

# *The Literary London Journal*

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**J. Dillon Brown, *Migrant Modernism: Postwar London and the West Indian Novel*, paperback, 246 pages, Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2013, \$27.50. ISBN: 978-0-8139-3394-8.**

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*The Literary London Journal*, Volume 11 Number 1 (Spring 2014)

Focusing on the Windrush writers who arrived in London in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, J. Dillon Brown offers a thorough – and exhaustively researched – background into the key literary figures of this group. In so doing, he exposes the often rejecting reception of these writers by remnants of the imperial notion that remained in solidarity after the war: namely, those canonical English writers who make up The Movement (most notably, Kingsley Amis). While the book focuses on London in the 1950s, it does not delve into the treatment of the city and the space it provides for these marginalised writers. However, Dillon offers keen insights into the Modernist underpinnings of the emergent generation of Windrush literary figures. Dillon begins with an exposé of The Movement’s shunning of Modernism and explains how these celebrated writers revert to the literary mind-set of imperial England. From this point, he goes on to provide close readings of Edgar Mittelholzer, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon and Roger Mais and concludes with a chapter on Kamau Braithwaite, Wilson Harris and V. S. Naipaul as they mark a shift in voices from West Indian writers to the Caribbean Artists Movement in a defining moment in Great Britain’s relationship with immigrants, the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. As Dillon suggests, through a largely European concept, then, Anglophone Caribbean literature conveys an anticolonial message.

From the onset of *Migrant Modernism*, Dillon recognises the opposition to Modernist leanings in a postwar England. Although Dillon intimates that his study is a departure from previous treatments of Windrush writers in London, claiming that the texts (such as John Clement Ball’s *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* and John McLeod’s *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the*

*Metropolis*) 'do not extensively consider the ways in London ... worked to mold these writers' literary output' (15), he fails to offer a sustained treatment of the city and the space it afforded them beyond the early part of the text. However, he importantly shows how 'the West Indian literary aesthetic ... emerged out of an intimate, if antagonistic, relationship to wider tendencies in postwar British literature' (27). These 'tendencies' are promulgated by the 'Insiders' – the writers who make up The Movement – and are directly opposed to those writing on the margins in 1950s London. English literary figures like Kingsley Amis and Donald Davie who represented The Movement remained 'backward-looking' and 'tradition-bound' (41), and it is against this narrow-minded worldview that the West Indian writers published their Modernist-inflected novels.

In his treatment of Edgar Mittelholzer, 'a cantankerous, contrarian figure' (44), Dillon champions the novelist's striving for literary experimentation. Although the recipient of dismissive critical reviews, he remained 'dedicated to experimenting with the manifold possibilities of literary composition, an artist determined to produce something new and uniquely its own' (45). Clearly, this is where Mittelholzer stands apart from other West Indian writers, and as Dillon posits, his 'modernist techniques . . . can be seen to signify. . . [his] strenuous attempts to imagine . . . a satisfying way of making a new (West Indian) form of literary art via the old (European) forms' (50). As the chapter proceeds, Dillon provides a carefully nuanced reading of *A Morning at the Office* (published in 1950) and its divided critical reception. While Mittelholzer highlighted a European tradition inherent in Caribbean mores, his idea was not well received in postwar London. Dillon also provides a shorter study of *Latticed Echoes* (1960) and *Thunder Returning* (1961). In each, the similar strain reverberates and seems to ask 'how to make a new, contrary tradition out of the materials of an older, repellant one', concluding that 'one must still necessarily pay heed to the peregrinations of the literary past' (Dillon 72).

Where Mittelholzer showcases literary experimentation in his novels, George Lamming writes in the vein of Modernist figures such as Joyce and Woolf. While noting the similarities between the Barbadian writer and Virginia Woolf, Dillon reveals 'his commitment to avoiding simplification' (74) and, in his later novels (*Natives of My Person* and *Water with Berries*), draws parallels with *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Here Dillon reveals a double jeopardy which West Indian writers faced: first, they were seen as outsiders because of their race and ethnic origins; second, the Modernist was also seen as Other in postwar England. Lamming, with his fellow Caribbean writers, wrote against:

An English exoticism that tended to read West Indians as simple, unthinking (and unworking) residents of a tropical paradise. In this reading, the category of (modernist) outsider functions to allay the threat of assimilation, while the invocation of a highly intellectualized cultural tradition (modernism) strategically disrupts, on several levels, the dismissive reduction of West Indian artists to simple, natural creature of merely anthropological interest. (77)

Lamming's novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), was criticised for its incoherence and marked by Joycean tendencies of prewar Modernism. The critical reaction to Lamming's writing gets increasingly offensive, as one reviewer remarks,

'He is best when he just talks on about London and the Caribbean' (82). The reductive tone of such critiques perpetuates imperialist attitudes instead of recognising the postcolonial message in Lamming's literature. As a result, what may become lost is Lamming's call for the reader to be accountable and 'question, challenge, and oblige reconsideration of the uses to which language has been and continues to be put' (102).

Critics of Samuel Selvon take a negative stance on his writing, and even his fellow Windrush writers view him as a West Indian folk writer. While he has been compared to Joyce, Selvon's works have been dismissed as simple and as essentially Trinidadian. Dillon attempts to shed new light on Selvon, however, as he examines his first novel, *A Brighter Sun*, and second, *An Island is a World*, before discussing his widely-known text, *The Lonely Londoners*. In doing so, Dillon traces the maturation of Selvon's craft as well as his pronouncement that 'a sense of community is missing' (124) for the West Indian in London. He notes, 'The novel thus seems to have strengthened the sense of perceived difference between English and West Indian people, perhaps even reinforcing British expectations of "natural" and "simple" writing and a childlike immigrant people' (129).

Already well known in his native Jamaica, Roger Mais entertained some notoriety as a writer of social protest literature. While Mais may be recognised for his use of vernacular, experimental writing and themes of nationalism, Dillon notes that he is best known for his overtly political views as seen in *The Hills Were Joyful Together*. He also connects Dylan Thomas's play, *Under Milkwood*, with Mais's first novel, *Brother Man*, as an example of the postwar debate between the Movement and Modernism. While Thomas is recognised as a British Modernist, his Welsh heritage creates a boundary between him and writers of the Movement. He, like Mais and the West Indian figures investigated in this study, remain on the periphery of discourse. Dillon's treatment of Mais's third novel, *Black Lightning*, shows 'a steady shift in attitude toward the appropriate means of art' (166) if read with his first two novels. Although his writing career was cut short with his untimely death in 1955, Mais's work continues to influence Caribbean writers and critics – and his experimentation with language (much like Lamming's) remains championed.

As he concludes his rigorous study, Dillon points to the importance of the year 1962 for West Indians in Britain due to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act which 'decisively restricted the entry of new migrants from the entire ex-empire' (169). Importantly, there was a shift in identity as 'West Indian' was replaced with 'Caribbean' or 'Black British'. Dillon points to the problematic 'consolidation' of these identities as postcolonial (169) and discusses the notoriety of Caribbean writers such as V.S. Naipaul (whose awards include the Nobel Prize in literature in 2001), Kamau Braithwaite (who formed the Caribbean Artists Movement) and Wilson Harris (who 'has a particular pertinence for an understanding of Caribbean literature's modernist inheritance') (179). Considering the burgeoning field of studies of contemporary London – and the cacophony of multi-ethnic voices who write within the confines of the Metropolis – Dillon reveals the tensions of migration at a pivotal time in Britain's history.

Women are noticeably absent in Dillon's text, a point he acknowledges early on. While drawing from the West Indian writers who were the subject of the BBC series, *Caribbean Voices*, the argument is thus limiting and male-centric – albeit meticulous in its study. Once you get past the dense writing in the first section, *Migrant Modernism* delivers in its quest to give a voice to the Windrush writers who were often silenced through antagonistic critical receptions, the break from Modernism in the postwar years and blatant racism. *Migrant Modernism: Postwar London and the West Indian Novel* lends the reader much to digest in its examination of Windrush writers and importantly, the emergence of an Anglophone Caribbean literature against the contested backdrop of Modernism.

**To Cite This Article:**

Rebecca Steinberger, 'Review of J. Dillon Brown, *Migrant Modernism: Postwar London and the West Indian Novel*, Volume 11, Number 1 (Spring 2014): 87–90. Online at <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/spring2014/steinberger.pdf>.