

Samuel Selvon:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Selvon, Samuel
Title:	Samuel Selvon Papers
Dates:	1946-1975
Extent:	2.5 boxes (1.04 linear feet)
Abstract	The Samuel Selvon Papers consist of handwritten manuscripts, typescripts, book proofs, manuscript notebooks, and correspondence. The papers offer an overview of the Trinidad-born, British writer's literary activities, with an emphasis on his published novels. Drafts for six of his eleven novels are present, along with supporting correspondence and items relating to his career.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-03778
Language	English.
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchase, 1976 (R7293)
Processed by	Christopher D. Filippi, 1995; Sarah Demb, 1996; Jennifer Peters, 1996
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Samuel Selvon, author of novels, plays, film, television, and radio, was born in 1923 in South Trinidad to an Indian father and an Indian/Scottish mother. He grew up in Trinidad's multi-racial society and graduated from San Fernando's Naparima College in 1938.

Selvon began writing fiction and poetry while he served in the Royal Navy Reserve during World War II. After the war, he began his literary career as the fiction editor of the *Trinity Guardian's* literary magazine until he immigrated to England in 1950.

In London, his short stories and poetry were published in various journals and newspapers, including *London Magazine*, *New Statesman*, and *The Nation*. His first novel, *A Brighter Sun*, was published by Wingate Press in 1952, after which he has published several other novels, including *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *I Hear Thunder* (1963), *The Plains of Caroni* (1970), *Moses Ascending* (1975), and *El Dorado West One* (1988). Selvon's works chronicle the West Indian experience in England with recurring themes of alienation, discrimination, and racial tension.

Selvon also had success with his writings for other media. He worked extensively with the British Broadcasting Corporation during the 1960s and 1970s to produce two television scripts, *Anansi the Spider Man* and *Home, Sweet India*, numerous radio programs, and a film version of *The Lonely Londoners*.

In addition to these accomplishments, Selvon held a series of university appointments in the Caribbean, Great Britain, and North America. He also received numerous awards, including two Guggenheim Fellowships (1955, 1968), Trinidad's Humming Bird Medal for Literature (1969), and an honorary doctorate from the University of Warwick (1989).

Selvon married Draupadi Persuad in 1947, with whom he had one child, and Althea Nesta Daroux in 1963, with whom he had three children. He moved to Canada in 1978 where he held several academic appointments. He died in 1994 on a trip to Trinidad.

Sources

Nasta, Susheila, ed. *Critical Perspectives on Samuel Selvon* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1988).

Wyke, Clement H. *Sam Selvon's Dialectical Style and Fictional Strategy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1991.)

Scope and Contents

The Samuel Selvon Papers consist of original holograph manuscripts, original and carbon copy typescripts, book proofs, manuscript notebooks, correspondence, and a cash book, ranging in date from 1946 to 1975. The material is arranged in three series: I. Works, 1958-75 (1.5 boxes), II. Correspondence, 1946-74 (4 folders), and III. Personal, 1965-67 (one folder). The Papers offer an overview of Selvon's writing process, with an emphasis on his published novels. Drafts for six of his eleven novels are present, along with supporting correspondence and items relating to his career. No materials relating to Selvon's personal life are present.

Series I, arranged alphabetically by title, consists of holograph manuscripts, original and carbon typescripts, book proofs, and notebooks for six novels by Selvon-- *The Housing Lark* (1965), *I Hear Thunder* (1963), *Moses Ascending* (1975), *The Plains of Caroni* (1970), *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (1972), and *Turn Again Tiger* (1958). A few titles are represented by completed typescripts only, marked with minor holograph revisions and printer's marks. However, early manuscript drafts of novels such as *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* and *Moses Ascending*, initially written in a manuscript notebook, are present. Of particular note is the way these notebooks document Selvon's writing technique--first holograph drafts were written from front to back on the right-hand side of a notebook, and subsequent drafts were written from back to front on the left-hand side of the notebooks. These notebooks also contain additional drafts of radio and television plays, and an untitled, unpublished novel. An additional working notebook contains early fragments of *Moses Ascending*, and drafts of radio and television plays that were produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation; a note attached to the front of the notebook by Selvon lists the titles and dates of each work.

Series II contains correspondence from publishers, broadcasting companies, literary agents, periodicals, students, and other authors, arranged alphabetically. There is only one outgoing piece of correspondence in the collection--a cablegram from Selvon to his English publisher, R. G. Davis-Poynter. The most comprehensive correspondence in Series II follows Selvon's association with the British Broadcasting Corporation over ten years, and contains letters referring to current projects, suggesting story ideas, and telling him of recent broadcasts of his work. Also of significance are letters from Marion Saunders, Selvon's literary agent. Her eight letters from 1952 to 1957 trace the process of finding publishers and American magazines for Selvon's early novels and short stories. Correspondence from West Indian authors such as Garth St. Omer and John J. Figueroa is also present.

Series III consists of a cashbook listing Selvon's travel expenses to research background information for upcoming novels, short stories, and radio/television plays.

Index Terms

Correspondents

Covici, Pascal, 1885-1964.

Figueroa, John J.

Hearne, John, 1925- .

MacDowell, Marian, 1857-1956.

Parrish, Robert.

Peter, Bruce.

St. Omer, Garth.

Saunders, Marion.

Swanzy, Henry.

British Broadcasting Corporation.

Davis-Poynter Ltd.

MacGibbon & Kee.

Subjects

Authors, Trinidadian.

Authors, West Indian.

Document types

Cashbooks.

Page proofs.

Series I. Works, 1958-1975

The Housing Lark (1965)

Corrected typescript, 1965 **box 1 folder 1**Corrected 'book proof,' bound, 1965 **folder 2**

I Hear Thunder (1963)

Corrected typescript, 1963 **box 1 folder 3-4**Corrected carbon typescript, 1963 **folder
5-6**

Moses Ascending (1975)

Holograph manuscript notebook with additional drafts of radio and television scripts,
1975 **box 1
folder
7**Corrected typescript, nd **folder 8-9**

The Plains of Coroni (1970)

Holograph manuscript notebook, 1970 **box 2 folder
1**Corrected typescript, 1970 **folder 2-3***Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (1972). Manuscript notebook with revised holograph
and typescript pages, 1972**folder
4***Turn Again Tiger* (1958). Carbon typescript, nd**folder 5-7**Manuscript notebook containing holograph drafts and radio and television plays, the
opening lines of *Moses Ascending*, an unfinished story, and various notes, 1973**folder
8**

Series II. Correspondence, 1946-1974

Correspondence, A-Z

box 3 folder 1

Series III. Personal, 1965-1967

Cashbook of Selvon's research and travel expenses

box 3
folder 2

Samuel Selvon Papers--Index of Correspondents

- A. M. Heath & Company Ltd.--3.1
- Alford, C. E. R.--3.1
- Allan Wingate Ltd.--3.1
- Baker, F. Sherman (St. Martin's Press, Inc.)--3.1
- British Broadcasting Corporation--3.1
- Charles, Patricia (University of the West Indies)--3.1
- Charles, V., Mrs.--3.1
- Collymore, Frank A.--3.1
- Corsbie, Ken (Guyana Broadcasting Services)--3.1
- Covici, Pascal, 1885-1964 (Viking Press, Inc.)--3.1
- Davis-Poynter Ltd.--3.1; see also MacGibbon & Kee
- *Evening Standard* (London, England)--3.1
- Figueroa, John J. (University College of the West Indies)--3.1
- Gough, Kathleen, 1925- (Simon Fraser University)--3.1
- Hearne, John, 1925- (University of the West Indies)--3.1
- Hopkins, Charles--3.1
- Jamaica Library Service--3.1
- John Bull (Firm)--3.1
- Keefe, John W.--3.1
- Lehmann, John, 1907- --3.1
- Longman (Firm)--3.1
- MacDowell, Marian, 1857-1956--3.1
- MacGibbon & Kee--3.1
- MacKenzie, Ian (St. Martin's Press, Inc.)--3.1
- Metzger, Kurt L. (New York. Department of Correction)--3.1
- Musia, Felix C.--3.1
- New American Library--3.1
- P. A.-Reuter Features Ltd.--3.1
- Parrish, Robert--3.1
- Peter, Bruce--3.1
- Richardson, Maurice, 1907- (Hulton Press Ltd.)--3.1
- Runnymede Trust--3.1
- St. Omer, Garth--3.1
- Saunders, Marion (Marion Saunders Literary Group)--3.1
- Simon Fraser University--3.1
- Sullivan, Doveton--3.1
- Swanzy, Henry (Gold Coast Broadcasting)--3.1; see also British Broadcasting Corporation
- Sweeney, James Johnson, 1900- (Edward MacDowell Association, Inc.)--3.1
- *Trinidad guardian*--3.1
- University of the West Indies--3.1
- University of the West Indies (Mona, Jamaica). Creative Arts Center--3.1; see also Hearne, John, 1925-
- Viking Press--3.1
- Voice and Vision Caribbean Ltd.--3.1
- Washington Square Press--3.1
- Yleisradio Oy--3.1