Confining Country, Confining City:  
*Real and Imaginary Places in the Work of Sam Selvon*

by

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An Abstract of Thesis  
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ABSTRACT

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Throughout the history of the Caribbean there has been a hegemonic divide between colonized and colonizer. The colonizer exerts power over its subjects by controlling history, often through literature. Colonized subjects were not taught their own histories; they did not have their own literature to represent them. Samuel Dickson Selvon was born in Trinidad while the country was still under British rule and, with his writing, gave a voice to the descendants of indentured servants and slaves alike; a voice that, at the time of his writing, was represented far too infrequently. Selvon captures the worlds that he lived in – both the colony and metropole – with documentary-like accuracy; as such, place becomes a measuring tool that I believe can be used to further the study of the post-colonial relationship between colonized and colonizer.

By looking at Selvon’s work through the ideas of cultural critic Raymond Williams, specifically his The Country and the City, parallels and comparisons can be drawn between the country and the city that uncover many facts about modern culture. All of Selvon’s works take place either primarily in Trinidad or primarily in London. I am interested in the way that Selvon operated when writing about Trinidad and London: specifically, when writing stories set mainly in Trinidad how does Selvon represent his home country and how does he signify London? Conversely, when writing about characters living in London, how does Selvon represent the metropole and how does he signify the Caribbean? A disconnect exists between these two places in Selvon’s life. I believe that Selvon recognized the cultural rift between these places and wrote to close the gap.
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Introduction

“Is it true,” she said, “that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.”

“Well,” I answered annoyed, “that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.”

“But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?”

“And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?”

“More easily,” she said, “much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.”

- Jean Rhys from *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

The above quote from Jean Rhys perfectly encapsulates the idea behind this study. In post-colonial Caribbean literature, an existing disconnect is often articulated between colony and metropole, colonized and colonizer. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette has no real conception of what London is like: the huge buildings and the masses of people in a city make it seem like a “dream”. Conversely, although he’s seen a Caribbean island with his own eyes, Rochester feels that the island has an “unreal” quality about it: the rural and tropical world away from the city seems like a mesmerizing landscape, known only for its natural beauty. When looking at the other from afar, each place takes on an ethereal character and this has very much to do with the relationship between England and the Caribbean; it has to do with their differences and the separation between the two – both the spatial and the hegemonic separation. These ideas can also be used to explore identity themes that exist in the work of other Caribbean texts, including those of Trinidadian-born writer Samuel Selvon.
All of Selvon’s works take place either primarily in Trinidad or primarily in London. I have split this study into two parts: part one will cover the novels that take place in the Caribbean, and part two will cover the novels that take place in London. Selvon was born in Trinidad in 1923 while the country was still under British rule. The dream for many in Trinidad was to leave the Caribbean for London in search for, what they considered, a better life. To consider the relationship between these two places, it is paramount to understand the impact that colonialism had on the Caribbean. Colonization created a new multicultural world. Regarding his upbringing in Trinidad, Sushiel Na has pointed out that Selvon, “grew up in a culturally and racially mixed world” (Nasta 3). His father was East Indian and his mother was half East Indian and half Scottish. He grew up in a village with a cross-section of cultures around him. According to his friend Jan Carew, Selvon was “totally creolized in the Trinidadian experience” (Birbalsingh 53). Aisha Khan points out that the term “creole” was used during census times to indicate, on forms, that a person had mixed parentage – for example an African mother and an Indian father (Khan 10). Stuart Hall has helped to define “creolization” in the sense that Carew uses the word. In Créolité and the Process of Creolization, Hall traces the beginnings of the term from its Spanish usage, through the French use and finds that the modern definition of the term “has quite a different meaning” specifically in Trinidad (Hall Créolité 29). In Trinidad, the term “signals the difference between those of ‘Indian’ and ‘African’ descent” (Hall Créolité 29). However, this term is not just used to mark the difference; Hall continues to explain that creolization is also the hybridization that occurs in language and culture when these different histories intertwine. Khan further adds that the term creole can indicate, “newness: emergent cultural, racial, social forms” (Khan 7). When mixed these different cultures form something new. The original definition that Khan gives was much more literal, but Selvon uses the term in a
broader way similar to Hall’s definition. For instance one of his characters, Tiger, in *A Brighter Sun*, often refers to himself as creolized based upon his living among the Afro-Caribbean population even though he is of a full East Indian heritage.

Since Trinidad was an English colony for more than 150 years, England must be added to the cultures discussed above; creolization, in the case of Trinidad, occurred when the subordinated Indian, Chinese and African cultures were forced to accept the dominating English culture. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha shows that England is not always a place that shines light favorably upon its colonies. The colonies were of a fringe interest at best, their culture and literature marginalized. Bhabha argues that, “the Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative internal to its national identity” (Bhabha 9). Colonization happened and history was forever changed, and the canonization of literature is something that has been slowly shifting since writers like Selvon began to capture realistic depictions of the Empire’s other.

These stories and the cultures within are part of English history. England colonized and subsequently became the center of knowledge, culture and power. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson explains that there is a hegemonic structure to colonial thought; he writes, “colonial racism was a major element in that conception of ‘empire’ which attempted to weld dynastic legitimacy and national community” (Anderson 154). In this structure “English Lords” were superior to “other Englishmen” who were held to a higher standard than “subjected natives” living in colonies (Anderson 154). In Selvon’s work, there is a constant influence coming from the colonizer; the characters look at England as an unseen god-like leader with authority that “was made possible by the overwhelming power that high capitalism had given the metropole” (Anderson 155). The metropole is the center of the colonial universe, the place where the leaders
reside, and the place where the money is. And, in the case of Trinidad and Selvon, England and London can be used interchangeably as the center or capital of the colonial world. Even after more and more freedoms were gained, the hegemonic structure remained throughout Selvon’s life in Trinidad.

Like most histories of colonial settlement west of Europe, the story of modern Trinidad started in 1492 with Christopher Columbus’ mistake of believing, when spying the Bahamas, that he had reached his goal of finding a western passage to Asia. As is known now, Columbus was in the Caribbean. His arrival brought disease, the end of entire civilizations, slavery and a modern history fraught with violence and greed — but born from this was also a rich multicultural tradition with roots from all over the world. A most complete history of Trinidad – up to the time of its initial publication in 1942 – can be found in Eric Williams’ *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*. Williams acknowledges important work by historians and anthropologists that helped to fuel his research; the difference with his work, however, is opposed to many of those researching Trinidad, Williams has a personal attachment because he was born there. Williams was not only, according to Syndey Mintz, a “brilliant Trinidadian historian” (Mintz 168), but he is arguably the most important leader in Trinidad’s history. To support this claim, look no further than the fact that Williams led the country to its independence from England in 1962 – England had ruled from afar with the Crown Colony system\(^1\) since they successfully took Trinidad from Spain in 1797 – and stayed in power until his death in 1981.

Through history, London rules Trinidad from Europe: government, money, education and laws

\(^1\) Though the specific shape and power of the Crown Colony shift through history, the basic idea is that, “Each island had a governor who appointed a council with limited power,” (Rogoziński 193). The limited power refers to a system of governing from the metropole. In Trinidad, for instance, there were local leaders in place that acted as leaders, but they could not, “contradict British laws,” (Rogoziński 193). Government and law came ultimately from the metropole.
all come from the metropole. Williams – like Selvon – is very keen on making plain the continuing relationship between London and Trinidad.

When reading Williams’ History, the land and nature as part of history is a recurring theme. In fact, starting his account of the Carib and Arawak tribes that populated the islands before colonialism, Williams points out that both groups were, “essentially agricultural” civilizations; he focuses on their work with the “cassava” and notes that they were able to “cultivate cotton” early on (Williams History 1-2). He tells a history of a rich and fertile land, which is why Spain, and then England were both so keen on settling Trinidad. Interestingly, the first chapter of History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago is called, “Our Amerindian Ancestors” (Williams History 1). Both the Amerindian and Africans were forced into slavery – working the land, cultivating crops like cocoa, cotton and, of course, sugar cane – by the technologically advanced European countries, thus birthing relatedness between the two cultures. Considering Bhabha’s thoughts on cultural hybridity, it is also important to note that Stuart Hall has carefully pointed out that working in a post-colonial context in itself can be problematic: he warns that, if not cautious, post-colonialism “collapses different histories, temporalities and racial formations into the same universalizing category” (Hall Post-colonial 243). Williams says, “our” ancestors and this can be taken as a kind of kinship – not necessarily a blood relationship, but a historical kinship – that is exemplified in Selvon’s work. With Williams’ historical writing – and with Selvon’s fiction – each cultural story is given patience and time to develop. These cultures are hybrids, but there is still a strong and proud sense of difference from each other and from the colonizer.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the population of Trinidad grew steadily. During this time the slave trade was thriving and, although more and more Europeans moved to
Trinidad, the African population dwarfed the white population. Once slavery was abolished each colony needed to sustain itself, including Trinidad. Certainly, the fact that “crops grown by slaves formed the only export” was a huge issue (Rogoziński 181). Jan Rogoziński writes that “The British West Indies were totally unprepared for slave emancipation….Island governments furnished few public services, since masters provided their slaves with what passed for justice, education, and medical care” (Rogoziński 187). There were suddenly tens of thousands of freed slaves with no money, no work and no way to obtain either. There was no infrastructure in Trinidad to support a freed public and with no one working the cane fields, “incomes were falling rapidly” because much of the ex-slave population, “had abandoned the plantation for free villages” (Rogoziński 187-189). After the decimation of the Amerindian population and the abolition of slavery, there was not enough labor willing to work the land and from here, the cultural difference of Trinidad continued to grow.

In 1848, these labor issues had Trinidadian governor Lord Harris on high alert, and the Crown Colony called for immigration from Asia as a possible rectification for the lack of labor. In fact, “the British Government went its way and permitted Trinidad not only to recruit immigrants from India, but to do so at a public expense” (Williams History 99); around 8,000 Chinese immigrated to Trinidad before 1893 (Rogoziński 192) and more than 145,000 Indians between 1838 and 1917 (Williams Columbus 348). Britain was able to make this happen because the English already had a strong presence in India dating back to early incarnations of the East India Company.

The East India Company helped Britain to form communities within India, which culminated in control of entire provinces. When Charles Cornwallis took over as Governor-General of Bengal in the late 18th century, according to Ron Ramdin, he began a long history of
“imposing British standards upon India, to the further detriment of native Indians,” most specifically, “the landless, dispossessed peasants and the poor (Ramdin 26). There was already a plantation system in place when it came time to sell the idea of moving to the West Indies for “high wages and a better way of life” to Indian workers (Ramdin 52). Many of those first to leave India were “illiterate” and “destitute,” which is why they were willing to cross the Kala Pani\(^2\) regardless of “caste defilement,” the British deemed their labor, “as vital to national progress” (Ramdin 52). It was a treacherous and long journey by boat, but the Caribbean seemed as though it could be a step up from the squalor and famine many were enduring while in India.

Unlike the Africans, the Asian men and women were not forced to move per se, but in hopes of saving their families from famine, they signed contracts and headed west; they often ended up living in similar or worse conditions than in India and were legally punished if they attempted to renege on their agreements. They would serve their time in indentured servitude making up a group of people that can be considered, “the last victim in the historical sense of the sugar plantation economy” (Williams, *History* 121). Once contracts were up, some were allowed to head back east, but the vast majority stayed – generations would be raised in a country that was not created for the people that were living there.

Like many other colonies, Trinidad was simply a satellite factory to England’s corporate headquarters, so there was not very much thought put into cultivating culture. A large portion of Chapter One of this study will be an argument to consider Trinidad as an English countryside and it is important here to draw a comparison to what was happening in England to the lower

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\(^2\) Kala Pani refers to the taboo of crossing water and leaving India. Kala Pani, according to Aisha Khan, “figured in Hinduism’s ideology of purity and its preservation through avoidance of travel too far afield from one’s place of belonging” (Khan 123). It was believed that by leaving India one would lose their connectedness to the land, preventing certain rituals from being done correctly, and cutting the perpetrator off from reincarnation.
classes during slavery and the post-slavery era, through the Industrial Revolution. Ramdin writes that, “In Britain, industrial workers also suffered the inhuman treatment of their employers, who, in many cases, were members of the same class that drove slaves to the limits of profitability” (Ramdin 28). This brings forth the reality that capitalism is what drives much of this history. Of course race plays a large role, but the hegemonic structure of England allowed the higher classes to use lower classes – be they white, Indian or African, in England or the Caribbean – with less political and economic power to do the difficult work in the factories and fields alike.

The Crown Colony system was created to maintain a work force that had no real rights, so in the middle to late nineteenth century there was little attention paid to the education of colonial children. Eric Williams argues that the education that colonials received was sub par. For instance, he found that “The Queen’s Collegiate School was formally inaugurated in 1859” and over the first 10 years of its existence, 206 pupils were accepted into the school; none were black or Indian (Williams History 203). In 1869, Patrick Keenan openly criticized the education system and some changes were made, but there were still issues leading into the twentieth century. In Selvon’s I Hear Thunder Randolph’s mother, Mrs. Belling, feels her son was ruined and would have been a better person had she sent him “to England to be educated” (Selvon Thunder 92). This part of the story takes place in the 1950s, but Selvon still sees education as enough of an issue to write about it. Mrs. Belling is a rich white woman, who understands traditional “English values” and is representative of the problem. There was no proper education available in Trinidad. The education that Randolph received as a white child was sub par, but it was an English education nonetheless, so for him, he was learning his own history. But what about those born in Trinidad?
In Decolonizing the Mind, Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o was especially critical of the education of colonial children. Wa Thiong’o lambasted the Crown Colony, calling it a “dominating” system that changed education to a “cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience” (wa Thiong’o 1135). As children, the colonials were forced to think outside of his or her culture because the, “language of the books he read was foreign” (wa Thiong’o 1135). In Selvon’s novel The Housing Lark, some characters visit Hampton Court Palace and discuss history: during the conversation, they confuse Robin Hood with a real person, and cite films as sources. Battersby says, “I must say you boys surprise me with your historical knowledge. It’s a bit mixed up, I think, but it’s English History”; to that, one of the other fellows replies, “We don’t know any other kind. That’s all they used to teach we in school” (Selvon Lark 125). In Trinidad, V.S. Naipaul had a similar experience to wa Thiong’o; Naipaul relates how he read Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea and barely cared, barely remembered it – the novel was not representative of the life or people that he knew. This strange English teaching and “mangled bits of old India” had created him; there was no literature from his people and what was given to kids in school “ruled us in every way” (Naipaul 10-15). Although Selvon is a bit older than Naipaul, they were in school around the same time. Naipaul complained that there was no local history being taught and that “slavery was only a word” (Naipaul 33). For Naipaul, there was no cultural thought put behind teaching in Trinidad; the governance of the Crown Colony was worried about keeping the lower classes, and classes of color at bay and a true, realistic education was not available to them.

This world is well represented in Selvon’s fiction: he does not just write about East Indians, he writes about the people of African and Chinese descent as well; peasants and the middle class alike; people toiling in the Trinidadian countryside and people traversing the
blacktops of London. By writing about how these cultures mingle Selvon creates a document, as Homi Bhabha puts it, “based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity” (Bhabha 56). Selvon writes about the point where these cultures not only clash, but also where they meet and how this merging affects the life of his characters. In *Turn Tiger Turn* the East Indian Tiger says to his black friend Joe, “I creolize just like you” (Selvon *Turn* 156) – Tiger is the essence of a hybrid, he lives a similar life in the same world as the people around him; his closest friends are Joe and a Chinese shopkeeper called Tall Boy. It is important to note the distinction between the cultures that are combining, all attempting to navigate the modern world while forming a new hybrid identity, just as it is important to discuss the impact of place on these cultures mentioned above.

Children in Trinidad were being raised with English ideals and English culture was instilled. Selvon’s characters grow up with a certain reverence for England; the place has this otherworldly feeling that is similar to what Jean Rhys captures in the quote from *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As mentioned earlier, England relinquished control in 1962, but when Selvon was writing, at least the first four of his novels, Trinidad was still an English colony. And even in the novels that take place post-independence there is a palpable push and pull between Trinidad and London – the time spent as an English colony has created, and changed, Trinidadian history. In a discussion placing Selvon in his Trinidadian context, Frank Birbalsingh said that, “West Indians have traditionally regarded emigration as a solution to their social and economic problems” (Birbalsingh 49); for emigrants from the West Indies, London was, “a place in which all their worries about poor finances and burdensome in-laws would soon cease” (Sandhu 132). London seemed like an answer to cure life’s woes; England did not hold just a literal governing control, there also existed a figurative grasp on the minds of the people: “people seemed to believe that
going there was the answer to all their problems” (Selvon Thunder 89). London seemed like a place where one could lead a good life and live in modernity with money and ease. And more than that, London and the English people can be considered models that existed on a plane to which Trinidadians were taught to aspire.

I am interested in the way that Selvon operated when writing about Trinidad and London: specifically, when writing stories set mainly in Trinidad how does Selvon represent his home country and how does he signify London? Conversely, when writing about characters living in London, how does Selvon represent the metropole and how does he signify the Caribbean? As a benchmark for consideration of urban versus rural life, I will rely heavily on Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams’ 1973 study The Country and the City. Williams was a voice for the lower classes and this text in particular draws a comparison between places in which the country is often subordinated and forced to work at the cities behest; Selvon writes about the lower classes in the country and in the city, and in each novel there is hegemony of classes at work. Williams talks specifically about the English countryside, but his ideas can be applied to England’s colonial holdings as well. The country for my purposes here will be rural Trinidad, and the city, London. In Selvon’s work, London is seen as the location where life can change for the better. London is the ultimate goal for many characters. Raymond Williams writes about how the city in England is a place of “Possibility, of meeting and of movement” (Williams Country 4). London in specific is a European institution, a place of power, commerce, art, culture and seemingly endless opportunity. Williams writes about how the country is controlled by the city and in the case of Trinidad, England is the epitome of an “Absentee landlord” that is “increasing wealth, but distributing it unevenly” (Williams Country 82). This reinforces the assertion of London, England as the metropole to Trinidad. Selvon recognized the cultural rift between these
places and wrote to close the gap; he gave the voiceless a voice and while doing so gives us texts
of times, people and places in flux.
Chapter One: The Colonial Periphery

This chapter will focus on Sam Selvon’s literary ancestors; living in the shadows of the metropole and creating realistic depictions of life in Trinidad are two major characteristics of Selvon’s work and understanding how he fits within these contexts helps to understand Selvon’s broader themes. Gillian Whitlock writes that the early barrack-yard literature of Trinidian C.L.R. James combines the “social realism of the European tradition with the comic Satire of the folk tradition” (Whitlock 45). This description can easily be used to define the early work of Samuel Selvon as well. Selvon uses a documentarian approach to storytelling while combining drama, comedy and local settings. To lay a foundation, I will begin in the countryside of the Caribbean where there is a strong literary history of writing landscape to give the Caribbean its own feel, and then move to the barrack-yards where a Trinadian realism is born.

In the Country and the City, Raymond Williams writes about rural simplicity in England, how people work the land for generations and form a connection to it. I argue that a similar feeling is evoked in Selvon’s work and that this correlation makes his Trinidad, in many ways, an extension of the English countryside: dreams abound of moving to the big city – in this case, London. The English and Caribbean countrysides are both known for farming and agriculture and in Selvon’s texts, sugar cane workers and farmers are prominent; many characters farm their own land to survive – whether for their own food, or to sell at markets for a profit. With that, it is also important to consider the disparity between the Caribbean and England as it is from difference and the need to create a sense of home that Trinadian literature is ultimately born.

In The Country and the City, Raymond Williams traces the history of writing about place through English literature; he writes about the ideology of both the city and the country through time, and though he doesn’t write about Trinidad, by taking some of his ideas and applying them...
to Selvon’s work, new ground can be visited and theorized upon. Re-application of theory is not without precedent. Take for instance Stuart Hall’s application of Antonio Gramsci’s thoughts. Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* were written about fascist Italy in the 1920s, but can be "delicately dis-interred from their concrete and specific historical embeddedness and transplanted to new soil with considerable care and patience" (Hall, *Gramsci* 413). Hall is speaking about the usefulness of Gramsci’s ideas when applied to post-colonial studies, which seems a far more difficult task than “dis-interring” Raymond Williams’ ideas that are already politically in line with Caribbean ideas. Williams writes against the capitalist empire in an attempt to give lower classes a voice.

Williams’ relevance not only lies in his ideas, but also in his past. Michael Gikandi writes that “Williams’s intellectual journey from the border country of Wales to the metropolitan center mirrors the experiences of postcolonial intellectuals moving from the colonial periphery to the heart of empire” (Gikandi *Maps* 42). Williams was born in Wales and was raised with British values in the countryside; he – similar to Caribbean writers such as Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, Sam Selvon and George Lamming – would have to leave the outskirts of the colonial empire and move to the city to find education, write, and publish work. The Caribbean writers have more in common with each other than with Williams when considering their shared diasporic experiences, but Williams attacks empire from a similar angle: in *The Country and the City* he writes that “the great majority of the poor and oppressed were without a connecting voice to make clear the recognition which was their daily experience” (Williams *Country* 83). The people living in the English countryside were unrealistically represented in literature and through much of history so “local observation grew to a general historical outline, and then to a myth” (Williams *Country* 83). This is very similar to West Indian history: the idea that entire cultures
were stereotyped, caricatured and subsequently looked at as “the other” held firm for quite some time, until early Caribbean writers like McKay and James were able to publish their early works that wrote against the notion of empire. They were able to show their similarities to the British – they were British citizens – and also to explain the differences at length.

The most marked difference between the countryside of England and that of the Caribbean is the history of enslavement and displacement. Stuart Hall wrote that due to the “abrupt rupture of colonization” the growth of colonial cultures “had to be decisively different from how these cultures would have developed” (Hall Post-Colonial 251). Being uprooted caused different cultural trajectories — identities splintered and changed. As mentioned in the introduction, for instance, Indians, Africans, Americans, Amerindians, Chinese and English coalesce in Selvon’s work to create a modern Trinidadian culture. In his essay Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation, Hall discusses all of the different “hidden histories” that form to create the modern Caribbean and with that a culture’s fiction can help to “construct those points of identification, those positionalities we call ‘a cultural identity’” (Hall Cultural Identity 705-714). Just like the influence of the displaced cultures on each other, the English influence on Caribbean culture as a whole is palpable.

Trinidadians were raised as British citizens following British rule, taught by the Crown Colony’s education system. In a recent BBC 4 Radio documentary about Trinidadian calypso singer Lord Kitchener, fellow Trinidadian Art Joseph was interviewed and said to go to England in the late 1940s was “just easy” (Kitch!). He continued by saying, “We are British. We’re born British. We had British passports” (Kitch!). Educated in an English manner, growing up speaking English, and having British citizenship, Trinidadians viewed themselves as British subjects — which would then make the Trinidad that Selvon knew, in a sense, a British state. Raymond
Williams explains that in the relationship between the country and the city the latter provides “political authority, law and trade” (Williams *Country* 51). He is talking about London in relation to a “proper” British countryside here, but in the case of Trinidad, “political authority, law and trade” were all under the ultimate authorial control of England. Williams continues that, “in the course of foreign conquest and trade, there is a new basis for the contrast between one ‘order’ and another . . . there is what can be seen as a factual exploitation of the country as a whole by the city as a whole” (Williams *Country* 51). That is, just as British cities exert power over the British countryside, Britain is exerting power and exploiting its foreign holdings in the same way. The British sugar enterprises, then, are not dissimilar to farming in the English countryside.

In studying Thomas Gray’s pastoral poetry, Terry Gifford writes that, “One can see why pastorals . . . were used for the education of the masses in anthologies of poetry for the classrooms of the British Empire”; pastoral poetry was used to warn, “colonial subjects . . . against a radical disturbance of the social order” (Gifford 52). Although in the Caribbean there is no winter to contrast the sentiment aroused during the English warm seasons, in works like Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom* there is a “sense of a simple community, living on narrow margins and experiencing the delights of summer and fertility” (Williams *Country* 15). Williams is discussing the countryside in Britain, but McKay’s novel suggests the same kind of nostalgia. McKay is applicable and fits into a lineage of Caribbean writers; he is from Jamaica, which, like Trinidad, was an English colony for much of modern history. The literature, as mentioned in the introduction, that was taught to colonial children was British and it is not far fetched to think that landscape writers like Richard Jefferies were read by colonial students; if not Jefferies, writers of a similar ilk. In *Banana Bottom*, McKay writes,
The spreading bower-like trees grew everywhere. Thick together in groves down by the riverside in fat wormy soil, or singly upon barren hill tops, in gardens or tilled fields, among yams and cassava, pineapple and ginger and along the roadside. Mangos of many kinds: the common, the number eleven and the delicious-tinted-and-tasting kidney mango. (McKay 87)

In *Wild Life in a Southern Country*, Richard Jefferies writes,

Dusky Blenheim oranges, with a gleam of gold under the rind; a warmer tint of yellow on the pippins. Here streaks of red, here a tawny hue. Yonder a load of great russets; near by heavy pears bending the strong branches; round black damsons; luscious egg-plums hanging their yellow ovals overhead; bullace, not yet ripe, but presently sweetly piquant. (Jefferies 331)

The trees and their fruits stand out in both passages; though the former is set in Jamaica and the latter in England, both selections give a similar nostalgic feeling for the beauty of nature and the giving tradition of land – the natural, unfarmed land. The difference between the two places is also strong. By writing landscape as such McKay follows literary tradition while creating a realistic depiction of the Caribbean. The vegetation in both places is distinctive and these examples illustrate the difference between Jamaica and the countryside near London; a person from either place would look at the other as fascinatingly unalike. Selvon writes in a similar way, continuing in this tradition:

In the season of the pious, the valley was yellow or mauve from head to toe, except where flaming red immortelle blossoms rose high for sunlight. The people there lived simply and worked hard, tilling the land and rearing a few odd head of livestock. (Selvon *An Island* 70)
Selvon writes about the colors, the trees covering the land, but adds a new dimension to the landscape: the people tilling. Selvon is interested in the way the land affects the people, the way the people affect the land. This will be discussed further in the next chapter, but it is important to note here as it is with the landscape and the realism of the people within the landscape where Selvon really excels. Selvon’s Trinidadian work is where the landscape meets character-based literary realism.

Helen Tiffin writes that “the exile or migrant, ‘landscape’ consists in the formation or (re)formation of connections with the adopted place” (Tiffin Environment 199). For Tiffin, writing about place and land is a tool for solidifying a home, creating a literature and culture. Reinhard W. Sander has compiled an excellent collection of early Trinidadian literature that can be used to gain a grasp of the literary history of Trinidad. The work he used was found originally in two magazines: Trinidad and The Beacon. C.L.R. James, Alfred H. Mendes, Albert Gomes and R.A.C. de Boissiere formed these magazines as a response to the lack of literature that was coming from the West Indies; all of these men were born in Trinidad from all different walks of life and focused on telling local stories.

In 1933, Albert Gomes wrote a review of Banana Bottom and, although Gomes finds the novel has many “obvious shortcomings”; Gomes says that McKay’s portrayal of “life in the West Indies is vivid; at times it is almost idyllic. Mr. McKay’s nostalgia for his native Jamaica lends a charm and simplicity to the book that is, to say the least, refreshing” (Sander Trinidad 35). Just as McKay captures Jamaica, the writers and journalists from the Trinidad and The Beacon placed an onus upon writing about Trinidad, looking to spark a “connection with the adopted place.” According to Reinhard W. Sander,
What the Beacon group advocated was writing which utilized West Indian setting, speech and characters, situations and conflicts. It warned against imitation of foreign popular literature. Local colour, however, was not regarded as a virtue by itself. A mere occupation with the enchanted landscape of the tropics did not fulfill the group’s emphasis on realism and verisimilitude in writing. (Sander From Trinidad 7)

Fed up with the onslaught of English literature and with writers from Trinidad telling stories about white people in Europe and America in an attempt to get published, Gomes saw literature as “a weapon to be used in the revolt against conventional values” (Sander From Trinidad 9). As Helen Tiffin suggests, these writers were creating home through literature – Trinidad and The Beacon were a start in crafting a functional forum for writers to produce a true Trinidadian literature for, and about, the people of the island. This is in direct line with post-colonial thinking: through the centuries, these kinds of marginalized characters were painted as stereotypes, but one glance through the early fiction compiled by Sander gives a clear view of a real place. Gillian Whitlock points out that magazines like these were the opportunity to “begin to shrug off the sense that all criteria of literary value and worth emerged from a European metropolis” (Whitlock 36). The work from these magazines covers a plethora of topics, with many characters; for instance Ernest Carr gave an early exploration in creolized English with his story Black Mother (1931); with his Woman on the Pavement (1931), R.A.C. de Boissere investigates racism among the different cultures colliding in Trinidad; and, in her Clipped Wings, Kathleen Archibald uses weather: when it rains it is quiet outside, but once the sun comes out the Savannah is bustling.
In 1931, Michael J. Deeble wrote *Yacua: A West Indian Romance*, in which he gives a fictional historical romance between a French soldier and a Carib woman. At its core, *Yacua* is a love story, but it is very much about the destruction of indigenous land and culture – a retelling of colonialism. Deeble writes that as they docked, “the French enemies were more or less intact suffering only from some hard falls on the jagged rocks or severe pricks from thorns” (Sander *From Trinidad* 58). To borrow Marlow’s words in *Heart of Darkness* regarding the rough terrain as his ship approached land in Africa, it was “as if nature herself had tried to ward off intruders,” (Conrad 14). Deeble’s story is filled with allusions to the land, and wonderful prose about the untamed island. After the land itself fails to “ward” off the French who “massacre . . . forty or so Caribs,” the remaining natives are “bound by ropes hastily improvised from the Mahoe Plant” (Sander *From Trinidad* 58). The colonizers are now using the land against its rightful inhabitants. Deeble uses the land as metaphor, while also producing a descriptive log of fertility, listing the fauna and foods growing abundant through the land: “Maize, manioc bananas, yams, and sugar-cane were planted; there was also good hunting and fishing” (Sander *From Trinidad* 51). The world in *Yacua* comes alive and serves a function, not just a backdrop; Deeble uses the landscape and environment around his characters to help further the narrative.

Deeble captures the raw beauty of the land as well, while retracing its brutal history. But the majority of the early writing within Sander’s collection is focused on contemporary settings with a strong significance placed on location. Sander noticed that there is, “stress . . . placed on the regional nature of the Caribbean experience” that “takes up the concern for a West Indian Literary tradition often voiced in the pages of the Beacon” (Sander *Awakening*149). Olga Yatof’s *Gasoline Station* takes place exactly where the title suggests, telling the story of one evening in the life of an attendant, George. The story is one of place with George sitting still watching the
world pass by as he cycles between reading his magazine and pumping gas. As each person visits, Yatof introduces myriad of characters: “a middle-class family,” “a limousine full of chaperoned debutantes,” and a “common Englishwoman who fidgeted and argued and an East Indian gentle man who waited with the inscrutable patience of his conquering race” (Sander From Trinidad 73-74). These people were “off to the country” or returning from, or heading to the city for a night out; loads of people filling their cars with gasoline, when all mingled “looked as if a chattering and disheveled company of peacocks and macaws had been spilled upon its pavements” (Sander From Trinidad 75). Yatoff shows the multicultural population of Trinidad and uses the location to dictate the balance of the environment and the modern world using nature’s own black gold as a mediator.

C.L.R. James’ 1929 story Triumph came before any of the aforementioned works and, perhaps, set the stage for what followed it. Triumph is a barrack-yard tale; Sander explains, “Barrack-yard literature . . . is rooted in a particular physical, social and economic environment” (Sander From Trinidad 12). James went to the barrack-yards himself to observe and meet people, looking to capture a realistic slice of life. Gillian Whitlock views the barrack-yard as a “frontier”: this was a location full of people that have not been aptly represented in any sense, especially in fiction (Whitlock 43). James tells the story of three women that live in the same barrack-yard; it’s a place that is tightly wound, where everyone knows everyone else’s business: if there is personal news floating about, “street boys knew the day after” (Sander From Trinidad 92). Mamitz is one of the main characters and James introduces her by saying, “so depressed was the woman and depressing her surroundings”; it is understood how destitute and poor this barrack-yard is, and James’ descriptions of the place fortify this feeling (Sander From Trinidad 88). Mamitz lives in a room “devoid of furniture” and later causes trouble by purposely knocking
over a, “bamboo pole which supported a clothes line over-burdened with Irene’s clothes” (Sander From Trinidad 87-91). These small details of place fill out the mood, creating a setting for the realistic depictions of the people inhabiting this small area.

In many ways Triumph can be read as a precursor to James’ 1936 novel Minty Alley, which was a landmark for Trinidadian fiction. The main character, Haynes, is a middle class black man. He is constantly calculating each move he makes, leaving little time for spontaneity. His backstory is a Caribbean literary trope: a middle class black man that is being groomed for a future with a profession. James writes that “in the West Indies, to get a profession meant going to England or America” for an education (James 22). Unfortunately, an illness takes his mother’s life, which consequently leaves his life in the balance. Haynes is using up his money quickly and must move from his home and take up residence in a boarding house. Whitlock rightly notices that in Triumph James is watching from the outside – his “tone introduces a note of detachment” (Whitlock 44). Interesting that in Minty Alley James inserts Haynes directly into the action, forcing him into the barrack-yard area, a house on Minty Alley. He moves from a place with “pleasant furniture, the mahogany sideboard with its spotless china and silver pieces” to a house that was “badly in need of a coat of paint” (James 23-24). The house is well kept, but living in such close proximity with so many people from so many different walks of life forces Haynes to start understanding the people. Whitlock points out that Haynes “gradually begins to see his neighbours as individuals rather than characters in an exotic drama” (Whitlock 45). Similar to James when writing Triumph, Haynes moves to the boarding house on Minty Alley and the people there are humanized once he’s among them, once he sees that they are real people with plights and problems.
The writers from Trinidad and The Beacon created a literary tradition, focusing their work on Trinidadian people and settings. These writers were keenly aware of what they were doing, they set the stage for the next generations, gave them a chance, made writing seem like a tangible goal. This literary tradition continues through to Sam Selvon, who is a “direct literary ancestor” to this group of writers (Sander From Trinidad 11). Selvon’s work is a product of his surroundings: he takes the influence of British, African and Asian culture and weaves texts in Trinidadian settings, incorporating the land, the food and the customs; he wrote about what was happening around him, creating an entire oeuvre of realistic texts based upon his experiences and the experiences of those around him. Selvon’s Trinidad is a complex, multicultural place; it is a place with a rich, tormented history, a place with giving soil and an expanse of beautiful landscapes.
Chapter Two: In Trinidad

I. Canefield After Canefield, Harvest After Harvest

Roydon Salick, in his overview of Selvon’s work, notes that “the largest share of critical attention on Selvon has been devoted to the novels” (Salick Selvon 50). Specifically, he has found that *A Brighter Sun* and *The Lonely Londoners* “have received the bulk of criticism” and that the Moses trilogy has received tautological consideration as well when compared to the rest of Selvon’s oeuvre (Salick Selvon 51). In essence Salick is saying that with respect to Selvon’s catalogue, there needs to be more diversity in criticism. This study is focused on doing just that. Salick categorizes the novels into three types: “peasant novels,” “middle class novels” and “immigrant novels.” The peasant novels are: *A Brighter Sun, Turn Again Tiger, The Plains of Caroni* and *Those Who eat the Cascadura;* the middle class novels are: *An Island is a World and I Hear Thunder;* and the immigrant novels are: *The Lonely Londoners, The Housing Lark, Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating.* For this study, the immigrant novels will be looked at in chapter 3 and also include the film *Pressure* written by Selvon, directed by fellow Trinidadian Horace Ové. Chapter 2 will focus on the peasant and middle class novels – in all of those works, the action takes place primarily in Trinidad. This chapter will focus on the countryside in these works.

British literature traditionally, as seen through Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City,* uses landscape to show beauty, or to show how characters interact with the world when farming or when simply existing. Trinidadian literature also uses landscape and setting, as shown in the previous chapter, following in British tradition. Selvon is part of both traditions, but creates his own Trinidad with vivid and realistic detail. In these works, he writes about the countryside and the cities of Trinidad, creating a lush Caribbean landscape with foliage, trees,
fruits, fields, huts, gardens, roads and buildings. Even when in the city, there is a constant reminder that the country is only a few miles away. In *The Plains of Caroni* and *I Hear Thunder*, the characters that live in the city are able to leave the city for the outskirts and visit areas to go on walks, or spend a day at the beach. When Romesh, in *The Plains of Caroni*, takes Petra out for a day at the beach, they leave the city and after a short drive are able to stop “where a trickle of crystal water dropped from the hills and had a drink” (Selvon *Caroni* 49). A few miles from the intense city life of Port of Spain and they are surrounded by nature.

Raymond Williams writes that,

In Britain, identifiably, there is a precarious but persistent rural-intellectual radicalism: genuinely and actively hostile to industrialism and capitalism; opposed to commercialism and to the exploitation of environment; attached to country ways and feelings, the literature and the lore. (Williams *Country* 36)

For Williams, writing about the country in British literature has a strong history that moves through ages and changes with the times. Its place is important in literature and helps to shape our understanding of eras. Williams points to ways that landscape and place can be read to uncover social and cultural information about the time in which a piece was written. When discussing Richard Jefferies, Williams says that at times his landscape is “Whimsical and fawning,” but always seems to be in “defence of a ‘vanishing countryside’” (Williams *Country* 196). The study of landscape can be viewed simply as setting, or it can be used to open doors to political, ideological and historical subtexts contained within literature.

Terry Gifford, in his book *Pastoral*, writes that the “history of landscape design serves to remind the audience that Arcadia is a social construct of each age” (Gifford 145). Gifford is discussing Tom Stoppard’s 1993 play *Arcadia*, in which Stoppard is satirizing “academics who
make their career by researching the pastoral” (Gifford 143). Stoppard’s post-modern self-awareness of pastoral is mocked, and Gifford notices that in twentieth century British literature there is a strong anti-pastoral leaning. Stoppard is even playing on a tradition with his title. In The Country and the City Williams studies other literary Arcadias: Jacapo Sannazzaro’s Arcadia and Philip Sydney’s The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia. Arcadia, in Greece, was home to the god of the wild, Pan. When considering Pan, images of the forest, flocks, flora and fauna come to mind. The Arcadia reference is a direct reference to the countryside and in these literary instances Arcadia is used to create a link to the countryside of the past. Selvon certainly did not create a literal Arcadia of his own, but when considering Arcadia as a metaphor and a continuation of pastoral landscape writing through history, Gifford’s assertion that “Arcadia is a social construct of each age,” “Arcadia” becomes interchangeable with “countryside”. If Arcadia as the countryside is a social construct that can pass through eras, different histories and literatures, then Selvon’s work can be considered as a literary continuation of a history of landscape writing.

About Wordsworth and John Clare, Raymond Williams notes that “the more closely the object is described, the more directly, in a newly working language and rhythm, a feeling of the observer’s life is seen and known” (Williams Country 133). By creating a natural setting, writers like Clare and Wordsworth were able to convey concepts such as the sublime and picturesque: they were also able to create a working world and in doing so they give life to the people they were writing about. In the creating of worlds through setting Selvon intersects with traditional landscape writing, but this facet of his work has been overlooked. Much of the focus of the criticism on Selvon’s work is disproportionate as a whole, according to Salick, but also most of the studies have been on Selvon’s language or on a general identity-driven post-colonial review.
There has been very little discussion about Selvon’s keen eye for detail in creating landscape and setting in the middle class and peasant novels.

In fact, there are studies focusing on Selvon’s lack of a true landscape. In two essays, “Dialect Maturity and the Land in Sam Selvon’s A Brighter Sun: A Reply” and “An Island is Not a World: A Reading of Sam Selvon’s ‘An Island is a World’,” Harold Barratt takes on critics that have missed the natural aspect of Selvon’s work. In the latter essay, Barratt argues that Isabel Quigly’s review of An Island is a World is guilty of “dismissing the novel’s palpable Trinidad setting” (Barratt A Reading 26). Quigly downplays the setting and relegates Selvon’s description as a mere addition of “local colour” (Barratt Dialect 109). Selvon’s usage of setting is beyond simple “local colour”; the descriptions are local, but more to the point, they create a vivid picture that differentiates Trinidad from the traditional English narratives Quigly was reviewing. As discussed in chapter 1, Selvon is working within the English tradition. Selvon was schooled in English literature by the Crown Colony and also, to have his books read by a large amount of people, must present his stories in a Western way. He did need to make money so it makes economic sense for a writer like Selvon to fit himself within this context. These local descriptions are vital to the formation of the world that Selvon is writing about; it’s precisely what sets him apart from this tradition he is working from within.

In the Trinidadian novels, the environment is used as landscape and setting; it is also used functionally and as metaphor and simile. I will be focusing on the setting here, but I will take a moment to show how far allusions to the Trinidadian environment run through these works, which can go a long way in combatting the “local colour” argument. For instance, when Henry is bad and needs a scolding, to teach him a lesson, Mary has him “cut ah switch from de hibiscus fence” (Selvon Brighter 56). To brush his teeth, Tiger, “cut a toothbrush from the hibiscus fence”
Urmilla, in *Turn Again Tiger*, “cut a piece of bamboo” to make a broom (Selvon *Brighter* 12). In *The Plains of Caroni* Balgobin’s “hair was grey but kept soft and shining with regular applications of coconut oil; he did that now not from vanity, but as protection against a head-cold” (Selvon *Caroni* 20). Robinson seems shady and the narrator says that he “shrugged like a snake, changing skins” in *Turn Again Tiger* (Selvon *Turn* 181). In *Those who Eat the Cascadura*, Devertie, as he talks, “moves back and forth like a hummingbird”; and when Garry and Sarjoni are confronted by an angry mob, the mob reacts “like corbeaux scenting carrion” (Selvon *Cascadura* 78-114). These images are prevalent throughout the pages of each work, instilling a deeper feeling and attachment to nature culminating with Selvon’s use of the natural environment that he grew up in.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson and George B. Handley, in the introduction to *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, write, “while the brutality of the plantation system produced a particular relationship to the natural world, it is important to consider those sites that served as vital repositories of indigenous and African beliefs” (DeLoughery, et al 2-3). Atrocities occurred on the very land in question, yet a home and background was created – culture was formed. The characters who populate Selvon’s novels are people exiled from their homelands and all of these different places are central to the formation of a hybrid culture; most of the characters in these novels are of East Indian descent, but there are many from other walks of life. Sasenarine Persaud wrote about how Selvon’s fiction has all of these different influences intermingling, causing him to be “a bit murky, at least ambivalent about his identity, identities” (Persaud 4). Persaud finds that the land is vital in Selvon’s work and not just because Selvon’s Indian ancestors were employed in the land, but because there was a sense of creating home. All around the entire West Indies you can find “plants and flowers which had their origins in India or
Asia” (Persaud 5). Selvon’s writing is filled with food, nature and buildings – this helps to give the reader a sense of what Trinidad was like and, in turn, makes his work feel sincere.

Given the history of the Caribbean, it goes without saying that “the plantation system” figures into these stories although each novel takes place post-slavery and post-indentured servitude. The fields are part of the history, part of the landscape. The title of this chapter comes from Selvon’s 1958 novel Turn Again Tiger. With the exception of An Island is a World and I Hear Thunder, sugar cane plays a major role in all of Selvon’s Trinidadian novels: A Brighter Sun takes place just after Tiger escapes life in the fields and much of his ambition stems from his desire not to return to that life; Turn Again Tiger sees Tiger return to the fields; and in The Plains of Caroni, Romesh is experimenting on creating a new kind of sugar cane. It can be argued that sugar cane’s role in Those Who Eat the Cascadura is minimal since the novel is technically about a cacao plantation; but sugar cane figures heavily in the story of Cascadura: Selvon writes that the cane industry was, even after independence, growing and “dominating the central plains and driving the other crop into the hills and the virgin forests” (Selvon Cascadura 77). Even in the twentieth century, sugar cane figured heavily in Trinidad’s economy and remains a force in Selvon’s work. The cacao planation, like the cane fields and villages in Selvon’s Trinidadian novels, becomes vibrant and alive with action.

Selvon’s characters are often – in A Brighter Sun, Turn Again Tiger and Those Who Eat the Cascadura – poor farmers that are only a generation or two removed from the world of slavery and indentured servitude. Williams writes that over time private farmers rarely existed in England, they couldn’t own land. In following with the capitalistic tradition created by the plantation system, only about
four hundred families, in a population of some seven or eight million people, owned nearly a quarter of the cultivated land. Beneath this domination, there was no longer, in any classical sense, a peasantry, but an increasingly regular structure of tenant farmers and wage-labourers: the social relationships that we can properly call those of agrarian capitalism. (Williams *Country* 60)

This sounds quite similar to the hegemonic set up in Selvon’s Trinidad; this hegemonic structure is precisely why, as I will show in the next section, many characters are trying to escape the destitute life of working fields, farming, living in huts and foraging in the wild for sustenance. A sense of mobility can be seen throughout Selvon’s work; characters are constantly trying to better themselves by moving on to a modern way of life. In *A Brighter Sun*, Tiger moves to a country village called Barataria after his arranged marriage to Urmilla. Tiger had been living with his parents as a wage-laborer, working in the cane fields. Selvon writes, “The private estate that owned Barataria leased lots to enterprising housebuilders” (Selvon *Brighter* 8). He continues with, “they grew vegetables in the yard,” the people “didn’t need any knowledge of farming to dig a hole and put in tomatoes seeds; the land was so rich that nearly every villager grew peppers or bananas or string beans” (Selvon *Brighter* 10). This is how Tiger lives: he rents land, has a small mud hut that he lives in with Urmilla and sells whatever he can grow; he is essentially a tenant farmer. “It is only a short step from a natural delight in the fertility of the earth to this magical invocation of a land which needs no farming” (Williams *Country* 17). The land in Selvon’s Trinidad is “so rich” that one doesn’t need any “knowledge of farming” to grow food. In these works, there is a similar feeling of attachment to the “magical” land as there is throughout Williams’ review of English literature; at the same time as Persaud noted, specific
natural items such as mangos and immortelle trees create a feeling of a certain Caribbean identity which creates a realistic image for readers.

There are many similarities between Caribbean landscape writing and classic British literature as mentioned in the previous chapter and the examples that illustrate a similar style of description. Nonetheless, the Trinidian landscape is different and much can be gleaned from the differences as well. With Selvon now in mind, I would like to take another look at Williams’ assertion about Clare and Wordsworth: “the more closely the object is described, the more directly, in a newly working language and rhythm, a feeling of the observer’s life is seen and known” (Williams *Country* 133). This statement simultaneously suggests similarity and difference: Selvon is using similar tools to Wordsworth and Clare, but is describing a different land. With that, the landscape isn’t just giving something to read with no conclusions to draw; when explored, the descriptions are giving the reader clues as to what that world is like.

In her essay “The Island and the World: Kinship, Friendship and Living Together in Selected Writings of Sam Selvon,” Alison Donnell discusses how Selvon’s work is a work about people and their interactions with each other, their learning to coexist in “the diverse human geography of the West Indies” (Donnell 57). This goes back to the idea that I was arguing in the previous chapter: Selvon is bridging a classic sense of British landscape with a modern Trinidian setting and adding realistic characters to his world; these aspects are vital to Selvon’s pseudo-documentary approach. This approach becomes key when considering Selvon’s later work; his later work forms a foundation of home for characters that immigrate to London. As I will show in the next section, emigrants fall back on this version of home for nostalgia and memories – home is also a way to compare and balance their feelings about city life. Selvon is able to achieve this because settings aren’t just a place for people to live in – the environment is
part of everyday life, it is part of the language. George Lamming has been known to champion the importance of Selvon’s early work in that his novels were a much-needed step forward for all Caribbean writers. In this vein, Michael Gikandi adds that, “Selvon’s ‘peasant idiom’ and sensibility could provide . . . a point of entry into Caribbean oral culture and hence provide native sources of meaning and expression for the emerging nations of the region” (Gikandi Kala-pani 108). By working within a familiar context to Westerners, Selvon created a baseline for future writers to draw from; he inserts a voiceless people into the global literary conversation.

Helen Tiffin has observed “landscape is necessarily a product of a combination of relationships between living beings and their surroundings” (Tiffin 199). In *An Island is a World*, to describe Caura Valley (the location where Father Hope built Veronica) Selvon writes,

> It stayed beautiful a long time, because only poor peasants lived there, and because it was difficult to get to, the road zig-zagged crazily around the hills, with no sort of protection against hairpin curves and sudden precipices. In the season of pouis, the valley was yellow or mauve from head to toe, except where flaming red immortelle blossoms rose high for sunlight. The people there lived simply and worked hard, tilling the land and rearing a few odd head of livestock. (Selvon *Island* 70)

Selvon gives clean, colorful description while inferring a greater colonial point: the land in Caura Valley is unscathed because it is out of the reach of modern society; the land is yet untouched by societal upward mobility and the plantation system. Over time, Raymond Williams sees an attachment to the land that exists and changes through each period. When Williams discusses the land, he is often writing about it in conjunction with the people within the landscape and the way the land affects the people and their culture; in the eighteenth century he notices that “the
labourer now merged with his landscape, a figure within the general figure of nature, is seen
from a distance, in which the affirmation of nature is intended as the essential affirmation of
Man” (Williams *Country* 132). In the above selection from *An Island is a World*, Selvon does
just this: he draws a grand – “general” – figure of nature from above to ultimately bring his
description down to the people “tilling the land”. The people cannot exist without the land, and
the land is described elegantly, with color and fauna specific to Trinidad.

Placing figures in landscape is another facet of traditional English literature. Regarding
the great landscape writing of Robert Louis Stevenson, James Wilson writes that Stevenson
“reveals people who, by their appearance and behaviour give scale and significance to the
setting” (Wilson 79). This can also be applied to Selvon. The following quote from the opening
of *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* has a similar effect:

> Manko put the conchshell to his lips so that it pressed against them like the
> mouthpiece of a trumpet, and summoned the workmen to the cacao estate. . . . He
> closed his eyes as if that helped to power the blast the more, and his head was
> raised at an angle to the blue sky so that the sound would carry over the tall
> flaming immortelle trees which were planted to shade the cacao. The long note, at
> constant pitch to the end, covered the mile to the village, and the cacao-workers
> bestirred themselves. (Selvon *Cascadura* 11)

Here Selvon starts with the figure of Manko and moves to a large landscape and then adds to the
scene the perspective of the workers. By doing this, he creates a physical connection to the land
while giving a view of the vast, yet secure seclusion of the small island by referencing the area
covered by Manko’s call. Further, it is one thing for Selvon to describe landscape; it is another to
mention such a specific tree as the immortelle. He also mentions this tree in the quote from *An*
Island is a World cited above. Anyone can search the Internet for Trinidadian landscapes and find serene, picturesque beach photos to build a mental image. It is distinctive to search immortelle trees and be able to understand the vibrant color and see why Selvon is so specific and using the name of the tree. This factor shows that “local colour” does not have to necessarily be a negative connotation; the red of the immortelle tree is something Trinidadian and adds depth to the description of a place many of Selvon’s readers (myself included) would not be familiar with.

Manko’s conchshell to summon workers is, again, an example of using nature functionally, giving the reader a bit of information about communication in the remoteness of the forests, hills and fields. It is also an instance in showing the community come together; Raymond Williams says that in Village life we are often give the “epitome of direct relationships: face to face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships” (Williams Country 165). This section about Manko is immediately followed by a description of how Manko obtained this conchshell. Selvon writes that the shell had “come a long way from a fisherman’s boat in Mayaro on the south-eastern coast of Trinidad” (Selvon Cascadura 11); on the boats, it was used to round up the community as well and ultimately the conchshell made its way to Manko. This is a direct chain of passage: an environmental item being used functionally as it is passed from person to person through the country, through the communities, until finally landing with Manko. Selvon uses the shell as a conduit to bring us from above and into the plantation, from here Selvon descends into the characters, creating his community around the land. In A Brighter Sun the landscape is littered naturally among the actions of the characters: “Mango season came. In the Northern Range the trees were in full fruit, and schoolchildren on holiday roamed the hills all day long, stealing in the gardens” (Selvon Brighter 37). A sentence
like this can be used as reminiscent for many people who, perhaps, had similar childhoods all over the world, picking crab apples or strawberries – whatever native fruit grows in any given land – but at the same time, the mango tree sets this landscape apart from anything most westerners have experienced. Selvon shows the community even amongst the children, using the land to show an attachment to the world around the people; as I will show later, this is something that is totally lacking in his London work.

The people in Selvon’s Trinidad are close with the land and Tiger is, out of all of the characters in Selvon’s Trinidadian novels, perhaps the best example of a person attached to the environment. He starts as a bit ignorant of the world at large due to his being so young when married, but he slowly acclimates to life once he moves to Barataria and begins to farm his own land. As he grows up in *A Brighter Sun*, “Tiger grew to love the land more” (Selvon *Brighter* 83). John Rothfork surmises that, “Tiger has found freedom, dignity, and community in Barataria, which . . . is Selvon’s model for Trinidad” (Rothfork 21). During *Turn Again Tiger* he is, due to his ability to read, given the job as bookkeeper on a plantation his father is managing in Chaguanas. He loves to read and learn, so the job is something he seems excited to use as a challenge to himself. Initially, the move from Barataria is difficult for him as he is unfamiliar with his surroundings. At a point, he gets lost when taking a walk and “upbraided himself again for not knowing the neighborhood” – he feels uncomfortable for not knowing his surroundings and complains about being separated form the land (Selvon *Turn* 46). But once given a job by Doreen to work a garden up for her, he is excited by the prospect: he immediately makes a plan to plant, “tomatoes, dasheen, cassava, corn, pepper—everything he could think of and which he knew would yield quickly . . . thinking about it put him in a good mood” (Selvon *Turn* 96). Tiger’s mood shifts with his relationship to the land, he’s a good farmer and proof that Selvon
was working toward creating a character base that is attached to the land, working to create an image of home that is central to his immigrant novels.

Selvon’s Trinidad is lovely and vast, yet true to the fact that it is a place with a sordid and confining history of servitude – with cane fields and white plantation owners as reminders. But Selvon pushes beyond that history by creating a real place with relatable characters that are representative of the Trinidad that he knew. His grasp of setting creates a clear picture for the Western world; a picture that is brimming with not just ideas, but very tangible and relatable realities. The country life is a simple one, yet there is a constant yearning for more: Tiger wants to read, which he believes can help him to get a better job and to become a whole person in a modern sense; he moves away from his folks to start his own life with his own family; this kind of forward movement enables him to come of age. Tiger’s coming of age could not have happened without the sense of mobility I mentioned earlier – he needed knowledge and to be away from his parents so that he can figure things out for himself. To fully comprehend this idea of mobility, an understanding of Selvon’s baseline of a country home is necessary: Selvon’s idea of the countryside is homey and simple; yet leading that kind of life, for many of his characters, seems futile as there can be more to the world than toiling in the outdoors.

II. Boundless Freedom

In his 1960 essay, "The Peasant Roots of the West Indies," George Lamming wrote about how the peasant in the Caribbean novel has been returned to, "his true and original status of personality"; he notes that Caribbean country dwellers in fiction are no longer large vague stereotypes because of Sam Selvon’s work (Lamming 24). And this is true, Selvon gives his readers well-drawn characters – not caricatures, but people with feelings, futures, pasts and
plights. However, subsequently adding to Lamming’s point, Gordon Roehlehr wrote that dialogue about “peasants” should be "modified" by incorporating "the interplay between country, town and big city" (Rohlehr 29). This is an apt point by Roehlehr: the globalization of West Indian culture has changed its representation, and the interplay between country and city sets the tone of Selvon’s work. The city, throughout literary history, has been mythologized negatively and positively. On one hand, cities give the “possibility of meeting and of movement” but, on the other, it is a “place of noise, worldliness and ambition” (Williams Country 1-6). In Selvon’s Trinidadian works, both of these possibilities for the city are represented. Here, I am specifically interested in the way that Selvon writes about characters physically living in Port of Spain, and also the way he writes about London as an idea. Port of Spain is a reality and – even though it is a smaller city and a step before the metropole – is much more advanced in modernity than the countryside. Many characters in these works have an unclear view of London, and that tends to mythologize the metropole.

Raymond Williams writes that, “In our own world, there is a wide range of settlements between the traditional poles of country and city” (Williams Country 2). The Country and the City is mainly about the relationship of the countryside to the big city, London, but Williams does note that a “wide range” of places exist. It is in-between the countryside and metropole that Selvon’s Port of Spain fits in. Port of Spain is not the ultimate destination for many, but it has many of the attributes of the city. One attitude toward Port of Spain can be summed up in this quote: “How Joe Martin ever came to leave the city of Port of Spain and settle down to a comparatively smooth-flowing life in Barataria with Rita was once history to some people in Trinidad” (Selvon Brighter 18). To exit the hustle and bustle of city life, even in Trinidad, is to “settle down” to a much slower kind of life in a village where there is much less human traffic,
much less commerce. But still, the phrasing, “How Joe Martin ever” is reflective of many of the character’s feelings. The slow, easy-going life in the country is a distant second place to the excitement of the city; why someone would leave the city for the country puzzles Tiger. For all of the city’s evils, he sees an “identifiable and moving quality: the centre, the activity, the light” (Williams *Country* 5). The city, for many of Selvon’s characters, is a chance for opportunity: in the city one can find jobs, culture, and people from all walks of life. Not being from the city allows Tiger to mythologize Port of Spain, which is the center of the island’s commerce and culture.

Selvon tells Joe’s story directly after beginning Tiger’s narrative; he explains how Joe did not want to leave the city, but he does so for his wife. Joe would have stayed even though Port of Spain is painted as a pitiable place to be positioned when you are poor: it is a place that is so crowded with people “Ma Jones knows what Ma Lambie is cooking for lunch just by poking her head through a crack in the dilapidated wall that separates their kitchens”; it is a place that is filled with, “slum folk and dangerous people” where “little naked children screamed and jumped about, playing in the earth with stones, scraps of wood, bits of paper, anything they could lay their hands on” (Selvon *Brighter* 19-23). In the peasant novels, Selvon writes Port of Spain as a place in which people are packed together tightly in rundown housing, living below or just at the poverty line; even still, throughout the Tiger novels, Tiger is enamored with Port of Spain.

As mentioned previously, Tiger moved from his family’s home to Barataria, which “is situated about four miles east of the capital Port of Spain” (Selvon *Brighter* 9). Just being in Barataria is the closest that Tiger has ever been to the city – he hears about the city from Joe and his friend Boysie, both of whom are from Port of Spain originally: “Boysie was going to show him many things in Port of Spain. Where was his life going to fit in? Perhaps, if he liked the city,
he could get a job there, and give up the garden” (Selvon *Brighter* 81). This connects directly with a much written-about scene, in which Tiger is on the wrong end of a “racial incident in which a black girl, employed as a retail clerk in a department store, snubs him to attend to an obnoxious white woman” (Rothfork 15). The city seems like a place where jobs are available and easy to obtain, where there is plenty of opportunity. But once Tiger is physically there, the reality hits him that he is one of many poor people ambling about unable to find equality. This sentiment is echoed later when his wife, Urmilla, has complications with her pregnancy; Tiger goes to Port of Spain to find a doctor, but has trouble getting help because he is a poor Indian.

Conversely, in the *Plains of Caroni* Selvon writes about Romesh, a young university student who has an easy time navigating Port of Spain. Although he is from the countryside – a small village – his family has money; his father, Harrilal, works for a cane organization called, The Company. The Company “helped the workers to build their own houses, and some of them who came into money – like Harrilal in Wilderness – owned large houses comparable to those in Port of Spain” (Selvon *Caroni* 11). The house in the village is measured against Port of Spain and is a symbol of the decadence of Romesh’s family. Romesh is studying at university and knows the city well; this is largely because Romesh’s mother, Seeta, has high plans of upward mobility for her son and the city figures heavily into her plans.

Seeta and Romesh meet in Woodford Square, a busy area of the city filled with, “jostling crowds” (Selvon *Caroni* 29). Seeta is highly conscious when around her son, trying to speak “as much proper English as she could command” (Selvon *Caroni* 28). A statue of Lord Harris – a former British-born governor in Trinidad who ruled in the middle of the 19th century – oversees their meeting. In *Sam Selvon’s Dialectical Style and Fictional Strategy* Clement Wyke writes about the significance of Lord Harris’ statue presiding. The narrator of *The Plains of Caroni*
imagines that Lord Harris must have, “learnt the local language” (Selvon Caroni 28) and paraphrases him speaking in a creolized English; this is contrasted with Seeta’s proper English. Wyke comments that, “The colonizer emblematically speaks the local lingo, while the status-seeking colonial imitates the settler's standard language, which has become for her the badge of respectability” (Wyke 95). This alludes to the hybridity I spoke of earlier. In the city, there is a feeling from Seeta that airs must be put on, she is worried about her son becoming a proper and successful man; not successful like his father in the country working and managing the cane fields, but a man wearing suit while working in an office for The Company and married to a white woman. Essentially, she wants her son to be more British than anything else and being in the city, he can easily meld into this character. He is studying the chemical make-up of sugar cane. Rather than working in the cane fields, the young man of East Indian descent is studying in the city to learn ways to manipulate the cane, which will enable him to work on the higher level of cane production in the capitalistic chain.

As Romesh and Seeta traverse the streets on their way to lunch, they see a city that has “an appalling death rate on the roads” (Selvon Caroni 31). The dangers of the roads are mentioned in Those Who Eat the Cascadura as well; in that novel, Prekash could have moved to the city to become a taxi driver to make decent money, but “he did not have the courage or stamina to flirt with death on the Trinidad roads” (Selvon Cascadura 118). Selvon describes Port of Spain as a place overrun with people – it is a place where everyone moves quickly and the traffic is heavy. Romesh and Seeta lock the car doors and the narrator states that in the city “it was not unusual for someone to jack up a parked car and go off with” the tires (Selvon Caroni 32). Their journey to the restaurant is short but crowded with information: the streets are
dangerously filled with death and crime; and during the ride, Seeta speaks of the future at length, pushing her son to be active in his quest for upward mobility. Wyke finds that

In this flood of details, Selvon is creating a sense of place by reconstructing a kind of montage of people, events, buildings, natural topography, and symbolic objects, all imbued with the Trinidadian spirit. This composite of urban life contrasts significantly with Selvon’s portrayal of rural life in his earlier novels. (Wyke 96)

The landscape is totally different from Selvon’s descriptions in the country: crime and auto accidents create an anxiety about the city, which contrasts the beautiful landscapes and hard work in the fields from the countryside. Not only is the setting different, but the characters are also very much dissimilar. Seeta chooses a Chinese restaurant for lunch because “she had been informed that one of the island’s senators came to this place regularly”; the waiter imagines that Romesh and Seeta are “two visiting coolies from the country, unaccustomed to the city’s amenities” – which is comparable to the treatment that Tiger received from the store clerk in the scene mentioned earlier (Selvon Caroni 33). But, Seeta recognizes the importance of the real estate of a table and when the waiter tries to seat them in a poor position for her plans she “took possession of the situation: she said, firmly, ‘we going to sit there,’ and she led the way to a corner” (Selvon Caroni 33). Of course Seeta was correct and the Senator is eating near them; and further a young white woman, Petra, that Romesh knows from school happens to be dining with the Senator; now Seeta’s plans can come to fruition: he will have an in with the Senator, and also be able to court a white woman. In this way, the city is not just a concrete jungle death-trap, but also a place of “possibility of meeting and of movement.”
This idea of the city as a place for promising prospects is something that reappears in Selvon’s work, and is linked to westernization. Seeta wants Romesh to be westernized; she wants him to marry a white woman and have an office job – she measures success against that which the city has to offer, specifically ideals instilled by England. In this way, Seeta would like Romesh to be similar to Adrian in *I Hear Thunder*. Adrian has an office job and travels as a representative for the canning company he works for. Adrian is “completely westernized and only kept up a show of being faithful to the customs and habits which he had shed while growing up in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the island” (Selvon *Thunder* 8). In the city he has left his ethnicity behind to become a modern man. Roydon Salick points out that “Adrian is a classic bourgeois” passing the time of his humdrum life of rotating work and play, taking very little seriously (Salick *Thunder* 119). Adrian and his best friend Mark went to university in Port of Spain; Adrian lives in the city and right after college started to make plenty of money to live comfortably, while Mark went to England to be educated as a doctor. The story starts with Mark’s return from England – it should be noted that Adrian is East Indian and Mark is African in descent, which goes a long way to describe the creolization in Selvon’s work and how newer generations are comingling with other cultures. Salick also writes that “Mark is much more fortunate than his best friend, Adrian, in that he has studied abroad, has qualified as a medical doctor, and has married” (Salick *Thunder* 125). Adrian has a menial job with a canning company and sometimes travels for business, but only to other Caribbean islands. Adrian wants to marry Polly seemingly only because she is a nice Indo-Trinidadian girl that fits the mold he is looking for; although the reader knows from her that she does not have any plans of marrying him. In this way Mark seems to have, by going to England, been able to fit into the modern world and achieve, while Adrian has been stuck in a middle-class city life that seems to have become stale
to him; in fact, as a personal test, Adrian is attempting to escape the over-sexualized ways of the city by abstaining from sex for a year – just to prove that he can do it.

The story of *I Hear Thunder* is about two boys from the country that have headed to the city to grow into modernity. The young men became familiar with the caretaker of Queen’s Park Savannah garden in Port of Spain because during their college years, “Adrian and Mark used to come to the gardens with their books looking for a quiet, lonely spot to study” (Selvon *Thunder* 17). The city in *I Hear Thunder* is similar to what Selvon describes in *The Plains of Caroni* aside from the beautiful park; Adrian and Mark would retreat from the city and seek refuge in the park. In his first visit to the city, in *A Brighter Sun*, Tiger visits Queen’s Park Savannah and

He imagined himself coming to the gardens to read; it was nice here, with the trees and flowers—look how much he was thinking now! A buttercup butterfly, bobbing about in the air, thrown off-course by the wind, and he watched it, holding his breath, hoping it would come to rest near him. (Selvon *Brighter* 101)

It is significant, I think, to imagine this faux countryside surrounded on all sides by the city. During this visit, Tiger dreams about the life that Adrian and Mark had in their college years: finding a quiet spot to read in the park while enjoying the serene scenery. These novels were written in the middle of the 1950s and early 1960s. By this time many had left the country for the city; migration was a realistic possibility for Trinidadians. Mark and Adrian did what Tiger could not: move from the country and settle into a middle-class life. The caretaker of the garden inside the park is an older Indo-Trinidadian man called Ramdeen. From visiting so much, Mark and Adrian became friendly with Ramdeen. Ramdeen sees Mark upon his return from England, and is excited and hopes that Mark will remember “the mango tree in the gardens where he carved his initials” (Selvon *Thunder* 20). Mark has left his mark on a tree, on the environment, yet has
gone so far since then that Ramdeen does not dare ask such a trivial question when in the city around a successful doctor. Ramdeen realizes that “this is the way things had to be, one man drove a car and the other cut grass” (Selvon Thunder 20). In other words, one man navigates the modern streets; another laboriously toils in the green. It isn’t as if Mark is pompous, rather he is conscientious and humble about his beginnings, but the hegemonic structure in place keeps class in an order that becomes inherent, which consequently prevents Ramdeen from mentioning the tree.

The idea of having a garden in the middle of a city exemplifies this hegemonic structure and creates a kind of phony pastoral paradise in the middle of buildings:

Tourists in the garden thought what a wonderful picture the old Indian made as he cleared away the weeds from a bed of flowers. As they looked about them, birds sand in the trees, a breeze swept down from the hills of Laventille and St Anns bringing smells of strange fruit and blossom; gaudy butterflies fluttered and made lines of color in the air . . . they saw the picturesque old man in his tattered khaki trousers with a hoe in his hand, and it completed the scene for them. (Selvon Thunder 97)

The butterfly in the garden here is “gaudy” rather than Tiger’s butterfly, which is “beautiful.” Ramdeen is “the other” for tourists to bring home with them – the mere use of the word “picturesque” puts him in a painting for tourist’s memories: when compared to the landscapes of the novels set in the countryside the landscape writing is just as luscious, but when bringing it down to the human level, tourists view this as a Victorian landscape with Ramdeen in it. He is not toiling in the countryside, but in Port of Spain in a garden sanctioned by the government. Selvon doesn’t stop there, he immediately changes the perspective at the beginning of the next
paragraph and writes, “Ramdeen grumbled and swore as his bare hands encountered stinging nettles” (Selvon Thunder 97). This is the reality of Selvon’s Trinidad: the reader can be the tourist and stand in awe of the landscapes, but the people working in them do not simply see these landscapes as pretty pictures. In the city, there is this attempt to recreate a deceptive countryside for tourists to look at rather than have them see the real, gritty life in the countryside.

Mark was born in the countryside, a small place called Success Village. When Mark visits his mother, he asks her to come and live with him in his home in the city. As a doctor, Mark must live in the city for his work. He has come back from London with a white wife and hopes of being successful in Port of Spain. But his mother “could not give up her way of life and move into an alien world” (Selvon Thunder 29). It is good enough that “she was elevated in her little world” due to her having a son that is so prosperous (Selvon Thunder 31). Mark is from Success Village and shows a trajectory for success that is intimated in all of these novels: people from the countryside leave for Port of Spain and from there the next logical step is London. In “Mythologizing the City” Leslie Fiedler wrote that “the confluence of many people, preaching and remembering, lying and telling the truth, asking and answering—until not just dialogue happens, but the dialectic is invented” (Fielder 113). Fiedler writes about the large cities throughout the world in history as a kind of “hell,” but there is still something drawing people to the cities. It is compelling to be one of many, to have unlimited options – no definite answers. Once back in Trinidad, Mark recalls London “and the boundless freedom the city brought him” (Selvon Thunder 72). Port of Spain is a reality and offers some freedoms, but the freedom in London is “boundless.”

Michael Gikandi writes that, when considering “metropole and colony,” we should not view them as “oppositions, we should see them as antimonies connected through the figure of
modernity” (Gikandi Maps 18). Merely viewing Trinidad as England’s other, or vice versa, is simplifying a larger concept: taking a look at how cultures intersect in life and literature can help us to understand the modern world. In Selvon’s work, there is a strong sense of this Britishness as part of characters identities. In A Brighter Sun, in a conversation with Boysie, Tiger asks, “You think the people who eating sugar over there does think about we who making it here?” (Selvon Brighter, 88). Selvon’s characters constantly view themselves in relation to the metropole; Gikandi writes that, “the colonized space was instrumental in the invention of Europe just as the idea of Europe was the condition for the possibility for the production of modern colonial and postcolonial society” (Gikandi Maps 6). Each location must exist for the other to fit into its modern context, and Selvon felt the push and pull between metropole and colony. To add to Tiger’s line of thinking, Raymond Williams wrote the, “city eats what its country neighbours have grown” (Williams Country 50). The connection between these places is not just a psychological connection dealing in ideas of identity crisis, but there is a very physical component to this. Tiger worked in the cane fields, producing sugar that would be sent to England. He had his hands on items that were being handed to people that would cook with it, or add it to their tea. This makes him very much a part of a real capitalistic chain of movement – a chain that later Romesh will attempt to scale. And it isn’t as if Tiger is dreaming of people in France, or Spain or America using the sugar: this is a conversation about London and he is wondering if his compatriots, his countrymen are thinking about him as he is about them.

The idea of London brings a wealth of thought to these novels; there is a constant idea that going to London equals success – heading to Port of Spain is one thing, but London is the highest plateau one can reach. Tiger is stuck, and feels trapped. He tells Joe “You grow up in the city, you had a lot of experience. If even you not have education, you still not a fool. But look at
me. A stupid coolie boy from the country, can’t even read and write” (Selvon *Brighter* 109).

Tiger is constantly dreaming of leaving for bigger things, he has so much anger about his plight that

> He learned to drive a bulldozer because he wanted to hurl it against the land and the trees; when he sat down in the seat he felt the power beneath him, and he dug up the land and crushed the bushes and wished it had more speed, so he could smash into a tree and hear the sound of the impact, and how the fibres in the trunk tore apart. (Selvon *Brighter* 180)

Tiger is not just dreaming of leaving for education, nor is he metaphorically hating the land, he is physically destroying the land. Tiger thinks that just growing up in a city gives an advantage – he is constantly measuring himself against the city; he learns to read and write to modernize himself in hopes of growing in the world. Education represents modernity, and the city is the place for education. As seen with Adrian, Port of Spain gives a certain level of achievement. But as seen with Mark, London can propel one to a whole new level and education is central to achieving higher status in the eyes of Selvon’s characters.

Tiger gets a job and helps to build a road from an American base, through the villages and to the city. Late in *A Brighter Sun*, Selvon writes “‘One day I will go away,’ Tiger said steadily, watching a part of the highway he remembered working on” (Selvon *Brighter* 203). Of course, the road represents movement and Tiger would hope to take that road to a new life. Yet, he is found back in the canefields in *Turn Again Tiger*. Early in that novel Soylo tells Tiger – the young man is now literate and has a job due to his new ability to read – “You is a young man, you should go away some place across the sea and study” (Selvon *Turn* 26). There is a constant
reminder through these novels that to be deemed a success by modern standards, you must go to England.

To his mother, the fact that Mark was a Doctor with a white wife makes it “incredible that a son of the neighbourhood could attain such heights” (Selvon Thunder 25). Mark is the pinnacle: he has totally succeeded in the eyes of his mother and her neighbors. They look at him as a complete triumph now that he has attained this level. Measuring himself against the world around him, Adrian’s plans are to “buy a car—he already had a house—marry and have a large family, and send the children abroad to study” (Selvon Thunder 10). Adrian has Western ideals behind his thinking and, on top of that, recognizes that to fulfill his ideas of achievement, his children must be sent abroad to study – something he wasn’t able to do himself and is jealous of Mark having done. Later in I Hear Thunder, when her mother finds out that Polly is pregnant out of wedlock, her mother says “we had best send she to England so it don’t cause no scandal” (Selvon Thunder 146). This is representative of the disconnect between Trinidad and London; no one really knows what is happening in London and when one travels abroad, they can come back or send back any reality that they’d like because the myth is strong enough – this idea will be further dissected later in this study.

In the end, I concur with Harold Barratt’s assertion that “It is not the land Tiger wishes to escape from; it is, rather, the constricting narrowness of his village” (Barratt Dialect 335). Selvon reasserts this notion in I Hear Thunder: Mark takes note of his mother and her neighbors when they gossip, and sees the “narrow scope of their lives” (Selvon Thunder 25). Mark left Trinidad for London and it was “great to get away from the small-mindedness and the apathy and the selfishness and the tight circle of sea which choked and gendered false values” (Selvon Thunder 26). For Selvon, in these novels, to understand the world at large, you must leave home
for the city. It is a myth at work throughout Selvon’s Trinidadian novels and characters like Tiger, according to Gikandi, seek, “solace in the imagined rather than the real world, in what he would have been rather that what he is” (Gikandi Kala-Pani 123). Man’s innate desire for upward mobility is captured in perfect form here with characters from all walks of life, all colors and creeds in Trinidad dreaming of greener pastures in the sidewalks of the city.
Chapter Three: In London

I. From the Basement to the Penthouse

History and time muddle narratives. By looking into the space where Selvon writes about place, it is possible understand his colonial self and understand something much truer about the so-called “third world.” By writing a tropical world that isn’t a glorified Eden or a vacation paradise, Selvon takes pieces from his identity and history to create a world that gives a larger cultural image. The feeling of reality is unmistakable in all of his work, which makes Selvon’s work as a whole stand out even more when looked at on a grand scale. The Trinidadian novels discussed above can be used in conjunction with the immigrant novels to draw comparisons that shed light on the post-colonial world. There is a love for the land in the Trinidadian novels, but just the same there is, as noted with Tiger, a yearning to be free of the restraints that accompany living in the country. Many of Selvon’s characters dream to exchange the slow, mundane life of the country for the action and possibilities that can only be found in the city.

From the village, the skies are endless and the landscape is open. But the economic options are limited, so many of Selvon’s characters migrate to the metropole. Raymond Williams writes that when considering the difference and movement between country and city “identity and community became more problematic, as a matter of perception and as a matter of valuation, as the scale and complexity of the characteristic social organization increased” (Williams Country 165). Williams’ point here makes excellent sense: the more convoluted and intricate our societies become, the harder it is to fit one’s self within and the more difficult it becomes to define its components. He writes later that,

it is indeed easy to see an old way of life overshadowed by the tumultuous development of the new industrial system. The decisive forces in the national
economy were the general industrial and financial development and the crises of trade. (Williams Country 182)

Williams gets to the reality that the city takes life from the country by soaking up trade and enticing the country dwellers to its streets where possibility seems boundless, which help cities – especially a metropolis like London – bustle. He mentions that, in the country, there was, “denigration of the labourer” in England during the middle of the nineteenth century (Williams Country 184). The marginalization of the small farmer resulted in laborers moving to the city for work. This can be likened to the situation that, over a century later, affected the people of Trinidad. The laborer that worked in the farms made little money; renting land and selling his or her crops for a minor profit seemed small minded. With that, think of Tiger and his desire to leave the country for the city: he promises that “one day I will go away” (Selvon Tiger 203); or consider Seeta’s obsession with “sending Romesh to England” (Selvon Caroni 21). For many Trinidadian characters in Selvon’s novels, the idea of going away to London is the best plan for the future. Prospects are not good enough in the countryside, nor are they in Port of Spain; and the laborers are low on a capitalistic chain, which makes the metropole seem like a place that would serve the modern need for personal fulfillment.

But, what can be found within Selvon’s London texts is that the city is just as confining as the country – not just physically confining, but figuratively confining as well. Physically, the dwellings of West Indians in London tend to be tight and shabby; while figuratively, living in the city is narrowing in that all cultures of color tend to be lumped together so that when it comes to searching for jobs or housing, many people of color are shut out. Charlie Victor, in The Housing Lark, collects money from tenants for a living and says “you see how they against us in this country” (Selvon Lark 19). There is a feeling in these works that the West Indian people are
being separated from the rest of society. In this way, it can be argued that the city is even more confining than the country as West Indians are, even though they feel British, treated as outsiders. Selvon writes a confining London and is able to show the separation of culture with two key components of city life: 1) the nature of housing and 2) the job market. In this section I will look at the West Indian identity in London; I will also look at how housing and jobs affected reality and the ways this reality manifests in Selvon’s work.

A clear history of post World War II black British literature in context within the geography and confines of the city can be found in James Procter’s *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*. Procter begins his study by defining the term “black” in a modern context, noting that, in England, the term is used to describe “settlers of African and Asian descent”; “black British,” according to Procter includes men and women from the east as well as those that came to England from the West Indies (Procter 6). Selvon’s work fits within this category on multiple levels. As mentioned earlier, Selvon writes about creolized characters from a cross-section of cultures – Selvon himself is of East Indian descent, yet, with his London works writes of Caribbean men and women of mainly African descent.

The influx of immigrants – of any culture, color or creed – moving to London in the 1950s caused racial tensions. By looking at mainstream media from the time, Procter and other critics such as Sukhdev Sandhu and Gail Low relay a realistic historical picture of the way that immigration impacted the reality of London. In his book *London Calling*, with the chapter, “Coasting a Lime on the Serpentine,” Sukhdev Sandhu looks at the years after WWI, well before the Windrush generation came to London, when, “African and West Indian troops were often demobilized in England. Many ended up in London where they found themselves edged out of the job market” (Sandhu 116). This initial immigration took place a few decades before Selvon
moved to London. Sandhu states that this initial influx of West Indians to London created nervousness about immigrants affecting the job market even after World War I and worsened over the years. White residents were afraid that their jobs were at risk due to possible over population and the possible willingness of newcomers to work for less money. Over the next few decades, a public consensus was created with prodding from the media. This is where Sandhu argues many of the tropes about West Indian’s were born: “evil characters” of color stealing jobs, cavorting with white women and committing murder all appeared in movies, novels, newspaper articles and radio reports; the media fueled a focus on difference, pushing these stereotypes (Sandhu 121).

Both James Procter and Gail Low look at the sociological work of Sheila Patterson’s *Dark Strangers*. Procter calls Patterson’s work “highly influential” and asserts that Patterson’s feelings were generally accepted by the public by citing newspaper and magazine articles from the era, such as one from the *Picture Post* from 1954 that, “claims that ‘there are still landladies who scream and shut the door, and some who faint, at the sight of a Negro on the doorstep after dark’” (Procter 23). Procter finds that Patterson’s work is, like the *Picture Post* article, generalizing and rather than looking at individuals as different people, or as houses as separate dwellings she creates a “composite picture of an average West Indian-owned house” (Procter 23). Low furthers this line of thinking by pointing out that Patterson uses “rhetorical and spatial codes to express what she terms the ‘colour shock’ of her experience of urban excursion in London” (Low 164). These accounts recall the “shock” of an invasion from outsiders when in reality as shown in Lord Kitchener’s case in chapter one, West Indians considered themselves British. They felt as if they were heading to another city in their own country and wanted to start a new life, but often, when they arrived, they were not greeted with open arms.
It is within the context of London that Selvon’s novels are set. Reality is mirrored with documentary-like accuracy in his London work. In *Moses Ascending*, Moses muses that

> 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, or one-eye Nelson with his column in Trafalgar Square, not counting color. (Selvon *Ascending* 44)

By this time in Moses’ life he has been in London for twenty or so years – this is the second of three novels about Moses – and he considers himself British. In fact he doesn’t liken himself to his West Indian friends anymore. He’s more interested in owning a home and living quietly like any number of Englishmen and women. But, even with that, he recognizes that as much a part of the “London landscape” he thinks he is, his color still prevents him from being a fixed and accepted part of the city. Selvon puts people inside the domiciles that Patterson wrote about – homes that she, and other like her, describe as nothing but a shell – and shows his readers human beings.

Procter finds Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* to be “less claustrophobic” than other works from that era; Selvon’s characters traverse the landscape of London and do meet in the confines of stuffy basements, but still he makes London a place for congregation and community for West Indians (Procter 46). The meeting and the mixing of the different West Indian cultures is key to understanding Selvon’s London work. In *The Lonely Londoners*, his first novel set in London, the main character Moses was born in Trinidad. To begin the story, he is on his way to meet up with an acquaintance from his home country, Galahad. Moses is an intermediary in *The Lonely Londoners*; he has been in London for many years and can help those new to the city navigate – and although he does so begrudgingly and often with sarcasm, he truly does want to
help others: "He is a true Samaritan; a man who would rather risk being a soft touch than allow himself to stand by and let his friends and countrymen come to harm" (Sandhu 150). While at the train station meeting Galahad, Moses bumps into a friend, Tolroy, who is from Jamaica. Moses says, "the English people believe that everybody who come from the West Indies come from Jamaica" (Selvon *Lonely* 28). This feeling is reiterated throughout Selvon’s London novels: in *The Housing Lark*, Jean complains that “them English people don’t know the difference” (Selvon *Lark* 22) between Trinidad and Jamaica and later, in Moses Ascending, Selvon writes “English people so stupid that the whole lot of Orientals and Blacks is the same kettle of fish as far as they are concerned” (Selvon *Ascending* 51). This sets up two important points: 1) it is difficult to assimilate and to be accepted as equal if the native Londoners cannot even recognize that there are many nations and cultures represented – it dehumanizes West Indians – and 2) the West Indians themselves know the difference, but do not let it hinder their relationships to each other – Moses' helpful, caring disposition is proof of this. We see evidence throughout *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark* of men from different countries coming together due to their similar experiences. Alison Donnell writes that "It is the possibility of unifying at a level of human interaction and mutual recognition that I believe Selvon insistently writes towards" (Donnell 2). Although it can have negative connotations and these characters are not from the same place specifically, they *are* linked by a similar past; a past filled with cultural displacement and loss of identity.

Selvon has created (or, more aptly, mirrored) a world in which all of these different cultures come together to form a larger community. In *The Lonely Londoners*, the West Indian men meet at "church" on Sunday (Selvon *Londoners* 140). Their “church” is Moses' apartment, where they will share stories and unwind after a rough week. They are originally from Trinidad
and Jamaica and New Guinea, all over the West Indies and beyond, but come together here for a sense of home; and Moses "he feel a great compassion for every one of them" (Selvon 138). This is something that Stuart Hall writes about often. In his article, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," Hall notes that

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the necessary heterogeneity, diversity; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (Hall Cinematic 713)

White people were looking at all West Indians as Jamaicans and the irony is that this may be one of the reasons that multiple cultures formed a large community through these shared experiences of similar backgrounds. Hall recognized that all of these different cultures were intersecting and saw the importance of the Diaspora, the importance of cultural growth and the recognition of identity.

This identity and community is part of the city, and in the city, “a way of life” is formed (Williams Country 160). Williams is discussing Charles Dickens’ work and how the streets in his novels become a location for people to interact. Within this interaction, Williams is interested in how Dickens has “the power of dramatizing a social and moral world in physical terms” (Williams Country 161). In other words, Dickens was able to use the city to instill authenticity upon readers. Moses, in Moses Ascending, is proud of his working hard for his life. He is talking about a generalized West Indian man and says that

In these days of pollution and environment, he is very lucky, for he can breathe the freshest air of the new day before anybody else … He should realize that if it wasn’t for him, the city would stay sleeping forever. He should look upon himself
as a pioneer what preparing the way for the city’s day, polishing the brass and chrome, washing the pots and pans. (Selvon *Ascending* 5-6)

Selvon makes the city a physical, living being that sleeps and in doing so creates a view of a generalized West Indian life within it. To Moses, West Indians are the people up early readying the city for the higher classes and, more to the point, white people. Selvon, in this quote, creates social construct and reasserts the hierarchy and hegemony seen within each novel and reinforces that there is a class issue, but also this class issue is compounded by race as discussed earlier in this chapter. The city of the West Indians is implied to be a separate world: they exist outside of the real world, breathing different air and completing the jobs left by those unwilling to do them.

In *The Lonely Londoners*, even when the men get jobs, they are menial and pay very little. Tolroy, Lewis and Moses all work "getting pot scourers all ready for packing" (Selvon Lonely 67). This is not the type of job that offers any type of stability, nor does it fulfill any person emotionally or financially. Twenty years later, Selvon was representing this same issue. In the film *Pressure* the main character, Tony, is educated, he finished school, he is smart and willing to work but cannot find a job; rather, he can find a job, just not a quality job – not the kind of job that is enticing, one that will appropriately use his skill set and fulfill his aspirations. Early in the film, Tony applies for an office job and the man interviewing him is worried about whether Tony has ever been in trouble, if he's good at cricket or football – never mind that he is educated and eager. After this interview yields a negative result, the job centre sends him to a machine factory and it becomes apparent that Tony is, essentially, Moses' son facing the same problems decades later. Much of the main conflict in *The Lonely Londoners* revolves around the characters attempting to gain employment in the white world. Sukhdev Sandhu notes that West Indian's, "then as now, were for the most part spent trying to make an honest living, and looking
for some companionship" (Sandhu 124). These men were trying to live a normal life, and work is important: it represents a way to provide sustenance and equality, it is a chance at upward mobility, a way to measure oneself against the community, it is part of public identity and how one will spend most of their time.

With employment, Selvon is able to illustrate the difficulty that West Indian men find trying to fit into their new surroundings. In his article, "Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain," Marcus Collins points out that a large portion of these men came specifically to work and, more importantly, were willing to work. But, they were being turned down for jobs—especially good ones. Then when they weren't working, they were vilified: "West Indian men were damned if they worked and damned if they didn't. They were made deskillled and then considered unskilled. They were accused of sloth and warned against ambition" (Collins 402). The trope of the lazy black man is an old one, and was perpetuated into the twentieth century and Selvon addresses the trope. Selvon realizes that lazy West Indian men do exist (as do lazy men in any culture), so he creates them as realistically as he does those that are willing to work; however, he points out when talking about Cap that "One worthless fellar go around making bad, and give the wrong impression for all the rest" (Selvon Lonely 51). It isn't as if laziness doesn't exist among us all, but what Selvon is asking is: why does laziness with West Indian men seem to be purported as the rule?

In an episode in which Galahad loses his job and resorts to attempting to kill a pigeon to eat, we see that a lack of work has a profound effect on his life: he is starving and has no choice but to kill the bird to survive, and he feels terrible about it. A white woman is feeding the pigeon and sees Galahad’s attempt and is revolted by it. In Moses Ascending, Selvon revisits this idea by writing that, “you know what English people are like when it comes to animals. I used to wish I
was a dog when I first come to Brit’n” (Selvon Ascending 49). Galahad wants to work, but can't and it seems as if animals are higher on the pecking order than he is. He is suffering for his inability to find work, yet, "day after day, Cap still alive, defying all logic and reason and convention, living without working, smoking the best cigarettes, never without women" (Selvon Lonely 61). Cap is an exception: most of the men are working hard to get by, but in London, a large place, if you are the right kind of person you can get by hustling people.

Even with this somewhat negative view, there are characters who live with hope, living with the idea that “the streets of London pave with gold” (Moses Lark 67). As confining as it can be, it is a place where Gallows can

roam in strange places that he never went before, because with these breezes that does blow over the city, you never know, one might lift up the fiver from one district and blow it into another, in somebody yard, or through an open window or something. (Selvon Lark 26).

Gallows lost a ‘fiver’ and traverses the city hunting for it, hoping for it to blow to back to him: again, like Dickens, Selvon treats the city as if it is a living being, a being that grants wishes to those that inhabit it. Selvon implies here is that someone else may have gotten lucky, and the city may have blown that fiver into someone else’s hands – again, giving human characteristics to the city. The same may just happen to Gallows. Selvon writes that “as long as Gallows belly full and he had a place to sleep, he didn’t think about tomorrow” (Selvon Lark 48). Selvon’s Gallows and Galahad oppose what is seen in the stereotypical version of the West Indian in London that Sandhu, Low and Procter show was portrayed by media. Selvon is writing characters that are hoping that lost money will return and another that is so hungry and broke that they are willing to
break the law and kill birds to eat. Selvon writes Gallows and Galahad with humility by drawing them as people that are simply looking to survive.

Survival is all that many of these characters want – they ask for little more. But the city brings a whole new set of problems that the country does not have. The skill sets that these men learned in the Caribbean do not translate to the city: the land is giving in Trinidad – Tiger is able to grow food to eat and to sell if needed. Moses chides Galahad for trying to kill the bird and says, “You think this is Trinidad? Those pigeons here to beautify the park, not to eat” (Selvon Lonely 125). The point is that in the country one can survive with no money; one can grow food, or fish, or kill their own fowl, yet in the city “men all over the place shitting their pants wondering what they would do if they lose their jobs, they have the mortgage to pay, they have the rates to pay, they have insurance to pay” (Selvon Lark 148). The worries of the city move past what one will eat for dinner into a whole new set of issues. Moses, for instance, in his older age just wants to “live in peace, and reap the harvest of the years of slaver I put in in Brit’n” (Selvon Ascending 3). Moses would like to work hard and retire like any other Londoner.

Selvon seems obsessed in his London work with this idea of survival. Williams writes that the city can be “a destructive animal, a monster” (Williams Country 159). In The Lonely Londoners, Selvon writes that London “Is a kind of place where hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity all mix up” (Selvon Lonely 29). The city can be harsh and unkind. The city becomes a character that ingests all that is happening within its limits and regurgitates the feelings back onto the inhabitants. Many characters spend their time just attempting to get money by any means possible, searching the city for jobs and the pressure begins to build. Early in the Housing Lark, we meet Bat, the main character who is staring at his wall, hoping it will “crack open and money will come pouring out” (Selvon Lark 7). Through the
entire introduction “he was thinking about ways and means of making money” (Selvon *Lark* 13). The suffocation begins to take hold as the realization about how hard it is to survive in London sinks in. Bat begins obsessing about survival:

Three pound ten rent for the basement, for one thing, and he only had three pound left out of his wages. But being as it was Sunday, he felt sure that somebody bound to drop around to see him, and he would borrow a couple of quid. (Selvon *Lark* 13)

Charlie Victor comes for the rent and Bat tries to argue with him to give him some more time. Bat, who just finished saying how important money is has to be reminded by Charlie that “all I believe in, is what bringing me money, because the money is the thing that I got to have to live in this world… if I ain’t have a job, and if I ain’t have money I might as well be dead, because I can’t live without it” (Selvon *Lark* 17). Charlie isn’t being greedy. He isn’t being rude. He’s being pragmatic, a realist. To survive in the city, money is essential. Money is hard to come by and without it, survival is impossible.

Gail Low looks at “the Caribbean settler and their strategies of survival within a hostile landscape” (Low 170). Of course money is needed to survive and eat, but Low also offers that “gatherings in rooms offer some reprieve from the hostile world outside” (Low 171). The characters often get together in *The Housing Lark* and *The Lonely Londoners*, passing rum and weed around the room while loosening up and talking. Most of the characters rent places, living in “dilapidated rooms” and meet up for “church” in places like Moses’ apartment (Selvon *Lark* 8). In *The Housing Lark* these meetings are taken a step further when Bat comes up with a scheme to put a group of his friends together to save money and buy a house. He figures that this is a great possibility to own a piece of London. This idea is so magnificent to Gallows that “he
walk away as if he drifting on a cloud. As if the plan to buy a house make a new man of him” (Selvon *Lark* 47). In place that is shown to be unfriendly and unsympathetic towards entire cultures, a place where work is hard to come by, owning a piece of property would be a piece of freedom unparalleled in their lives.

Sandhu writes that in *The Housing Lark* “Selvon’s narrator empathizes with his characters’ desire to move into proper homes and enjoins us to do so too” (Sandhu 164). Sandhu points out that Battersby’s apartment number is “13a” and takes this as foreshadowing because “thirteen is an ominous number – it suggests that Bat’s house-owning aspiration are probably doomed from the outset” (Sandhu 164). And their aspirations are doomed. The initial inquiry into purchasing a house seems daunting when an agent responds “frankly, none of my clients desire to sell their property to coloured people” (Selvon *Lark* 50). Again, Selvon’s characters find that race will undoubtedly keep them from living comfortably in London – even if they are able to get the money together they may very well be shut out. But this isn’t the only undoing because Bat, unlike Moses in *The Lonely Londoners*, seems greedy and unwilling to go the extra steps to purchase the house; rather than using the money that his friends have given him to save towards a deposit for further inquiries, he begins to spend the money so that he can live comfortably. Before he even realizes what he’s done, the money has disappeared and with it, the prospect of buying property has gone with it.

Procter writes that “the figure of the house is not merely figurative” (Procter 22). Owning a home would help a person move up on an invisible ladder of class; the house can be looked at as a symbol and an achievement, however, there is the very real aspect of owning something. In *Moses Ascending*, Moses grows – or devolves – from the compassionate and helpful friend to a singular minded person like Bat, seemingly out for only himself, who envies
people who are “buying houses and renovating them to sell and make big profit” (Selvon Ascending 1). This dealing in real estate is a city idea: each piece of land is owned, each building is owned and someone is profiting off of everything. Moses is so enamored with the idea that when a friend is selling his home, he realizes that “if I didn’t make my move now, I would be doomed to the basement brigade for the rest of my life” (Selvon Ascending 3). Moses becomes a landlord and makes money by renting apartments; he has a tangible piece of property that he feels that he is superior to, for instance, Galahad. Galahad is involved in the black power movement in Moses Ascending, a movement that Moses finds to be futile, as he just wants to live quietly and keep to himself.

By the end of the Moses Trilogy, Moses feels that he has made it “From the basement to the penthouse,” (Selvon Migrating 26). This can be used as a metaphor: from Trinidad to London; bottom to the top; country to metropole. But, this statement works just as well in its literal movement: each character is trying to make it out of the basement, better their lives by owning something, by being like everyone else in the city. But, racial issues prevent assimilation – and not just assimilation. Race prevents Selvon’s characters from living comfortably as seen in the job and housing issues they face. Lisa M. Kabesh puts it well by saying that in Selvon’s London “migrants discovered that systemic discrimination limited their access to jobs and housing, resulting in an informal but pernicious system of segregation in the metropole” (Kabesh 2). This inherent “system of segregation” keeps entire cultures down, and what results is an inability to totally mesh into the city life, creating a separation. Anxiety is formed around identity and, as I will show in the next section, confusion arises as to where one belongs.
II. An Enigma that Never Arrived

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams wrote about how "an old order keeps reappearing" (Williams 35), about how there is a constant classic view of the world in each era's works; people continue to dream about earlier, simpler times and this idea holds true with Caribbean film and literature. Consider Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom*, in which Bita Plant returns from seven years of education while living in England and heads back to her hometown in Jamaica – upon her return, she has a deep-rooted nostalgia and fondness for her childhood. McKay write, "Bita felt the simple life of her girlhood was childlike and unconscious" (McKay 41). It was a feeling that was ingrained, a feeling of respect that allowed to help shape Bita as a person; in the end, it's the combination of her education and cultural memory that make her who she is.

Williams also says that he “could find no place, no period, in which we could seriously rest” (Williams *Country* 35). For many characters in Selvon’s work, the idea of the Caribbean as home is a helpful idea, something to look back upon fondly. Even though characters want to move forward, they are constantly looking back. The Caribbean is a place that, if worse comes to worse, will welcome its children back with open arms. It is a place that many of these characters have in common, and talk about together. The idea is a large part of the shared diasporic culture. But for many, according to James Procter “the imagination of black British settlement is itself by no means ‘settled’ across the postwar period” (Procter 15). The characters tend to be in flux with their thoughts and identity. To begin this section I will look at how, in Selvon’s novels, characters look toward the Caribbean from afar. There is often a fond recollection of the past, but over the years the character Moses seems to change his feelings and he prefers to think of himself as totally British. Finally, I will discuss how in the film *Pressure*, Tony, the protagonist,
born in Britain with no memory of Trinidad and no idea of home to fall back on. Tony has a jumbled identity that keeps him stuck between his British and Trinidadian selves and his London origin goes a long way to explaining way Selvon wrote him as such.

In *The Housing Lark*, Charlie Victor collects rent for a living; he’s hard on his own people because he, as shown in the previous section, feels the pressure of survival and puts an onus on money over everything else. He doesn’t normally hang out with his friends, but goes on a day trip so that he can “grab a chance to mingle with OUR PEOPLE” (Selvon *Lark* 110). The scene from which this excerpt is taken comes from a visit to Hampton Court. To visit Hampton Court, Bat hires a bus and plans an excursion like ones he used to take in Trinidad: “nearly every weekend Bat chartering a bus and going round by his friends inviting them to excursion in Mayaro, in Los Iros, in Columbus Bay, in Toco and Blanchisseuse” (Selvon *Lark* 104). Bat, to appeal to his friends and neighbors uses his memory of the Caribbean to come up with a way to make money. A large group of West Indians visits the court and Sukhdev Sandhu notes that they all dress in their finest clothes to visit this historical British landmark and are balanced against a castle that was “inclined to keep black aliens as far at bay as possible” (Sandhu 165). Here is a group of societal outcasts heading to a place where Selvon can have both worlds, British and West Indian, collide.

Bat knew what he was doing giving the people a chance to relax, “laugh skiff-skiff and have a good time” (Selvon *Lark* 111). Late in the scene,

    Bat put his head in Matilda lap and looking up at blue skies. If you ever want to hear old-talk no other time better than one like this when men belly full, four crates of beer and eight bottle of rum finish, and a summer sun blazing in the sky” (Selvon *Lark* 123)
The reason that this scene is so important, is that Selvon injects the entire day with bits of British history and shows how out of place the characters are; they jumble history during their tour of the grounds and the highlight of the entire trip is, “eating out in the open” (Selvon Lark 122). The characters get away from the grey city – they leave the bricks, mortar and hustle to eat in a park and unwind. The visuals are of summertime, Caribbean-like scenes in which they ‘hear old-talk’ under ‘blue skies’ while the sun is ‘blazing’. Even Charlie Victor who is so “Anglicized that he even eating a currant bun and drinking a cup of tea for lunch” goes on the trip (Selvon Lark 110). He is described as somewhat of a sell-out, and yet even he is “getting in the mood, and his foot keeping time with the calypsos. When the bottle of rum pass around for the first time, he shake his head, but you could see him watching it like a lost man in a desert who sight a mirage” (Selvon Lark 111). The majority of this novel is about finding a home, and the search for money to do so, but this scene shows a reprieve. Raymond Williams relays how he had to move to the city and be educated on city ways to understand “what country life, country literature, really meant: a prepared and persuasive cultural history” (Williams Country 6). In this scene Selvon has his characters let go completely: they are living off of their memories, forgetting that they are in the city and allowing their cultural memory to let them uncoil.

The characters are relaxing near the banks of the Thames, eating the food of their childhoods and discussing their histories. According to Bat, the history that they are discussing is “a bit mixed up, I think, but it’s English history.” To that, someone replies, “We don’t know any other kind. That’s all they used to teach we in school.” Battersby then retorts, “That’s because OUR PEOPLE ain’t have no history” (Selvon Lark 125). For my purposes here, it’s useful to consider that the history Selvon’s characters do have is their memories. In the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy discusses the way that colonial cultures have been left out of history and he writes
that Caribbean artists of all kinds “have created a new topography of loyalty and identity in which the structures and presuppositions of the nation state have been left behind” (Gilroy 16). Essentially, art, memory and diaspora are a way to continue culture, to instill a past that is true and helpful. For instance, the mere memory of home gives Moses some sense of relief at times. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses relays that

> life really hard for the boys in London. This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn’t get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell. Here is not like home where you have friends all about. In the beginning you would think that is a good thing, that nobody minding your business, but after a while you want to get in company, you want to go on excursion to the sea, you want to go and play football and cricket. Nobody in London does really accept you. (Selvon *Londoners* 130).

This is a sad reality for Moses. He lives a lonely life in this novel and it is hard for him. But, in this passage there is the memory of home and the similar background these characters have in common allow them to mesh, to create a community with like-minded individuals.

However, Moses grows from longing for home, to being an advocate for “Ol’ Brit’n.” In *Moses Ascending*, Trinidad and much of the West Indies have gained independence from Britain. By this novel, Moses has let go of people’s search for freedom and the fight for equality that he was interested in during *The Lonely Londoners*. Gabrielle Watling stresses the fact that in *Moses Ascending*, Moses disavows his “Caribbean pasts in favour of Britain’s legitimate history” (Watling 69). Moses is now a British citizen and he is obsessed with a tenant he believes is “importing illegal immigrants”; he is also obsessed with thwarting the black power movement that is taking place in his basement (Selvon *Ascending* 61). Moses becomes more British than
anything, afraid of what is happening underground he cries, “the clan was gathering in my basement to plot and plan the overthrow of the White Race and the Uprising of the Blacks” (Moses Ascending 27). By *Moses Migrating*, Selvon considers himself “an enigma that never arrived” (Selvon *Migrating* 25). He is the epitome of confused, stuck between the two worlds he has known during his life, but heavily leaning towards one.

The story of *Moses Migrating* revolves around Moses’ taking a trip with his white friends, Bob and Jeannie, to Trinidad. When Moses leaves England, he is unsure if he will stay in Trinidad or come back. Upon leaving, Moses is in a particularly self-reflective mood. Some of his contemplations shed light on his feelings about his mindset before he came to London. These reflections also give a generalized idea of how many emigrants felt when descending on England for the first time. Moses arrived on the same port from which he is now leaving and recalls how my heart bounded as they sent a tug to take our luggage off the ship, for as we anchored a little way offshore, and I could see the greenery and the coast hills, the pretty little houses, and seagulls hovering and fluttering around, waiting to drop a welcome on the heads of we black adventurers. (Selvon *Migrating* 45)

His musing moves from excitement and interest in the landscape, to a metaphor for the race relations he will see. With fresh eyes, he can see the future and the beautiful things, but telling this story in retrospect he inserts the coldness and propensity for pessimism that the city has instilled in him. This pessimism shows through in the two later Moses novels. Nonetheless, Moses is recalling fondly his experiences and annoyed that Galahad, who is dropping Moses off at the port, is not going to miss their friendship while he is gone. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses helped Galahad upon his arrival, but now Galahad is trying to usher Moses out because “his eyes were flickering around, assessing the possibility of picking up a few passengers to take
back to London” (Selvon Migrating 46). The implication here is that Moses is heading back to the country life, while Galahad is still in the midst of the hustle and bustle of city life and has no time for emotion. The mere idea of the country has put Moses into a pensive, thoughtful mood, while Galahad is already on to the next thing. But still, this new and miserable older version of Moses “can’t conceive of anyone stupid like me to leave Brit’n” (Selvon Migrating 46).

Even with the coming visit to Trinidad, and the possibility of staying, Moses views the city as the best option for living. Once in Trinidad, he barely leaves his hotel, he is staying in what Selvon calls, “de-Hilton.” He feels more comfortable in “the sanctuary of the hotel than on the streets of Trinidad where he grew up (Selvon Migrating 90). The hotel has the amenities of the city and white tourists everywhere – he fits in better at de-Hilton because he is now, according to himself “just a loyal Briton” (Selvon Migrating 52). He spends his time drinking and waiting to head back to England until he meets a young Trinidadian woman, Doris. He falls in love with Doris and this makes him want to stay in Trinidad to marry her. However, with Doris, interestingly, Moses runs into a character-type discussed earlier. She is like Moses once was, like Tiger is throughout his arch: she wants to marry “a decent man and get out of Trinidad” (Selvon Migrating 115). Doris is forward-thinking, she’s enamored with the possibility of moving to London. Meanwhile, Moses seems confused about his past and his future, unsure as to what he wants because, oddly, Doris makes Moses want to stay in Trinidad and with her wanting to leave things get muddled.

For Carnival, Moses is “playing mas” and dresses as Britain to prove his Englishness to the Trinidadians. To play with him he chooses his white friend Jeannie rather than Doris. Doris is supremely devastated and this destroys any chance that Moses may have had with her. Susheila Nasta makes an intriguing point about this: “Moses cannot escape his role as masquerader even
when carnival itself is over” (Nasta *Migrating* 17). For a moment in this story, Moses found a bit of home and was willing to settle down. He began to revert to his original, Trinidadian self, but in the end, he has been so split apart that he chooses Britain and a white woman over Trinidad and a black woman. Moses is so accustomed to mimicking the, as Gabrielle Watling puts it, “borrowed guise of a Western cliché, the English writer and landlord” (Watling 72) that he heads back to England with his Carnival trophy, hoping to brag about his “loyal impersonation of Britannia” (Selvon *Migrating* 194).

Moses ends up back in London, probably to finish his days as a crotchety, curmudgeon. But, that does not erase the fact that there is a feeling of longing in *The Housing Lark* and in *The Lonely Londoners* that can be somewhat quelled with memory. This works for many of Selvon’s characters and the aged Moses is an exception – albeit an important exception when considering the duality of culture. In any case, all of the novels show a certain division in identity based upon the warring cultural ideas. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy says,

> striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. . . . Unfinished identities . . . stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world. (Gilroy 1)

As seen in the Introduction and Chapter One of this study, a hierarchy existed and the Crown Colony instilled superiority to the British way of life over any other form of culture. As seen in Chapter Two, a feeling of home was created in the Caribbean in Selvon’s literature; this includes indigenous cultures and all of the cultures that were coalescing. The push and pull between cultures, to use Gilroy’s terminology, created a ‘double consciousness’.
The curious case of Moses is just one way that Selvon manifests a double consciousness. In *Pressure* the main character, Tony, his parents were born in Trinidad and moved to London to give themselves what they consider to be a better life. Horace Ové directed *Pressure*, Sam Selvon is billed as cowriter with Ové. The film starts with still photographs of a Trinidadian landscape.

The first filmic picture the viewer gets is not of London where the film is set, but rather the memory of the Caribbean – the viewer, in this way, is like Tony. We start with images, not reality. Tony does not have a Caribbean memory because he was born in London.
This last shot is key to understanding the grand scheme of this film. There are two adults and one young man; we can assume that this sketch represents Tony’s parents and his older brother, Colin, on the boat to England from Trinidad. His brother looks old enough to have a memory of the Caribbean, at least some semblance of a recollection. From the beginning, Ové and Selvon are well aware of the importance a Caribbean memory has and, from this point, the Caribbean is visually withheld from the rest of the movie.

In *Pressure*, Ové uses the city's landscape to thematic advantage; with framing, he helps the viewer to feel the alienation that Tony feels. Martin Lefebvre writes about the way that shot composition can be considered along with other elements of the scene such as "pictures (landscape) and sound (taskape)" (Lefebvre).

In this shot, Tony is on the left side of the frame, his friends are on the right; they are separated physically by a telephone pole. Tony is divided from the other guys, then the sound of the city comes in and along with that, we hear the voices, the languages all meshed together with different Caribbean accents; some of his friends are from Jamaica, some Trinidad, but Tony's
voice does not mesh, he has a British accent – and he's the only one. There are multiple layers to Tony's estrangement from the crowd in this small scene: the pole, his accent and, lastly, his clothes. Tony is dressed in a nice, “smart” suit. The guys dig at him for dressing as such and laugh at his strange pronunciations –– one of his friends tells him that he's smarter than any white man, but he "will never make it in this country" (Ové).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Tony is educated and has finished school; he is smart and willing to work but cannot find a job. Rather, he can find a job, just not a quality job – not the kind of job that is enticing, one that will appropriately use his skill set and fulfill his aspirations.

This shot of Tony walking is after a long day of being turned down for jobs. He is on the left side of the frame, the Thames is on the right; as he walks with his head down a white man on a river boat passes by him. Tony had returned home after a terrible interview experience and was chastised by his mother for not being able to find work. Jim Pines wrote that Tony's mother tries "to impose a set of values and expectations which are based on an ideal notion of the complete assimilation of their British-born progeny" (Pines 31). We see Tony with his head down,
ambling along the shore slowly, alone, after a rough day of being unable to fit in anywhere – while a white man in his advanced and mechanized mode of travel, navigates the water. The shot reiterates the technology and power of the British; they are navigating the water while the young displaced Tony, who is in London via Trinidad, is walking, downtrodden. This is a key moment for Tony: this is where he begins to realize that he is never going to totally fit in anywhere, but he must begin to form his own identity within the context of London among people with a similar cultural history.

This is not an easy task – Tony does not have “church” in his life like the characters in *The Lonely Londoners* do. His personal and cultural identities are both unclear. Tony is struggling, being turned down for jobs – his mother and father push him to continue trying to join the work force, which seems impossible. Meanwhile his older brother, Colin maligns Tony for “acting white” and trying to make a living in that world. Ashley Clark points out that Tony's brother, Colin is "unable to grasp that Tony's experience as a young black man born in Britain is different to his own upbringing in Trinidad" (Clark 112). We never see any Trinidadian scenes other than the opening photographs; however, the idea of the photographs exist in the characters memories as an idealized, invisible landscape similar to that which can be seen in moments when Moses and his friends “get together now and then to talk about things back home” (Selvon *Londoners* 130). Tony does not have that, nor does he have someone that is willing him to talk with him about the past – he is forced to move forward and that is all. The idea of Trinidad in this case, is what Lefebvre calls "temporalized landscape": an imaginary landscape outside of the pictorial (Lefebvre 76). This brings an interesting point about how the Caribbean is withheld from *Pressure*. 
Tony's father owns a small shop in which he specializes in selling Caribbean goods; essentially, he is disseminating physical Caribbean objects to West Indians, but forgetting to forge a cultural memory for his son. In one scene, Colin heads to the shop and grabs an avocado for breakfast. Back at the family apartment, he begins to open the avocado and offers Tony some.

The framing is, again, clever in separating the men by not only the table, but also the window and their dress: the scene paints a picture of just how different these men are. Tony says that he doesn't like "avocado." Colin laughs, makes a joke by ribbing on Tony, implying that this is a food that is grown in Trinidad and what he is opening is not an "avocado" but rather, he uses the Trinidadian word, "Zaboca." Colin doesn't explain it to his brother, he laughs and pokes fun at him for speaking like an Englishman and snaps, "your taste in food is as bad as your taste in music" (Ové).

Tony doesn't like the food from his native land, he doesn't use the words from Trinidad that his brother does putting Tony, according to David Wilson "in the middle, a black born and educated in Britain with no dream of 'home' to fall back on and no future in a white society" (Wilson 141). Tony is not from Trinidad, he's never seen the water or the beaches there first
hand, nor is he a true British man; he's a new kind of person, one that neither West Indians, nor the British completely understand. There is no empathy or real advice from Colin, there is no recognition of his skills by possible employers. Those born in Trinidad, at least they have their memories of where they came from; this is the confused identity Tony is trying to create in London.

He doesn't fit anywhere so he joins the black power movement, with which his brother is involved. He joins, as Ashley Clark noted, "not, one suspects through any burning desire for political agency, but rather because his other avenues of advancement have disappeared" (Clark 112). You never get the sense that Tony is totally sold on this route; in the final scene, we see a group of people protesting the police. Ové lets the camera watch random protestors for a few minutes before he gives us a tight close up of Tony's face.

Then the camera slowly pulls back until we see Tony clearly: notice his clothes, they've changed – he's dressing a bit more like his friends. From here, Ové pulls back to a medium shot to show where the protesters are standing. Then, the sound of rain picks up and it begins to pour.
The world is no longer symbolically raining on Tony, the environment is dumping it right on his head – he is frazzled, annoyed. As he walks, he breaks his sign, continues to picket while holding the sign above his head to shield himself from the rain. Protesting seems futile, but the reality of his using the sign to shield himself from the weather is functional. He doesn't leave, he sticks it out. This final scene, the fact Tony is able to protest something that he is against shows the city, finally, as a liberating space. Certainly this scene can be considered somewhat sublime with the rain coming down, and the large buildings looming. But, as vast and frightening as it is, as difficult as it is to navigate, in the city, Tony has found a voice and can choose any number of paths and meet with like-minded individuals – or at least people with similar problems.

The characters in the London novels face a number of problems, and all of these problems are compounded by race. Raymond Williams accounts for class in *The Country and the City*. He explains, as I’ve shown here, how the modern world draws lower classes from the country to the city for the hope of a better quality of life. What he does not account for is race. Selvon writes about a London cityscape that is exacting and unforgiving to those that seem alien. Selvon’s work culminates, I think, with an excellent film script that shows that how the generations born in London will face similar problems. Race prevents total assimilation in Tony’s instance, and being born in Britain hinders Tony from understanding his Caribbean past. In *Pressure*, the city is harsh and defining oneself can prove to be difficult there, but what *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark* show is that looking backwards can go a long way in helping – even if only for a brief respite. A conclusion to draw may be that adults should be conscious of instilling a proper historical past in the youth – I don’t mean this in just the context of these novels, or with these specific cultures, I mean it in a global context. Either way, Selvon shows that the past is just important as the now; both he and Ové were keenly aware of the
messages they were trying to convey: they were both conscious of the significance of cultural memory and the power of using the environment around them to their advantage to espouse these themes.
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