was still being forged” (4).²⁶ Just as West Indians were confronting their ambiguity through immigration and urban modernity, London itself was still coming to terms with its own modernity. The twentieth century left London susceptible to intervention and other ways of life, which Lamming signals to in this pivotal scene.

The array of perspectives and characters in the voyage section, however limited or fleeting, are pivotal for Lamming’s narrative in that they unfold a new, collective black consciousness that takes shape before the passengers reach the English shore. During “A Voyage,” Lamming illustrates the anxieties and tensions among a diverse group of West Indians journeying to London. Mary Lou Emery writes, “[C]reolized Caribbean arts have made what has

been called “British” culture part of a more extensive circum-Atlantic cultural network that did not begin, but certainly intensified, with the slave trade and its twin, modernity” (*Modernism* 3). The voyage scene tracks a new break with history within the oceanic limbo of the Atlantic. This break with the past is symbolic of new movement through space, a new spatial trajectory, or story-so-far, as Doreen Massey terms it, of the West Indian diaspora to London that is a means of reworking “modernity away from being the unfolding, internal story of Europe alone” (*For Space* 63).²⁷ The voyage is a significant moment in the history of modernity that documents a new spatialization of blackness in the Western world. Each shift in narration articulates the complexity and anxiety that attends such a transformative journey for the immigrants, on both an individual and collective level. As the narrator states,

Tornado knows the place he’s sailing to, but he doesn’t care much about it [...] We others don’t know the place and yet we’re all anxious to arrive [...] Whatever the island each may have come from, everything is crystal clear. Everybody is in flight and no one knows what he’s fleeing to. A better break. A better break. That’s what we say. (50)

The narrative voice in this passage, Collis, captures that this is for West Indians a turning away from the past and embracing the potential for a new and better “break.” The voyage to England, and by extension to London, visualizes a powerful moment in black British history that will forcefully re-configure urban modernity in London.

The lengthy voyage section, as the ships travels closer to the English shore, is filled with extensive images of the sea and its empty space, which Lamming juxtaposes against the numerous scenes with the West Indians gathered around each other talking about their expectations, fears, hopes, and stresses for their future lives in England. An imagined sense of

community has been nurtured during this voyage considering that earlier scenes stressed difference and tension among the various West Indians that become representative of their various islands of origin. For instance, two men, one from Barbados and one from Grenada, are the main participants in a political/cultural debate. At one point in the conversation, the Grenadian remarks, “Is only because you Bajans was always under the English you get this idea ‘bout you got more education than anybody else” (37).²⁸ The early portions of the section stress cultural tension, but this begins to shift, particularly when Higgins learns about the cooking school. In the wake of Higgins’s misfortune, the West Indians become aware of their own anxieties, and the uncertainty of their own situations, which arouses “a new feeling [...] strengthening this fraternity by the awareness of their predicament” (91). A new black consciousness has been erected on this voyage.

The transformation of the West Indians into a black collective body carries on throughout the section. When the immigrants are notified that they are getting closer to their final destination, they look at the map on the ship,

They perused the map, following it in a line of punctures from where the pin stuck back to the Azores, the empty sea, the islands, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Barbados, Trinidad; and as they followed the line down and away from the point of their destination they recalled what had happened in the dormitory, on the deck, in the dining hall at various times. There was neither excitement nor nostalgia in their recollection, just a neutral resignation to incidents that could not be reversed [...] That was England. That was where they would disembark, and then the feeling of uncertainty crawled over them and for a moment they were still, sympathetic, together. (96)

The West Indians follow the line on the map that is symbolic of center-periphery cartographic power, and in doing so, the text begins to imaginatively traverse this distance. Massey contends that maps are “forms of representation, indeed iconic forms,” which attempt to impose order on a disorderly world (*For Space* 106). New spatial stories and histories challenge maps by revealing the “the instability and potential of the spatial” (*For Space* 116). Geographically, the map responds to the route that will lead the West Indians to a new life, but the map also reinforces a particular version of history and culture. Lamming, however, commits himself here to emphasizing that these are destinations marked out by pins and therefore meaningless except in terms of geography considering the periphery is moving towards the center in this scene, which allows him to argue for the relationships that maps often portray not be internalized. He invites his audience, through the imagination, to go beyond the ink on the page to explore places and the relationships they forge globally and locally. Massey writes, echoing Michel de Certeau, that the meaning of a “place” constantly is renegotiated through the spatial stories-so-far, revealing that they are not simply points on maps but “integrations of space and time; as spatial-temporal events” (*For Space* 130). The new spatial story that begins on this voyage opens up their destination, England, to renegotiation. Even Higgins, despite the loss he has suffered, feels that dot on the map holds the possibility for new life still. As the narrator describes, “He was struggling to find meaning for his next decision, for he wasn’t a man to guess his actions. He saw the land, England [...] There was life, life, life, and wherever there was life there had to be something, something other than no-THING which did not matter. It mattered to be in England” (106-107). The immigrants now, as they move from the ship to the metropolitan center, find themselves having to negotiate through the history-soaked associations that inform their expectations of London.

Lamming's imaginative use of maps reoccurs in *Water with Berries* where maps serve as Teeton's curtains in his apartment. As the narrator illustrates, "He turned to look at the maps again [...] the blue ink of ocean looked so troubled, so utterly indecisive where it should go, and what it should let him hear. The island was smiling under the monstrous shadow of its northern neighbor" (19). The map is a collection of markings on paper, but for Teeton it brings to mind a multidimensional world consisting of both city and island. Such scenes are how Lamming fuses the twentieth century London of Teeton, Roger, and Derek with the world of *The Tempest* to demonstrate how these black immigrants, who struggle for their "right to urban life" (Lefebvre 374), still experience the city largely through the filters of its imperial past and the center-periphery dialectic. Early on, however, the three black artists of this novel do regard London as a space that maximizes "freedom and autonomy" (*Sphinx* 9). As Lamming writes,

They had traveled together from the torrid island of San Cristobal [...] The weather displayed its malice in various ways; but it had acquired the privilege of history. It was inconvenient and forgivable [...] They had invested all their virtue in the rigorous struggle of being artists. They had discovered a style of difficulty that promised to free them from the insecurities of their origin. More important, they had escaped the cruelties of neglect. Whatever indignities the foreign city might impose, it had achieved a most vital claim on their affection. (68)

They each have created a life in London and even appropriate the city as the space that allowed for them, as artists, the freedom of the imagination. However, the past still encroaches on them. For Teeton, it is because of the pressure from "The Gathering" and his landlady, the Old Dowager, who incessantly involves herself in Teeton's life. As John Clement Ball contends, she "plays the role of Prospero as aged, weakening imperial power" (154). Teeton even observes

how she inserts herself in his life. For example, she organizes the sale and marketing of his art, cleans his apartment, and facilitates their ritualized tea sessions. Her dominion over his apartment, Teeton considers, is her “natural element” (19). Roger begins to re-experience the restrictive bonds of race and heritage after one day on the street when a newly arrived “black” immigrant asks him what he does for a living (69). When Roger explains he is a composer, he receives a “rude awakening” as the man declares, “I say there must be a stop to all that [...] Is men like you make niggers think with their feet” (69). While Roger explains that such an attitude “isolated him from his from his own place of birth” (70), this experience still disturbs him and leads him to later deny that the baby his girlfriend, Nicole, is carrying is his out of fear that it might be “white” (139). Such experiences inform why Teeton slowly has been internalizing the reality the map embodies where the island “shrinks” under England’s shadow.

Teeton looks at the map as an active subject rather than an artificial construction of the world where the meaningful experiences of life cannot be fully illustrated. New spatial stories, as Massey illustrates, participate in the “continuing production [...] the constant process of the making and breaking of links which is an element in the contribution of you, yourself and the space you move through” (*For Space* 118). For *Water with Berries*, spatial stories-so-far, such as those of Teeton and Roger, subvert the historic associations attached to London through the relocation of self and their creative ambitions to London whereby they attempt to actively participate in the creative opportunities London holds. However, as Teeton associates the images on the map with an imperial history, and in turn internalizes that history, the narrative suggests this “making” and “breaking” in space can be a tedious and even violent process. The violence of this process is represented at the end of the narrative when Derek, exhausted and enraged by being offered to play only the role of corpses in productions, rapes a white woman in front of the

audience. Readers also see the consequences of this violent process when Roger goes on an arson campaign against the city after Nicole disappears. For Teeton, he soon realizes shortly after the Old Dowager murders her lover, Fernando, her husband's brother, to save him from Fernando's rage that he would be forever "within her power [...] his future was dependent on her mercy" (232-233). To break with the Old Dowager, Teeton kills her and therefore is able to leave the past and the island "behind him [...] The future had come between them" (248). London, in *Water with Berries*, is a liberating life-force, but also the most spectacular instance of disappointment and futility of the human endeavor.

A majority of scenes in the second section of the *The Emigrants*, "Rooms and Residents," largely take place in domestic interiors with only fleeting moments of London's streets. While the unrepresented urban landscape projects, as John Clement Ball notes, a "social reality of racism [...] a city of segregation, of firmed-up boundaries between 'English' and 'immigrant' citizens" (114), there is still new, black territories being nurtured in London. New trajectories in urban space are taking place, even while largely indoors. The immigrants establish a sense of community in barbershops, hostels, and basements, which become associated with the black urban experience. As the narrator illustrates,

There was womb which the world (meaning those other than you) was not aware of. The world which passed by on the outside, intent or callous, but ignorant of the intimacy and the warmth of this house, in this corner, where those women were seated around a table [...] The radio played unnecessarily [...] Turn it off and it would be missed. Leave it on and no one noticed it. But it was a link with the world, the others; and in its way it might have been a reminder that there was nothing fanciful about the others, nothing false about what was said now about

that world, those who walked outside anxiously, monotonously over the surface of this corner. (148)

As the omniscient, phantom-like narrator describes this female hair salon that caters to black immigrants, the narrator speaks, arguably, to the reader. The narrator attempts to make the reader aware of an unseen world of London: its hidden, black world. While these rooms, and the conditions they represent, may not be all that comfortable as they are characterized as small and ignored, there is a warmth being attributed to them, facilitating the impression of a “home” and ultimately the process of black urban settlement being undertaken through these rooms. Lilian and Tornado particularly cultivate this sense of home in London: “After work they all met in Tornado’s room to play bridge and talk. The Jamaican and his girl usually joined Tornado and Lilian at the evening meal, each party bringing their own preparations [...] As a meeting place for emigrants and their friends, it was as popular as the barber shop’s” (189-190). According to Michel de Certeau, practices such as “dwelling” reintroduce space in a new light through the individual making the space the realm of their “goals and desires” (xxii). Tornado, in the “Room and Residents” section, has been experiencing a change of heart with England. While talking with the Jamaican one night in his room, the Jamaican states “There must be some kind o’ satisfaction in de life” (196). Tornado responds with, “You got to invent it [...] I goin’ marry Lilian [...] And then we goin’ to try an’ live as we live before we ever left” (196). Lilian, as a response to the Jamaican’s surprise, states, “He really change [...] A real change take possession of him” (196). While the experience of the city manifests through the interior largely in *The Emigrants*, there is something being created here within these interior spaces. The West Indians begin to make these spaces their own, which instigates a process of black urbanization in London as they actualize these black rooms and homes with their “goals and desires.” The narrator

explains to the reader that this too is “a kind of action” (192). Massey argues that postcolonial communities and cultures, once largely excluded from the experience of modernity, now have “come home to roost. For exposing that geography—by the raising of voices located outside of (although geographically often within) the accepted speaking-space of modernity, by insisting on the multiplicity of trajectories—has helped to expose and undermine the power/knowledge relation” (*For Space* 64). The counter-creolization in the urban as explored in Lamming’s narrative exposes the “accepted speaking-space of modernity” and in turns challenges it. Therefore, the black appropriation of urban space manifests through both the exterior and interior, public and private, thus creating a topography of resistance across the city.

As the novel progresses, Lamming transplants focus to new parts of the city in the final section of the narrative, “Another Time.” In doing so, he captures the classic movement of immigration that begins with the voyage and eventually moves from settlement into consciousness. For example, the opening scene of this section takes readers to the streets through Collis. Lamming writes, “This was an afternoon like any other, familiar, uneventful [...] I had walked this street for more than two years, at first curious, with a sense of adventure which offered me the details of the houses and the fences. Now it was my street. It seemed I had always walked it. It was a convenience which had been created for me” (231). As Lamming carries his readers through the progression of the initial phases of black British urban modernity, from the voyage, to the black homes and sites of communion, he now takes his readers to the black man on the street that he has made his own. There is a sense of freedom and belonging implicit in Collis’s words that articulates Massey’s point that the active practice of space, through the “successions of meetings, the accumulations of weavings and encounters” will in turn build “a history” (*For Space* 139). However, it is also in this section that Lamming explores the darker

aspects of black British history in London, which carries a new “sense of strangeness” rather than anything entirely familiar or comfortable (“Metropolis” 47).²⁹ Dickinson walks through a city park at night after a group of white women put him on display and therefore appropriate his body as the exotic other: “She said they only wanted to see what he looked like. He was lying on the divan, his clothes uncouthly thrown in one corner [...] They devoured his body with their eyes. It disintegrated and dissolved in their stare, gradually regaining its life through the reflection in the mirror [...] (266). The memory of what just transpired for Dickinson takes readers to this surreal moment with Dickinson in the park, which is reminiscent of James Joyce’s Nighttown scenes in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922). The park becomes the dark, unseen London that promises but never delivers intellectual and social mobility. As Lamming illustrates,

He didn’t trust the immobility of the trees, nor the distance that separated him from the activity of the street beyond [...] He had to be assured that he was still there under his clothes, inside his skin, and these were possibly the only people who could probably restore his life, his identity, which the eyes of others had drained away. He had reached the end of the park. (267-268)

Dickinson becomes unrecognizable to himself here where his consciousness splits between the competing narratives of colonialism and urban modernity. In another scene, the Governor reflects, while in his nightclub located in the dark underbelly of the city and host to a transnational crowd, that it “was wonderful to be removed from the crowd, to be with it, though not of it” (270). Lamming’s immigrants are still reacting to London and negotiating where they belong in the crowd, which concludes *The Emigrants* on a rather unsettling note. Elizabeth Wilson argues, however, in *The Sphinx in the City*, much like Raymond Williams, that such

perceptions of the metropolis, no matter how disturbing, renews its modernity. As she writes, “Extremes of wealth and poverty, of enjoyment and misery, made an essential contribution to perception of the city” (5). These frustrations, horrors, and pleasures of the everyday among black immigrants unveil new perceptions of London.

In *Water with Berries*, Lamming invokes another scene that takes the reader to a dark, black London. However, in this scene, it is not a menacing London. Teeton, after learning about Randa’s suicide, walks down the Heath where a shadowy, female stranger joins him. Readers learn that this woman is Myra, the daughter of the Old Dowager and Fernando. The Old Dowager’s husband took her to the West Indies out of resentment, where Myra was one night brutally raped. Now Myra works as a prostitute on the Heath. Teeton and Myra talk extensively during their first encounter on the Heath, and they agree to continue meeting. She asks him deeply personal questions and they engage further in topics that are close to the heart, and rather philosophical. Teeton is enthralled by their conversations that take place during the darkest hours of night in the city. As Lamming writes, “[H]e was thinking, only under the spell of such a moment that I have been able to recognise some possibility in my myself; some real potential for any act that would really connect me to what we ordinarily call living” (112). His moments with Myra are fleeting, and quickly end, but these moments on the Heath illustrate Massey’s point that “cities are so productively both condition of and provocation to new thinking. Moreover, part of what this provocation has entailed [...] is a rethinking of city space—as accumulation of layers, as ungraspable juxtapositions, and so forth” (*For Space* 159). These moments between Myra and Teeton are in darkness, and as a result, the cultural tensions nurtured in London by the lingering sense of empire fade in the darkness, detaching London from these former associations. Teeton particularly feels liberated when he talks with Myra and realizes “she had suddenly freed

him from the banalities of that room” (112). It is a moment that liberates Teeton from the gaze of the Old Dowager and elevates the promise of the urban environment for the black immigrant. However, Teeton knows they can only meet under certain conditions: “The words had acquired their own holy rhythm. That’s how it should be; that’s how he really wanted to be. Here on this heath, under cover of the night, they would meet like a legend of spirits, indifferent to the frivolities of daylight. The dark was their bond; the word their only necessary bridge” (154). Teeton, after their final meeting, laments that he does not share more of himself with her, but for Teeton caution remains necessary as his particular experience of the urban is still over determined by the fact of empire. Nonetheless, much like Collis on his familiar street during the daytime, Teeton finds the promise of London one night on the Heath.

CHAPTER II

“THE BOYS ALL OVER LONDON”: SAMUEL SELVON’S LONDONERS

Running concurrently with this sense of disengagement from London was a process of falling in love with it. Guyana became more remote with time and, as it shrank in my mind, London took root. London was strange as time passed but only because I explored further reaches of it, making it strange as portions of it became second nature to me.

Fred D’Aguiar, “Home is Always Elsewhere”

The *right to the city* cannot be conceived as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*.

Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City”

Jane Grant, in her introduction to Samuel Selvon’s *Ways of Sunlight* (1957), charts Selvon’s diverse use of language in his fiction, and her analysis on Selvon’s complicated use of language informs us that the West Indian was experiencing another form of creolization in the metropolis. She writes that Selvon’s Trinidadian stories use either a strict Indian or Trinidadian creole (xxix). Selvon’s London-based fictions, however, invoke and even alternate between a London Creole dialect, which draws on both West Indian Creoles and English slang, as well as what she labels the “West Indian Standard” which is “nearer to Standard English [...] but with a definite West Indian flavour” (xxix). Grant’s analysis compliments Charles W. Pollard’s argument that creolization, or the heterogeneity of cultures and languages, finds expression in West Indian modernist aesthetics. The urbanization of creole discourse is central to understanding how the cultural mixing taking place in postwar London was fusing the native language of the West Indian with the native language and lifestyle of the metropolis. Much like his modernist forbearers, Selvon understood that language was key to exploring consciousness.

The narrative attention to language in Selvon’s prose is the medium for unfolding the black British urban consciousness, which forms the basis for a new urban text. Michael Bell argues in “The metaphysics of Modernism” that when it comes to modernism, the language is

important as “language entails a view of the world, a usually implicit philosophy” (18). To urbanize creole speech is as means to respond to the urbanization of the West Indian, and envision, arguably, London’s own hybridity. For many of the characters in Selvon’s postwar, urban fiction, they are dwelling and moving within the city but the thoughts of their cultural heritage and native islands are never far away. It is through the spaces of the city that the protagonists draw on their modern predicament: to negotiate between two supposedly exclusive forms of identity, one that was nurtured within their community in the West Indies and another now beginning in the urban. Language becomes the primary means to articulate this cultural tension, but then to reveal the new dissemination of a black cultural consciousness situated in London that contributes to the ongoing project of exploring London’s modernity and transnationality.

Samuel Selvon was personally fascinated by the effect of London on West Indians. In his letters, he considers the complicated status of the immigrant as he writes, “To this day, in England, even though a new generation of blacks and coloureds can claim to be British citizens, the English stubbornly continue to call them immigrants” (1).³⁰ He goes on to consider how his early experiences in London, and being face-to-face with a diverse group of immigrants from the West Indies, among other places, triggered his imagination to constantly go back to Trinidad. In an article entitled “Finding West Indian Identity in London,” Selvon asserts these experiences helped him explore a more complicated sense of self. Cultural identity in the Caribbean was problematic and largely defined by the island to which one grew up on and one’s ancestry, whether mixed or “pure.” Selvon though notes though that “London taught me about people from the Caribbean” in a broader context (“Finding” 37), demonstrating how placement in different national, social, cultural, and urban contexts allow for new perspectives. London then

became a particularly important place in terms of cultural identity formation among the West Indians that came over on *Windrush*.

Selvon, however, writes in his personal letters that living in London and setting down roots in the city complicated his poetic imagination even further. He writes, “For my part, I ambled in the streets of London, trying to discover myself and also what I could of this city which had bred a generation of writers” (8).³¹ In the 1950s, he applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship as a prelude to moving to the United States, where he hoped to develop his writing further. After being awarded the fellowship, Selvon spent a few months at a writers’ colony in Peterborough, west of Boston, where he found himself thinking about the life he had cultivated in London as an immigrant.³² It was at this time that he started writing *The Lonely Londoners* before his fellowship had ended and he had returned to London.³³ He returned to England and stayed on, even while West Indians were considering journeying back, or actually returning, to the Caribbean. Selvon notes that while some of the postwar writers were going back to the Caribbean, he stayed on as he found “enough scope for the imagination” in England with the transatlantic, immigrant community and a “new generation of black Britons” in London (3-4).³⁴ London, as central to his imagination as a writer, deserves much consideration. Paul Gilroy writes in *The Black Atlantic* that “intellectuals and activists, writers, speakers, poets, and artists [products of transatlantic diasporas] repeatedly articulate a desire to escape the restrictive bonds of ethnicity, national identification, and sometimes even “race” itself. Some speak, like Wells and Wright, in terms of the rebirth that Europe offered them” (19). Considering Selvon’s personal letters, the West Indian intellectuals, writers, artists, etc. were experiencing in the course of their interaction with the city their own rebirth through the London imagination, which in turn Selvon explored in his narratives *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending*. Selvon,

much like canonical modernists such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, becomes an active participant in exploring urban modernity through his material and symbolic representation of London. Jessica Berman notes that “modernist fiction form[s] part of a complex interdisciplinary conversation about human-landscape relations. Describing geography as relational, ongoing, and a science of possibilities [...] complicates the mapping of social and racial identity in modernism” (286). Much like how Selvon’s use and manipulation of Standard English with Creole dialect is an important aspect to his urban aesthetics, his representative and also symptomatic treatment of London, and the experience of London, as a lived space for black culture established Selvon’s role as an active agent of the modern.

In *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending*, Selvon represents London as a transformative space where West Indians cultivated a metropolitan consciousness, and in doing so, shape the city around them. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon particularly shifts the narrative perspective between multiple points of view and experiences of an array of characters to unfold their unique lives in the metropole. This modernist technique, while perhaps revealing the crises for the West Indian immigrant in London, also equally portrays their significant range of experiences across and within a wide range of urban contexts. The individual subjects in the novel routinely experience and engage with their manifold surroundings on multiple levels, from the interior, through memory and contemplation, and its exterior, through its streets and public spaces. Selvon’s novel then bears the weight of a black urban creolization taking hold of modern London. In *Moses Ascending*, Selvon further charts a process of settlement being undertaken by West Indians, other transnational immigrants, and their children, in the 1960s and 70s London that prompted riots, major race-relation debates, and Enoch Powell’s famous “Rivers of Blood” speech.

During the 1950s and 60s, and beyond, immigration and race-relation debates were explosive in government and on the streets as a result of both West Indian and other forms of transnational immigration. Racial tensions began escalating leading to outbreaks of racially motivated riots against West Indians and other black citizens. The Notting Hill riots in August 1958 were made famous, as Peter Fryer notes, through “media sensationalism” (377). Enoch Powell, a prominent British politician, delivered his “Rivers of Blood” speech to a Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham on April 20, 1968, where he famously argued for black emigration in reverse: “I turn to re-emigration. If all immigration ended tomorrow, the rate of growth of the immigrant and the immigrant-descended population would be substantially reduced.”³⁵ *Moses Ascending* references to such history through its focus on the Black Power movement in London.

The novel also further bears witness to a more cultivated black space and modern culture in London, particularly by invoking Standard English more so than *The Lonely Londoners* but while still remaining true to the West Indian dialect through creolized speech. The Standard English is explicitly invoked through characters who personify the second generation black Briton. For example, Brenda, a black power organizer and second-generation black Britain, uses clearly articulated Standard English which surprises Moses as he states, “I would have thought it was a nordic talking” (17). Blackness becomes forcefully linked with Britishness in this novel as Moses owns property in the city and the Black Power movement gains momentum in London. Regardless of the differences in historical time between *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending*, urban creole speech and the range of experiences, movement, and attitudes among West Indians and other black immigrants are the most powerful devices at Selvon’s command to give voice to an emerging black British London. To imagine another London, unseen, within the

space of the narrative is ultimately to advocate for a London that never stops reinventing itself, and by extension allows for modernity to be understood as a never-ending process for both places and people.

The Lonely Londoners begins with a familiar image of a foggy, gloomy London, but then abruptly shifts to a West Indian voice. The narrative voice begins in Standard English but then transitions to a West Indian dialect once Moses's name is mentioned. As Selvon writes,

One Grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet, Moses Aloetta hop on the number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Western Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train [...] 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 known. (23)

In this opening scene, the strong narrative voice articulates a cold and strange London that recalls T.S. Eliot's "Unreal City" in *The Waste Land* (1922). Eliot's descriptions of the foggy winter morning and postwar crowds captured London's afflicted urban environment, and Selvon invokes both this familiar image and a new one, through language, to introduce the dissatisfied lifestyle of the poor West Indian migrant worker in London. This opening appears to be a conscious response to previous literary representations of the city, but Selvon introduces the readers to a definite attitude about London through a new voice: the urban creole voice. Selvon, however, makes sure he emphasizes Moses's supposed familiarity with London through street names and bus numbers, which arguably is why the city is characterized as "unreal" considering Moses is a West Indian, and therefore technically a stranger in the city. This empowering voice

however creates a sense of Moses's mastery in the city, and therefore, its "unrealness." Michel de Certeau argues that invoking street names, building names, monument names, etc., is power. He writes that "[P]roper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings [...] they are the impetus of movements, like vocations and calls that turn or divert an itinerary by giving it a meaning [...] that was previously unforeseen" (104). Street names and bus numbers are being invoked here then to reinforce both a new black voice in the metropolitan consciousness and in the urban novel. Although Moses is originally from the West Indies, and therefore an outsider in the city, the narrator suggests his mindset is finely tuned to the daily operations of London and the city's topography. Therefore, while on the one hand there is a London where Moses is alienated and positioned as the "other," there is another London, while unknown, becoming apparent through the text's emphasis on Moses's suggested mastery of the urban environment. The narrative voice imaginatively rejects an exclusive London where immigrants are only "visitors" and proclaims the validity of marginalized voices in the metropolis.

To contest the West Indian's position as "outsider," the narrative introduces readers to Moses who is the London veteran in that he has been living in the city for several years. Moses has grown tired of his presumed role as caretaker of newly arrived West Indians in the city, which is a role he has carried on for some time as he remarks, "Because it look to Moses that he hardly have time to settle in old Brit'n before all sorts of fellars start coming straight to his room in the Water when they land in London" (23). While annoyed, he still agrees to help the newly arrived Galahad in terms of shelter and finding a job. Michel de Certeau writes that various daily practices, or "tactics," such as walking, transform a place rendered as fixed by authoritative powers and systems, such as a city, into unruly spaces open for new spatial stories (xviii-xx). In knowing the city and using it as a means to pick up newly arrived immigrants from Waterloo,

and help scatter “the boys around London” by finding them jobs and apartments (*Lonely* 25), Moses scatters an array of West Indians that spatialize a black London through their travels and experiences. Moses particularly helps Henry Oliver Esquire, “alias Sir Galahad, descend on London” (*Lonely* 35), or in other words, know the city. Galahad though, on his first morning in the big city, turns down Moses offer to help him find the Employment Office and embarks on his own to learn the city.

Galahad, as soon as he walks out onto the streets alone, experiences the fast-paced, ever moving life of the urban environment, and in turn, panics. The panic manifests when he is trapped by the crowds walking along the streets: “He bounce up against a woman coming out of the station but she pass him like a full trolley before he could say sorry. Everybody doing something or going somewhere, is only he walking stupid” (42). Galahad, by experiencing the streets’ movement and energy, proceeds to fall into a “daze” (42). Writing at the turn of century, German sociologist, Georg Simmel, argues in “The Metropolis and Mental Life” that the city exists as an overwhelming entity that can facilitate such responses. As Simmel writes,

The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotion life [...] rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli. To the extent that the metropolis creates these psychological conditions – with every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life—it creates in the sensory foundations of mental life [...] a deep, contrast with the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence. (11-12)

Simmel points to the ways in which urban life was growing in terms of social life, or the “crowd,” and becoming entrenched with an intense production of capitalist economy. Therefore, he emphasizes the new and broader range of urban cultural phenomena in the city that can elicit a range of emotional responses from its inhabitants. Galahad, newly arrived from the islands, experiences the force and violence of the city that he has only known through stories and education back home. While such reactions to the fleeting, fast-paced life of the city often overwhelm their inhabitants, the city can also be a freeing space in that one is not bound to specific religious, cultural, or political affiliations. The individual, according to Simmel, is not bound to a “rigorous setting of boundaries and a centripetal unity” as in small towns (15). In Galahad’s case, he would not be limited by the West Indian migrant worker identity and the cultural associations attached to it. As Simmel notes, “[T]he individual’s horizon is enlarged [...] A person does not end with the limits of his physical body or with the area to which his physical activity is immediately confined but embraces, rather, the totality of meaningful effects which emanates from him temporally and spatially” (17). In Selvon’s novels, Galahad embraces the life force and freedom of London more so, arguably, than any other character.

Galahad is one of the main figures in *The Lonely Londoners* who finds freedom through the metropolitan experience in a multitude of ways, such as by moving through the politically and culturally contested spaces of the city, to altering his clothing depending on which spaces he participates in and moves through. Galahad is enthralled by London’s modern environment and continues to return to areas such as Piccadilly Circus on a regular basis as the narrator describes, “Every time he go in there, he have the same feeling like [...] people sitting and standing and walking and talking and laughing and buses and cars and Galahad Esquire, in all this, standing there in the big city, in London. Oh Lord” (90). His experiences project the romance of London

as he tends to admire the dazzling, and often corrupt, exhibitions of its history and power on the cityscape. Michel de Certeau writes that it is not merely observing the city that matters, but walking through it because to merely observe the city puts one “at a distance” from it (92). Walking through the city, the individual cultivates their own style which is a “spatial language” that speaks about the city and how the individual experiences it, and in turn, ascribes it meaning (99). Moving through various spaces of the city, between the political and cultural, and the public and private, allows West Indians, such as Galahad, to cultivate their own style of walking, and therefore experiencing the city. Galahad, in order to liberate himself from the identity marker of “West Indian immigrant” moves through various spaces of London, including those that preserve London’s imperial history in stone and architecture, which is a practice that associates these spaces with new stories and histories.

Galahad dresses well too when he moves through the city. As Moses illustrates, “One thing about Galahad since he hit London, no foolishness about clothes: even Moses surprise at the change” (*Lonely* 86). Moses also notices that when Galahad is working, his appearance changes where “you won’t believe is the same fellar you did see coasting in the park evening before. He have on a old cap that was brown one time, but black now with grease and fingerprint” (86). Galahad transforms himself depending on the spaces he moves through in London. Felix Driver and David Gilbert argue that the “identities of urban places, as much as those of individuals or nations, are multiple and complex” (5). Galahad therefore has his work clothes and dress clothes like any other Londoner, demonstrating his commitment to routine and role-play dynamics of metropolitan culture. It is his transformation particularly during those “park” evenings that allow Galahad to fully immerse himself in the freedom of the metropolis and to the erotic aspects of urban life.

Fashion, as Elizabeth Wilson asserts, is an important aspect of modern identity. She writes that fashion is an “aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires, and beliefs circulating in society” (*Adorned* 9). Therefore, attire can contest boundaries and free Galahad from being recognized exclusively as a “West Indian” laborer. Galahad, who has a tailor in Charing Cross that keeps him up-to-date on the latest styles (87), dresses in nice clothing and suits to associate himself as a Londoner when he travels through largely historical spaces of London such as the Marble Arch or Piccadilly Circus. Wilson asserts dress has always been important in terms of metropolitan identity and modernity as it is a “kind of connective tissue of our cultural organism” (11-12). However, while Galahad aspires to be affiliated as a Londoner by way of dress, his skin color excludes him from such a status. While at Piccadilly Tube Station one evening, a child points to Galahad and exclaims, “Mummy, look at that black man” (87), which carries a great deal of irony as it is easy for even a child to spot Galahad.

No matter how sophisticated he attempts to dress, Galahad cannot escape certain cultural and racial affiliations in London. He gets upset too by this and begins, as Moses explains, “talking to the colour Black” (*Lonely* 88). Galahad exclaims, “Colour, is you that causing all this” (88). While Galahad encounters people who make him, because of the color of his skin, into a sort of spectacle, he nonetheless carries on continuously walking through London in the evenings in his sophisticated attire. Such a practice creates a new form of the Londoner: the black Londoner. While perhaps upset to always be marked as black, he cannot be anything else, but to be associated through fashion as something more than a black working class immigrant is its own form of freedom for Galahad. In *Moses Ascending*, Galahad transforms his style once again. Moses observes him in his “Black Power glad rags. Starting from foot to head” (10). By altering his style to affiliate himself with the Black Power movement in Britain, Galahad still

continues to assert his desire to belong in London, and more forcefully perhaps in *Moses Ascending*, in Britain. Joining the Black Power movement, a group dedicated to the promotion of civil rights and to freedom of black, cultural expression in Britain, and partaking in their style of dress, Galahad continues to project his dreams and desires to belong in the big city.

The black experience in London ironically challenges the Simmelian view of the freedom in the metropolis considering that Selvon's characters have to negotiate daily the contradiction between the promise of prosperity in London and the reality of the racial bias of its inhabitants. During one particular scene in *The Lonely Londoners*, the omniscient narrator breaks into one of the episodes of with Tolroy, Tanty, and Lewis to describe an area off "the Harrow Road," a working class area, with "a lot of spades" (73). Spanning a few pages before returning back to the other characters, and more specifically Tanty, the narrator considers the alienation that attends daily London life: "It have people living in London who don't know what happening in the room next to them, far more than the street, or how other people living. London is a place like that. It divide up in little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don't know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers" (74). However, positioning London as both a place of estrangement and oppression gives Selvon the opportunity, through the space of the narrative, to reconsider London also a possible space of rebellion and self-making for the black immigrant. Selvon considerably builds on Simmel's sociological hypothesis that the city could be a "locale of freedom" by advocating for the possibility of this metropolitan freedom, ironically, through the creation of one of these London "worlds" in text.

In Jeri Johnson's "Literary Geography," she explores how writers realistically portray cities in literature, but then imaginatively construct cities. She notes, "[C]ities in literature represent something other than themselves' and 'cities in literature represent at least

themselves” (60). Fictional representations of cities in text then is a means to which the urban modernity can be better understood and explored. As Johnson remarks, “[C]ities in literature stand for something other than themselves [...] they represent a network of relationships unfolded (or not) over narrative time” (61). To actualize a black London through the imaginative space of the narrative is a means for Selvon to contest the racial and cultural boundaries of London and in turn promote Simmel’s vision of freedom through the urban. Pamela K. Gilbert writes that people, historically, have “turned their faces toward the city, and created it as the site and embodiment of communities of their dreams and necessities” (1). Selvon’s representative fictions show cast London as a signifier for something “other” through the West Indian who actively engages with the urban environment and makes it a space of settlement and opportunity.

The black cultural body of London promotes that very freedom Simmel argues cities prove, which carries new significance for London as a transnational metropolis. Naming, for example, becomes the means by which Selvon effectively strips London of its former imperial associations and imagines an alternative vision of London; for example when black West Indians refer to London as “Londontown,” Bayswater as the “Water,” and the Marble Arch as the “Arch,” they remake that urban space into their own space. Another example is when the omniscient narrator breaks up the scene with Tanty, Tolroy, and Lewis to go into a reverie on the changes taking place in a black, working class community. The narrator describes the “spades” developing “a kind of communal feeling” in such areas near Harrow Road, or finding more places “all over London” that carry more items partial to Britain’s black citizens (*Lonely* 75-77). The narrative voice here is also in Grant’s “London creole direct” which is in contrast to the heavy-handed West Indian creole Selvon has been invoking through the direct speech.

The changes taking place in some of London's shops emphasizes London's modernization through the new black urban body in the twentieth century, as these small sections of London allow for multiracial participation in the city's economy. Selvon takes this participation even further in later work by exploring how West Indians were buying old, run-down houses in various areas of London. While perhaps the West Indian sharing in on London's housing market is more forcefully characterized in Selvon's *The Housing Lark, Moses Ascending* also opens up with Moses buying a house. As Selvon writes, "After all of these years paying rent, I had the ambition to own my own property in London" (2). London no longer restricts them as migrant workers but is being more forcefully inhabited and renovated by West Indians, such as, in the case of Moses, moving from a small basement-apartment in Bayswater to a house. To move from a small space to a larger space, a house, while perhaps run-down, is for Moses a freedom.

While the imperial metropolis may impose on the immigrants' freedom of movement and self-expression in the city, they also push back through their own material practices. In the "Tanty" episode of *The Lonely Londoners*, the narrator comments on how Tanty rarely ventures far from the space she has cultivated in the area near Harrow Road where she knows, and connects with, many of the other immigrant families living there (80). Tanty makes the "small portion" of London she feels free to move through her own. She refuses to accept the way London bakers traditionally hand out bread: "Where I come from [...] they don't hand you bread like that. You better put it in a paper bag for me" (80). She also convinces a shopkeeper to adopt a "trust" system, or tab system, where she can pay what she owes on a weekly schedule because that is how they do it "Where I come from" (79). This small portion of London is her own.

In *The Lonely Londoners* too, Selvon's reverie of the London summer, which spans over several pages and champions the modernist technique of stream of consciousness, functions as the narrative of black London in his episodic novel. While the novel has been introducing readers more and more to the creolized spaces of London, Selvon's eight-page myriad of images, sounds, voices, noises, and place names appropriates London with various black experiences and sensibilities. The narrative perspective does not belong to one character but rather fixates on the city itself. The section begins with the omniscient narrator joyously stating, "Oh what a time it is when summer come to the city and all them girls throw away heavy winter coat" (101). The focus in these pages shifts through images such as Moses bringing a hysterical woman to his apartment, to Galahad and Moses in Hyde Park looking for women to pick up, to the boys partaking in the city nightlife, or the weather. While this textual tribute to the black urban experience has moments of comedy, and overall seems to celebrate the freedom of the London summer for the West Indians, the section also points to something darker. The black figures in this section become the "erotic" other as the narrator describes the summer where it is customary for black men and white women to meet in the parks for potential romantic interludes: "what a gambol does go on in the park on them summer nights oh sometimes the girls wishing it would get dark quickly and you have them parading all down the Bayswater" (104). The tribute to the London summer in these pages is an ambivalent proclamation of both the shame and glory attached to the black urban experience. There is a sadness too that carries over these pages, particularly in the fleeting moments with Moses, for it appears Moses recognizes something degrading in becoming the eroticized "other." Galahad soaks up the experiences of the London summer like a sponge, reveling in its amusement, while Moses is far more ambivalent. As Selvon writes, "[E]verybody hustling that is life that is London oh lord Galahad say when the

sweetness of summer get in him he say he would never leave the old Brit'n as long as he live and Moses sign a long sigh like a man who live life [...] and who frighten as the years go by wondering what it is all about" (110). Moses appears wary of this association, and the attention it brings him during the summer, and expresses a desire in the end of the narrative to hold out against the tides of life that threaten to devastate him in London. The narrative perspective then takes readers back to Moses and that same ambivalence he retains since readers first met him the novel.

George Simmel argues that to protect oneself from the shifting, changing, and overwhelming dynamics of metropolitan life, the individual can adopt certain survival mechanisms, such as a very rational, distant attitude, to protect himself/ herself from the city's protean nature. This can lead to the blasé attitude: an apathetic response to one's surroundings and the people moving through them. The blasé attitude is then an adaptive phenomenon where "the nerves reveal their final possibility of adjusting themselves to their final possibility of adjusting themselves to the content and the form of metropolitan life by renouncing the response to them" (14). The individual is rendered unable to react to new stimuli appropriately, and therefore will establish a distance to, or remain entirely indifferent to, his/her urban surroundings and its activities. Individuals in cities also take on another protective measure against the dynamic nature of city life: a reluctance to facilitate any new relationships or be associated with a particular group or community (15). Curiously, Moses arguably takes on such defenses; for example he seeks to distance himself from his fellow West Indians, which readers witness early on as he scatters the boys who seek his help to areas far away from him in Bayswater (25). In addition, Galahad's response to London, his curiosity and desire to know the city, reminds Moses too of his former self as he remarks, "[I]n you I see myself, how I was when I was new to

London” (*Lonely* 85), suggesting that Moses has been unable, or unwilling, to react differently towards the city for a long time. It is Galahad’s admiration of London that seems to slowly dismantle Moses reserve towards new experiences in London.

The final episode of the narrative is arguably the moment of transcendence and consciousness for Moses. Moses looks over the banks of the Thames and considers how 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” (141). While the final passages of the novel are rather sorrowful, there is a declaration of desire for a future manifesting through the language. As Nick Bentley illustrates, “Selvon’s use of stream of consciousness [...] is not primarily to indicate an individual’s alienated experience of the modern metropolis but to show its applicability for the political representation of black individuals as a collective experience” (72). Moses’s final words signal to the process of urban creolization, where much is still being worked out, but there is nonetheless a process taking place in London that Moses is giving voice to through his own moment of consciousness: “[I]t 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 though he ain’t getting no happiness out of the cogitations he still pondering, for is the first time he ever find himself thinking like that” (142). Considering Simmel, Moses’s distance and indifference to new experiences in the city is now shifting and giving way to a new sense of self and experience, as Moses himself states it is the first time he ever found himself thinking “like that.” It is a moment where the metropolitan consciousness takes ahold of Moses, and while its meaning remains ambiguous, it is a moment of freedom where he experiences a new way of thinking and a desire to give expression to that experience

through creation: to “write” (142). This moment carries over into *Moses Ascending* where Moses attempts to write his memoirs.

In *Moses Ascending*, Moses still desires to transcend the bonds of his racial status and cultural obligations in order to pursue the life of the intellectual through his memoirs. As he writes, “You just cannot live your own life and do the things you want to do. I didn’t have anything to do with black power, nor white power, nor any fucking power but my own” (14). His desire to transcend racial affiliations and cultivate his intellectual ambitions illustrates Simmel’s point that the city could be a locus for freedom as he writes, [W]e follow the laws of our of our inner nature – and this is what freedom is [...] it is our irreplaceability by others which shows that our mode of existence if not imposed upon us from the outside” (17). Moses feels that he has no obligation to the Black Power movement as a means to claim is right to belong in London. As he declares, “I have weathered many a storm in Brit’n, and men will tell you that in my own way I am as much part of the London landscape as little Eros with his bow and arrow in Piccadilly” (44). Galahad sees his attitude though as ignorant for Galahad advocates the position that for the black Briton to be an individual in London, the black community of the city has to unite together first in order to pave the way for such a future (41-43). Both Galahad and Moses, in their individual attempts to remake themselves, reveal that transcending boundaries, prejudice, and racial associations, is as much of a process to be worked through as is London’s own transnational position.

In *Moses Ascending*, Black Britons are more forcefully claiming their place in London through the Black Power movement, which not only includes first-generation Black Britons such as Galahad, but the children of immigrants, such as Brenda. The Black Power movement is characterized in Selvon’s novel as a “right to the city [...] the call of or recently developed

centralities” (Lefebvre 374). It is the assertion of the black British urban consciousness. For Moses though, his right to the city is demonstrated through his attempt to break with his own self-consciousness in order to assert the voice of the urban creole and its place in the city through words. For example, Moses, acting as the first-person narrator, goes into a reverie on the significance of the black laborer in London. He reflects,

The alarms of the black people in Brit’n are timed to ring before the rest of the population. It is their destiny to be up and about at the crack o’ dawn [...] He does not know how privileged he is to be in charge of the city whilst the rest of Brit’n is still abed. He strides the streets [...] He is the first passenger of the day. He is the harbinger who will put the kettle on to boil. He holds the keys to the city, and he will unlock the doors and tidy the papers on the desk, flush the loo, straighten the chairs... (6)

This is the unseen Black London that he desires to give voice to now being an aspiring writer with his very own home in London. However, Selvon appears to be somewhat ambivalent towards Moses’s self-proclaimed authority of the black immigrant narrative, considering that Selvon characterizes Moses as constantly struggling with his memoirs. Moses appears to forget the range of experiences and roles the black individual can have in London. For example, Moses, during a Black Power gathering remarks, “[T]his is quite a riff-raff lot. Couldn’t you of asked Lamming and Salkey and some of their English contemporaries (120). By creating this distance between “black” and “intellectual,” Moses works against Simmel’s vision of freedom where “our mode of existence is not imposed” by outside forces. To suggest, whether unconsciously and consciously, these are two exclusive categories is to limit the scope of black modernity by reinforcing negative stereotypes and associations with black culture. Perhaps Moses’s attitude is

why Selvon comically puts Moses back in the basement at the end of the novel, demonstrating much still needs to be work through.

Samuel Selvon's novels reveal that freedom from history, tradition, and prejudice through the urban is an ongoing process as Black British urban modernity brings both opportunities and insecurities. Both *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending* argue though that London's very existence made it clear other ways of life were possible for West Indians and other transnational communities. Simmel notes in "The Metropolis and Mental Life" that in the metropolis "it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man reflect itself in his emotional life only as a pleasant experience" (16). London means for the West Indian such unpleasantness and struggle, but it also means, through this struggle, something new. If the city can provide such transcendence as Simmel argues, then the demands black British literature pushes on London are justified.

CONCLUSION

“Bona Fide Londoners”: The Case for a Black British London

The sights we see and the sounds we hear now have none of the quality of the past; nor have we any share in the security of the person who, six months ago, stood precisely where we stand now. His is the happiness of death; ours the insecurity of life. He has no future; the future is even now invading our peace. It is only when we look at the past and take from it the element of uncertainty that we can enjoy perfect peace. As it is, we must turn, we must cross the Strand again, we must find a shop where, even at this house, they will be ready to sell us a pencil.
Virginia Woolf, “Street Haunting”

Black London stands isolated and marginal to the mainstream of British society. Ironically, Black London is itself fragmented and scattered through the city, these patches of the Caribbean separated from each other by space and by point of origin of its émigrés, but united by a common situation.
Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Black London”

In 1957, Samuel Selvon published a series of short stories in a collection entitled *Ways of Sunlight*. The stories are divided by setting: Trinidad and London. The final story, “My Girl and the City,” is both a celebration of a love affair and of London itself. It centers on the narrator, a writer, reflecting on his inability to capture on paper the city around him. The story begins with the narrator’s lament over the many times he has tried to write about London, and then transitions, using stream of consciousness, into a series of descriptions on the noises, sounds, and protean energies that attend London life,

Hurling in the underground from station to station, mind the doors, missed it!, there is no substitute for wool: waiting for a bus in Piccadilly Circus: walking across Waterloo bridge: watching the bed of the Thames when the tide is out – choose one, choose a time, a place, any time or any place, and take off, as is this were interrupted conversation, as if you and I were earnest friends and there is no need for preliminary remark. (169)

The narrator's response to the phenomena of London, its contradictions and immensity, and his inability to rework the existing language of the city into something new is an ongoing theme throughout the story. He then describes various well-known London landmarks such as Waterloo Bridge, Victoria Station, Belsize Park, etc., but their significance to him remains unclear. As the relationship with the woman progresses, however, his reflections become increasingly complex; for example, he weaves together personal memories and associations with various sites and locations in London. When his girl asks him why he loves London, the narrator responds,

Maybe I could have told her because one evening in the summer I was waiting for her, only it wasn't summer at all. Rain had been falling all day, and a haze hung around the bridges across the river and the water was muddy and brown, and there was a kind of wistfulness and sadness about the evening. The way St. Paul's was half hidden in the rain, the motionless trees along the Embankment [...] sometimes a surge of greatness could sweep over you when you see something.

(174)

There is a transition here where the narrator moves from a more objective view of the city to a subjective view, and in doing so, begins to internalize the metropolitan consciousness more forcefully. His subjective perceptions and inner responses to London through the progression of his relationship allows him to begin to imagine how he can express the city as a fundamental way for experiencing life.

In the end, the love affair becomes as much a source of celebration for the narrator as is the city in which the affair takes place. The language of love becomes synonymous with the language of the city. When the narrator remarks near the end that he has been to New York, where he enjoyed walking to its outskirts at night to see the illuminated cityscape, he admits he

never felt the same emotions for New York as he does for London (176). He claims a relationship, a connection, to London, just as he increasingly builds a connection with his girl. The significance of the city becomes infused with this relationship. Shifting from anxiety and fascination to a pride and love for his girl and London, the narrator remarks, “At last I think I know what it is all about [...] Everything that happens is words. But pure expression is nothing. One must build on the things that happen” (176). The narrator realizes the cityscape is the means in which to explore something larger about the everyday. London begins to fuel his imagination. By attributing new significance to the city through his relationship, the imagination of the urban writer is awakened. Selvon explores through his thoughtful study of London how deeply a writer’s talents can be rooted to a place, and the relationships and connections that manifest in that place. In this story though, it is a black urban writer who internalizes the London imagination.

London, like many other cities, has historically been a city expressed and explored through words and other art forms. Nicholas Freeman, in *Conceiving the City*, notes that in the nineteenth century London was becoming less of a “setting” in fiction and more of a character, as demonstrated through a wide range of authors from Charles Dickens to Virginia Woolf (26). During the late nineteenth century, however, how to visualize and explore the city through words had to be reconsidered as London’s industrialization, consumer capitalism, and expansion was modernizing the city, and its culture, in dynamic ways. Jerry White argues in *London: In the Nineteenth Century* that at the end of the nineteenth century London was constantly building and rebuilding for a new century: “the most striking feature of London [...] was its modernity” (477). What followed during this period of rapid modernization and historical transformation were narratives that were particularly attentive to the experience of urban modernity. As Nicholas

Freeman notes, “What was new in the late nineteenth century was a sustained, albeit haphazard interest in developing specialized language of urban life [...] an attempt to articulate a condition of ‘cityness’ that seemed of urgent importance in an era of unprecedented metropolitan expansion” (3). Authors such as Virginia Woolf, Bernard Shaw, and T.S. Eliot were breaking with past authors’ narrative modes of representation through language that would in turn challenge the metropolis as ever being a fixed, knowable entity. Selvon and Lamming were breaking with past modes of representation through language in order to position themselves as active urban participants in the production of difference and newness, or in other words, a more complicated, and cosmopolitan sense of urban modernity.

In “My Girl and the City,” there is a voice that wishes to give representation to the urban experience, but is one that is typically marginalized in the historical record for being black, which readers only learn through the language as the narrator speaks mostly in Standard English with slight overtones of a creolized West Indian dialect. Henry Louis Gates, in “Black London,” argues that “because of its sense of isolation and powerlessness, Black London defines itself through its own instruments. Language, along with music, is the obvious example” (308). Therefore, to close the gap between what is seen and unseen, or lived experience in other words, Selvon and Lamming turn to language to explore urban creolization and the potential for a more transnational London through the lens of a black London. Stories such as Selvon’s “My Girl and the City,” by invoking as Grant terms the “West Indian Standard,” harness a bold image of an urbanized black citizen now very much imbedded in the urban experience, and who seeks to give meaning to the “newness” of it, which perhaps is arguably the goal of black British urban literature. Both Samuel Selvon and George Lamming use language, similarly to other modernists, to give shape and meaning to the urban experience, but their textual use of urban

creole speech and Standard English tactfully reshape prior actualizations of the center-periphery dialectic by bringing them into contact with the potentialities of a new cultural context in the urban environment: the periphery-center. This demonstrates the power of literary art to alter personal and cultural situations by reviving earlier modes of thought and being, such as creolization, in new ways that might contribute to a change of mind in the present. Additionally, The urban poetics of Selvon and Lamming arguably can be a means in which to explore the narratives of second and third generation Black British writers such as Zadie Smith, Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali, and many others, but that is a topic for further investigation.

¹ Transmission for *Caribbean Voices*. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. It should be noted here that this citation for the archival documents from the Samuel Selvon Special Collection of the Alma Jordan Library is the preferred citation designated by the research library and the University of the West Indies.

² Transmission for *Caribbean Voices*. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

³ In Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, he invokes "black" as a political term to refer to "'people of color,' people with an African, African Caribbean, or South Asian background" (8).

⁴ Transmission for *Caribbean Voices*. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

⁵ Transmission for *Caribbean Voices*. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

⁶ See Sheila Patterson's *Dark Strangers*. Indiana University Press, 1963. Print.

⁷ From White's *London in the Twentieth Century*.

⁸ See Stuart Hall's "The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual II." *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing about Black Britain*. Ed. Onyekachi Wambu. London: Phoenix, 1999. 86-90. Print.

⁹ Marilyn Geofroy is the author of the official guide to the Samuel Selvon Special Collection (1994/5). Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁰ Personal letter. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection, The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹¹ Personal letter. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection, The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹²Stuart Hall initially defines “culture” broadly as “systems of shared meanings which people who belong to the same community, group, or nation to help them interpret and make sense of the world” (“New cultures for old” 176).

¹³Document not dated. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁴ Personal letters. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁵ Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁶ See Jerry White’s *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and its People*. Vintage, 2008. Print.

¹⁷ “The Spades dig in.” Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁸ Personal letter. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁹ See Stuart Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003. 233-246. Print.

²⁰ From White’s *London in the Twentieth Century*.

²¹ Susan Stanford Friedman emphasizes in her “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism,” that modernism, given its ambiguity, remains largely a difficult term to define.

²² Article. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

²³ Article. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

²⁴ Article. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

²⁵ From Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities*.

²⁶ From White's *London in the Twentieth Century*.

²⁷ Doreen Massey defines space broadly and respectively as follows: “[T]he product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny [...] we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity [...] if space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality [...] we recognise space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as simultaneity of stories-so-far” (*For Space* 9).

²⁸ A culturally contested term for someone from Barbados.

²⁹ See Raymond Williams's “The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism.”

³⁰ Personal letter. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

³¹ Personal letter. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library.
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

³² Personal letters. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library.
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³⁴ Personal letter. Courtesy: The Samuel Selvon Special Collection. The Alma Jordan Library.
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³⁵ “Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech.” *The Telegraph*. 6 November 2007. Web. 1
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