

Voice and Identity *in Sam Selvon's Late Short Fiction*

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"VOICE" HAS BECOME problematic in contemporary critical usage. A term that harks back to Aristotle's "ethos," it is associated with that which individuates an utterance in a literary work. In prose fiction, it is the personality behind the narrator and the range of tones that emerge from the speaking personae. According to T. S. Eliot, voice may be expressed by the author "talking to himself," addressing an audience, or creating a character or persona who speaks (89). Behind these voices it is assumed that there is an organizing presence. It should be understood here, however, that the question of "authorial presence" cannot be taken for granted. The "I" of a literary narrative, according to current structuralist and poststructuralist theory, is "no more than the wake of all the codes which are its sole constituent elements: subjectivity, as Barthes says in *S/Z*, is not the ship but its wake, not the plow but its furrow" (Elliott 95). In the final analysis, the "I" becomes decentred and an illusion. For the purpose of this paper, these complexities are associated with the concept of voice.

In his theory of utterance, Bakhtin introduces two relevant aspects of voice: the idea of "intonation," which for him is "eminently social" and is always at the boundary "between the verbal and the nonverbal, the said and the unsaid" (Todorov 46);¹ and the idea of "dialogism" or, as Julia Kristeva would put it, "intertextuality." This view is based on the notion that all "utterance" is interrelated. For Bakhtin,

No member of a verbal community can ever find words in the language that are neutral, exempt from the aspirations and evaluations of the other, uninhabited by the other's voice. On the contrary,

he receives the word by the other's voice and it remains filled with that voice. (Todorov 48)

The voice in Selvon's latest short fiction (particularly in "Her Achilles Heel" (1980), "Ralphie at the Races" (1982), "Turning Christian" (1986), and "Zeppi's Machine" (1987)—the stories on which this essay focuses), though personal and individualistic, is layered and multiplex, ranging from that of the ordinary Trinidadian narrator, to those of the folk-philosopher, the informed immigrant observer, the comic entertainer, the tongue-in-cheek commentator, and the subtle manipulator of the unsayable, where silence provides weighty commentary. Selvon's fictional voice eventually assumes a Bakhtinian dialogical or intertextual quality with resonances in his other works and—with slight modification—in the prose fiction of other Caribbean writers.

In "Her Achilles Heel," the first sentence of the leading paragraph provides the pivotal principle around which the story is constructed: "there was a great deal of anguish because so much had been left unsaid and undone" (182). The narrator's voice derives its greatest poignancy from what is said by this agonizing silence. Selvon allows the unsayable to speak in terms of its operations of "marking a threshold in the ways of knowing" (Budick and Iser xiii). Underlying the speaker's predicament is the tragic loss of sensitivity and affection by the people for the land he has always loved even more than he loves the people. "They have always forgotten the land, and they do not include it in their quarrels about their rights and equalities." They ignore the land so much that if they were displaced "they would not know the difference." "They cannot hear the *keskidee* or see the bluejean darting into the hibiscus fence, although this is what the argument is all about" (182). The irony of an argument occurring without knowledge of its constituent ideas by the arguers contrasts with the narrator's unquestioning acceptance of what the land communicated; for him "it was not asking too much for it to make the decision for me" (182). He "found peace when the land, at daybreak, said go" (183).

The voices of the narrator, the people, and the land coincide and merge with an utterance by Wordsworth, whose voice as sonneteer seems to inhabit that of Selvon's narrative persona:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
 Little do we see in Nature that is ours;
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
 The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
 The winds that will be howling at all hours,
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
 It moves us not.—Great God! (Sonnet XIV)

This romantic lament for the loss of the heart's response to Nature is subtly embodied in Selvon's narrator's sense of bewilderment at the islanders' indifference to the moving message of the land. He can articulate his own disillusionment only through what remains unsaid by an unnamed friend, who represents the attitudes of her fellow islanders. The concluding statement of the story completes the cycle begun in the first sentence of the introductory paragraph, as the narrator departs from the island (Trinidad) with the words: "So much left unsaid, undone, it saddens me" (189).

Selvon begins the story *a posteriori* with the protagonist informing us that at the end of a week's stay in Trinidad he is forced to decide whether he should stay another week or leave. The land helps him to decide. The story then interweaves brief moments in which his friend expresses her preoccupation with her daily routine between her workplace at the library and her well-to-do neighbourhood. The narrator wistfully recalls his past familiarity with the natural flora and laments the lost spontaneity of local Trinidadians who are now so caught up in advertising any cultural activity as a commercial venture that they lose touch with the land. The narrator picks a pussytail so that this flower "could listen to all the serious intelligent talk" (184). His search for intimacy with his friend is futile. In all of the many statements, actions, and known facts that define the psyche and the environment of the island is the unspoken text of silent gaps pregnant with meaning. Sense of place becomes, in Iser's words, a "bridge between the functioning of negativity and articulation of the unsayable" (Budick and Iser xv).

Thus paradoxically from an inability to verbalize there flows a sequence of negative experiences and statements which domi-

nate the story: "I do not know who the people are anymore" (186); "One cannot get a balata to buy in the market, and when you ask a youngster if pwadoo is in season he laughs a Third World laughter. You don't spin top again, then?" (187); "You don't pitch marble and play three-hole?" (187); "I never saw a humming bird" (188); "That's not money . . . that's not real money" (188); "We never had a highlighted moment" (189). This litany of negative utterances by the speaker and the islanders with whom he converses emphasizes his sense of estrangement and displacement. In addition, Selvon conveys through this mood of negation an unstated but inferred comment on Trinidad society: that to its people Trinidad, as the native landscape, has become a place of spatial nothingness. In this way, the story functions according to Theodore Adorno's "negative aesthetic" in which art must be negative in order to "bear witness to the negativity of social existence" (qtd. in Burns 141).

The principal speaker of the story expresses his feelings by negating what is said by the woman with whom he converses. In one instance at her house, he yearns for a special moment with her and notices that she is feeding watchdogs, drinking Haitian rum and getting ready to go on a date. Unable to salvage any moment with her, he says, "Listen, listen, listen, she didn't say, I've got my life to lead—you think I'm going to allow you to upset my routine and cry again after you've gone" (189). The woman makes no explicit statement; out of her silence the speaker construes the nature of their relationship and of her attitude and values. Her unspoken words become the spatial gap which serves as a metaphor for the human void, one which can be humanized only by allowing what "she did not say" to mediate between extremes of cynical doubt and the fear of isolation.

The title of the story is contextualized significantly within a non-event, anticipated at the threshold of the narrator's mind. In a supermarket, he pushes a trolley against the Achilles heel of his friend, producing from her "anger and fighting words" the unfulfilled verbalization: "I could have kneeled and kissed the spot, because I was beginning to wonder if the security zone had extended to her heart" (187). This moment betrays the weak

point (Achilles heel) falsely protected by "the security zones" Trinidadians use to preserve appearances. The voice that ultimately speaks to us then is that intonational social one which Bakhtin tells us occupies the boundary between the verbal and the nonverbal, the said and the unsaid.

In "Ralphie at the Races," the narrative voice is less complex, shifting from the intermediate position between verbal and nonverbal to become more explicitly verbal but with a variety of revelatory nuances that are centred on the protagonist, Ralphie. While the narrator, with consistent omniscience, relates the story in the third person, Selvon restricts the point of view to Ralphie, allowing him to reveal many facets of his character and behaviour. We enter his thoughts, discover his motivations, listen to his interior dialogues, listen to his self-evaluation, watch his emotional anxiety, hear his ethno-cultural view of the host country he has just entered, judge his misrepresentation of other people, observe his hopes and dreams, witness his feelings and disappointments, watch his suspicions, note his confusion and bafflement, and follow his personal reflections. The pivotal consciousness through which all of this flow of information is filtered is the unpretentious voice of the unnamed narrator.

The narration begins with Ralphie, a "landed immigrant from tropical Trinidad" (190), standing before a narrow mirror in his bathroom, trying to find his lost image which has "vanished off the mirror" despite the twisting of his head and the hunching of his shoulders. The reader is drawn by this image into a self-contemplative world and eventually into Ralphie's thinking about the climatic conditions of being in Calgary in the summer. "He got to thinking that he was falling into a rut" (190), and not wanting to be like other immigrants who get into a daily routine, he reluctantly agrees to go with his friend Angus, a fellow Trinidadian, to the races. Before they arrive at the race-track, the narrator takes us in and out of Ralphie's thoughts: his realization that in Canada "the only walking anyone did was to and from a parking lot or shopping in the malls" (192); his resolution that he must exercise because he was out of shape; his thirst for an ice-cold beer; his irritation with his soreness from walking in the sun; his expectation of money from Angus to

repair his car; and his anticipation that Angus's telephone call meant that he had lost his money at the races. The reader hears a voice presenting the action sequentially in standard English but he or she is mentally and psychologically more engaged by what occurs inside the mind of Ralphie.

There is, however, a subtle construction of sense of place while we follow the patterns of Ralphie's thought. We get the feel of Calgary as a hot city in the "frozen North" (190), of the "Calgary Tower" as a tourist attraction, of the shopping malls and green-belt areas, and of fashion-conscious Canadians "who seemed to have special clothing for every . . . thing, curling, golfing, baseball, fishing, ice-skating" (194). Eventually we are drawn into the environment of Stampede Park where the climactic event occurs. Some of these details are filtered through the sensory responses of Ralphie; others through the stereotypical viewpoint of the narrative; and others are merged through the consciousness of Ralphie as an immigrant and the general perspective presented by the narrator whose voice is that of an outsider exhibiting, as Selvon did, an understanding of Canada from having lived there for a number of years.

As the action moves to the final event of Ralphie's loss of his ticket despite his lucky guess about the number of the winning horse, the narrator's voice becomes more detached and the tone more humorous. One gets the impression that this view of Calgary is coloured by a knowledge of English people not unlike that seen in *The Lonely Londoners*. For example, we are told "a woman came out on the platform, dressed up like English people when they are going to chase the foxes with the hounds" (196). The speaker tells us that "Angus frowned and concentrated like he was trying to work out Einstein's theory of relativity" (196). When narration shifts to dialogue the narrator's voice subtly draws back to allow for Angus's distinct Creole informality: "Besides boy, the weather too hot these days to do anything" (191). Angus, however, can be philosophical and innovative in his use of Shakespeare: "Cowards die many times before their deaths is one saying, but they have another, which is 'third time lucky'" (199). The voice becomes multi-layered here as the standard-English-speaking narrator, the relaxed Trinidadian Angus and the mod-

ified voice of the English bard, create a polyphony that intertextually enriches the story.

The richness of the text is further enhanced by the predictive omniscience of the narrator that becomes ironic by mingling the personal anxieties of the leading character, when Ralphie fears that he will lose his money at the races, with the expectations set in motion by his having bought a winning ticket. The reader who has not yet reached the end of the story hears the predictive language of Ralphie's thoughts as he awaits the outcome of the race:

Already he was regretting his rashness, he would be leaving the racetrack without a cent in his pocket, couldn't even afford to buy some lotion from the drugstore for his sunburn, though it didn't bother him much unless he touched the tender skin . . . as for driving to the mountains over the weekend, well, it was just too bad, he would have to wait until next payday. (200)

On the surface, these thoughts seem overstated and false, since we assume that he is likely to choose a winning ticket because he has done so twice before; however, the statement is, ironically, true; for when he loses the ticket in the litter of betting tokens, Ralphie does have to "wait until next payday."

"Zeppi's Machine" (1987), introduces Zeppi as he sits on the steps of his hut surveying the village neighbourhood and anticipating the usual daily activities by those who make up the social world that depends upon him to "work an obeah" to solve their daily problems. Although the narrative voice begins with a simple third-person perspective, its utterances are individually coloured by the perspectives of Zeppi and the villagers, as well as by the weaving of misperceptions and opinions that develop from these points of view. "He backed their superstition and fear by surrounding himself with a vast array of every conceivable object identified with his art" (19). Zeppi also has "strange dreams . . . sometimes wishing that he was the suppliant and not the interpreter of dreams and phantasies" (19). In this way, Selvon fragments the speaking voice of the narrator so that the reader is pulled into a psychological world of confusing conflicts. Eventually, the issue which truly engages Zeppi is that "Machines is trouble in Tacarigua" (20).

In this utterance, Zeppi the character becomes the fictional filter for the author's voice, which links polyphonically with other expressions of the theme of man versus machine in other works by Selvon: "The Harvester" (1986), an excerpt from *The Plains of Caroni* (1970); and *Highway in the Sun* (1957), which is based on *A Brighter Sun* (1952). Sookdeo in *A Brighter Sun*, Balgobin in *Highway in the Sun* and Zeppi all speak with the same voice, thus creating what Bakhtin calls intertextual (or dialogical) relations. Zeppi "intervenes in his own context from another context, already penetrated by . . . other intentions. His own intention finds a word already lived in." What Bakhtin means by "intention" is that language is saturated with "living intonations." Language is "contaminated by rudimentary social evaluations and orientations" (Todorov 48). The social evaluation of Zeppi's statement about machines emerges when we contextualize Selvon's novels within the social, cultural, and political worlds of this story and the larger works which are set in the rural areas of Trinidad, where sugar-cane is cultivated by peasants descended from the black African slave and the East Indian indentured labourer. This socio-economic group, of which Selvon himself was a product, constitutes the greater part of the Trinidadian population. The ethno-cultural concerns of this society historically raised the postwar spectre of technology and the machine, which was a serious threat to the basic lifestyle and survival of peasant villagers in rural Trinidad. In order to cope, the uneducated villager had to resort to his native sense of humour and the superstition embodied in the practice of "obeah."

This broader social utterance ("obeah" as a feared mystery and an easy panacea) resonates through Selvon's canon in such works as "The Village Washer" and "Johnson and the Cascadura"—stories in *Ways of Sunlight* (1957), and *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (1972). The "obeah" motif connects Selvon's work with V. S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*, in which charlatanism is a central focus. In "Zeppi's Machine," when an attempt is made to modernize the magical powers of obeah in order to compete with the jukebox and the weighing machine which were "eating up coins as fast as the excited villagers could put them in" (22), the result is humorously disastrous. The humour of village life is

dramatically demonstrated through the collective voice of the crowd that surrounds Zeppi as he tries desperately to make his self-made machine perform the task of the obeah man: he attempts to use his newfangled machine to name the thief who stole Lutchman's money. The slip of paper comes out with Zeppi's name. This ironically points up the absurdity of merging man's technological ambitions with his self-serving superstitions. Meena, one of the villagers, brings a healthy humour to the situation that leads to Zeppi's departure from the village: "If he can't work obeah, at least he could make we laugh. I going to dead with laughing tonight" (29).

The voice of the comic entertainer heard at the end of "Zeppi's Machine" yields to the more serious commentator on ethno-cultural relationships in "Turning Christian," part of a novel in progress which was begun in 1986. Selvon's peasant world has not changed. Cross Crossing, the setting of the story, is run by the powerful estate owners who have imported Indian indentured labourers to replace the black African slaves in the cane fields. The thematic focus in "Turning Christian" is upon the strained and testy relationship that emerged after emancipation, when, according to the narrator of the story, Blacks were happy to be replaced by Indians; the attitude the narrator describes is summarized in the words, "Let the coolies sweat with hoe and cutlass in the hot-sun for Massa, we done with that" (205). This voice, which becomes that of a folk-historian, tells us that these Blacks were appointed policemen to keep Indians from leaving the estate to live in the town. As the policeman Norbert puts it, "if these coolies keep running away from the estates, all of we would be back to slavery" (209).

Changoo is persuaded by his brother Jaggernaut that the way out of this dilemma was "to join-up with the white Canadian missionary religion" (203). The utterance merges intertextually with that of Poonwa in Ladoo's *Yesterdays* (1974), who told his parents "that he was going to get [a] job; they just had to give him consent to become a Christian" (43). Poonwa's goal however eventually includes a more vengeful and political dimension than Changoo's. The reader is introduced to Changoo and to his viewpoint on white missionary religion by following him from the

time when he awakes "foreday" morning to his brief meeting with his best friend Gopaul. Information which he tells Gopaul is actually conveyed to a dual audience, and the reader discovers that Changoo is not a willing believer in the strategy of Jagger-nauth; rather, Changoo tries to sort out the colliding impulses in his mind: the desire to get cough medicine in town for his friend and the inner struggle to accept the favour of allowing Gopaul to arrange that his son Raman be taken to town to "turn Christian" (205).

As the story advances, the narrator shifts between direct third-person narration and summarized dialogue without the marks of direct speech. One instance of this verbal method occurs when Norbert gradually recognizes that Changoo and Raman are approaching. The narrator describes Norbert's response to the crowd, who are excited about "a coolie man down the road coming" (207). The response is presented in quotations: "Eh-heh?" The following unit of dialogue is, however, an internal utterance without quotes: "Like it was a coolie for true, and like he have a child with him." This mental affirmation in Trinidad dialect introduces a dramatic immediacy that gives to Norbert's thoughts the compelling force of spoken words. When he goes on to say, "You right, Tanty!" (207), the voice is that of the policeman on the public stage responding to one of his "extras," as the narrator describes the crowd (209). Selvon thus weaves the voice between the inner and outer worlds of his characters with the skill of a masterful storyteller, such that, as Bakhtin claims, there is no "radical qualitative difference between interior and exterior; . . . [since] expression precedes experience, it is its cradle" (Todorov 43).

When, however, the narrator shifts to the exterior experience of Norbert's questioning of Changoo, the dialogue between them blends several attitudes and relational issues into a tightly woven pattern of diverse perspectives: power versus weakness, Blacks versus Indians, security versus fear, sociopolitical manipulation versus victimization, society versus the individual, and punitive law versus freedom. The emergence of these issues indicates that the meaning of discourse and the comprehension of this meaning by others exceed the limitations of the individual

speaker expressing an ideological issue or representing his own human personality. In this case, someone named Norbert is pulled between assuming his responsibilities as a policeman and fulfilling his role as actor in a drama before an audience who "liked to watch Norbert in action" (207). In this dialogue, "verbal reaction has a sociological character" (Todorov 30).

Such outcome, according to Bakhtin, is a "socialization of the self and of its action," for "human personality becomes historically real and culturally productive only insofar as it is part of a social whole, in its class and through its class" (Todorov 31). This kind of social and historical localization makes a person real and "determines the content of his personal and cultural creation" (31). Accordingly, Selvon's handling of the dialogue between Norbert and Changoo becomes a way of communicating the social and historical dynamics of Trinidad communal life. For this reason, the narrative voice shifts suddenly from reporting Gopaul and Changoo's decision to christianize Raman, to "the police uniform" of Norbert, to his view of himself as "the LAW," to his upbringing "from boyhood to manhood as a slave," and to the account of the settlement history of Trinidad East Indians who came "as indentured labourers from India . . . to replace the [black] slaves" (205).

This ordering of details allows the narrator to foreground the Norbert-Changoo interrogation against psychological, ethnic, and cultural factors that historically define the background of Trinidadians and significantly explain the social dynamics of their behaviour. Selvon, on one level, thus becomes a detached social commentator without the intrusive forcefulness of V. S. Naipaul, who often stands above his characters to voice their social and cultural inferiority and failure. On another level, the fictional speaker in the story reveals—through his implied relationship to the characters and through the manner he adopts toward the reader—that he understands the ethnic rivalries and insecurities which distinguish Blacks and Indians in the rural parts of Trinidad.

This tone of confident understanding is conveyed in the way the narrator interprets Changoo's statement, "No, no. He is a Christian, and the boy turning Christian too!" (209). As if he

anticipates the reaction to this information, he heralds Tanty Matilda's reply with the words, "And lo, there was a voice." Following her reply, given in direct speech, Norbert makes a dramatic comment on the argument among the crowd through an "indirect direct" adumbration of the thoughts in the mind of Norbert (209). Familiarity with the local dialect gives a rich authenticity to these mental utterances: "And too besides, nothing was wrong with the pass . . . if he let the coolie man go this time, [the high-brown girl] might favour him for future possibilities. . . . Is all well and good for you to say so, Tanty, but is my job to investigate these things" (209). Although we are confronted with the stated thoughts of Norbert, we sense that we are still hearing the narrator's voice, since the words are not placed in quotation marks (209); beyond the narrator's voice is the muted voice of Selvon the Trinidadian as omniscient author.

In this situation, however, we must be careful not to reduce Norbert, the character, to an artificial man, to *homo sociologicus*, defined by Robert Elliott as "a depersonalized figure who is reduced in theory to the sum of his social roles." What we notice is what Elliott calls an evocation of selfhood, a process of "selving" (97). Through a polyphony of voices, we understand more fully the conflicts within Norbert, why they occur, and why he is disillusioned at the end of the story when he saw the high-brown girl running up the road behind Changoo and Raman. In this way, voice becomes the means through which we gain insights into character; and there is a dialogic connection with utterances which evoke the historical and ethno-cultural world of Selvon's islanders.

Selvon believed he needed to leave Trinidad to understand this world: "If I had remained in Trinidad I might never have had the opportunity to be at such close quarters to observe and try to understand the differences and prejudices that exist from islander to islander" ("Three Into One" 215). Although not having self-distancing hinders cultural understanding, it does not wholly determine the author's persona or voice. As Patrick Cruttwell argues, the author as "maker" is a person, and "the only source of the maker's material is himself." For Cruttwell, there are four ways in which this process is accomplished: the direct,

the masked, the mythologized, and the dramatized. The direct presents an undisguised perspective of the self, as in a confession or autobiography. The masked presents a self that pretends not to be that of the writer but encourages the reader to think it is. The mythologized transposes the self into a symbolic figure or reference. The dramatized maintains a distance between the author and his persona, and enters the text as a kind of "leakage" (487-97; cf. Elliott 147).

As we have seen, Selvon seems to operate as a "masked" maker in "Turning Christian." He does so in the three other stories as well, although the manner and degree of this process varies from work to work. In "Her Achilles Heel," the narrative voice is first person and the female friend to whom he relates the story is nameless. The result is to leave no fictional evidence that this relationship is identifiable with a particular person or that the speaker is explicitly Selvon; however, the phrase "leaving the island this time" suggests a traveller like Selvon who has left Trinidad several times after revisitations. The pervasive lament in the story about the loss of fundamental connections with the land and the tone of familiarity augmented by a romantic connection with the flora and fauna are traits characteristic of Selvon the author, who displays these qualities in several other works.

In "Ralphie at the Races," the masked self emerges as a composite of two characters: Ralphie, the Trinidad immigrant in Canada, and his friend Angus, who is already familiar with Calgary, where Selvon lived during the writing of the story. Selvon shared both roles, even as he shared the same dualities in London when he wrote *The Lonely Londoners*. Although the narrative voice masks the personal involvement of the author by adopting a third-person point of view restricted to the consciousness of Ralphie, the familiarity with the locations and knowledge of the habits of Calgarians encourage the reader to view Selvon as the source of these facts and to correlate the tone with that of the humorous and sardonic commentator of *The Lonely Londoners*.

In "Zeppi's Machine," the masked persona is a more detached creation than Ralphie, since Zeppi belongs to the mythical world of island superstition from which Selvon maintains a safe creative distance. The voice of the narrator often yields to the dialectal

conversations among the villagers and the humorous verbal play that marks the daily dialogue of the ordinary villager; for example, Jaldo responds to a report from Felix about the process of taking a chest x-ray by asking, "Is dancing or what?" (21). This lively Creole retort, an aspect of speech that undermines the "authority of custom and of . . . traditions [which] fetter linguistic consciousness" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 368-69), is soon followed by the formal style of the narrator who knows how to shift registers like the educated speaker of Trinidadian English: "a chorus of voices agreed, as if the government was some immense and mysterious power that controlled and manipulated their lives from a distance" (21). The language intertextually recalls the narrative patterns of *A Brighter Sun* and the skill of Selvon, the journalist-cum-novelist, who could shift readily from the dialogue between rural peasants to a formal commentary on social conditions in Trinidad during the "war effort" in 1940, or an explanation of the Westernization of Indians who lived in Port of Spain.

Some conclusions may be drawn from the preceding analysis of voice in these four late short stories: Selvon demonstrates the skill of using the unsayable to link the inner world of the narrator and the community where he forms his relationships; he knows how to organize the point of view of the narrator so that the reader simultaneously knows the thoughts of the protagonist and the social world he inhabits; the voice of the fictional speaker in his stories may sometimes shift among three perspectives—the psychological, the social, and the ideological—with the author mediating among the different levels; the voice of the stories fragments into a polyphony of utterances which coincide dialogically with similar utterances in Selvon's own canon or in the works of writers with a West Indian sensitivity; the voice of the main fictional speaker is validated not so much by its individuality as by the social, ethno-cultural community in which it is localized and given historical signification; finally, Selvon, as a "maker" and "person," usually fashions and exhibits the materials of his fictional world from his own self-authenticated experience. In this way, he makes human life what Bakhtin calls an

"open-ended dialogue," a "dialogic fabric" (*Problems* 293), into which he subtly and unobtrusively weaves his short fiction. The result is art which fulfills the classical criterion, *ars est celare artem*.

NOTE

- ¹ Most of Bakhtin's statements in this paper are from passages cited by Todorov, who draws upon works written by Bakhtin as well as works attributed to him and thought to be either pseudonymous or resulting from substantial influence by or collaboration with Bakhtin. To simplify this complicated situation, I identify all of Bakhtin's statements (except those on pages 20 and 21) by pagination in Todorov's translated work, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Each citation of Bakhtin's statements in this source is fully identified in a chronological list of the writings of Bakhtin and his Circle that appears at the end of the text. Most of these sources are in languages other than English.

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