Ana Rodríguez Navas, *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk: The Uses of Gossip in Caribbean Literature*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018. x + 293 pp. (Paper US\$ 35.00)

Readers of all stripes, Caribbeanists and scholars of transnational American studies alike, will be enlightened and entertained by this witty study. Ana Rodríguez Navas takes the Caribbean as a fruitful region for the study of gossip, she stresses, not because it is unique or exceptional, but because as a crossroads of languages and cultures, grounded in slavery, colonization, and diaspora, the region shares historical commonalities with many other parts of the world, including the rest of the Americas. She situates her approach to gossip accordingly, drawing on novelists, poets, critics, and theorists working in Spanish, French, and English. The result is this eye-opening book, an innovative multilingual, multicultural analysis of gossip's "embattlements," the double-edged sociopolitical function of gossip in Caribbean literature.

Idle Talk takes on the pitfalls of monolingual, Euro-centered studies of gossip from the outset. It's surprising, Navas says with characteristic understatement, that literary scholars of gossip have overlooked the Caribbean, given the regional roots of the field. While the fulcrum of "gossip scholarship," led by Patricia Meyer Spacks's 1985 *Gossip*, points to the "good" gossip of intimate drawing rooms and small towns in Anglo-American nineteenth-century novels from Jane Austen to Henry James, gossip Caribbean-style is "adversarial," political, potentially violent, part of, not apart from, the power relations of both public and private spheres. Spacks explicitly acknowledges her debt to the anthropological work of Max Gluckman, whose 1963 "Gossip and Scandal" paid tribute to Melville Herskovits's pioneering ethnographical studies of gossip in Trinidadian and Haitian communities. Taking off from this point, surely surprising to most readers, the book starts with a fascinating linguistic tour of the etymological differences among the terms for gossip in the three dominant language traditions of the Caribbean. Gossip can be, in French and English usages, "idle talk," the more or less trivial chatter of intimate communities, but also in the senses of the Spanish *chisme* and *bochinche*, "boisterous, divisive, dangerous." This short introduction, using several dictionaries in each language and fanning out to include creoles and slang usages, launches the book's running argument in favor of comparative approaches to gossip—common in anthropology but something that literary critics have not yet embraced. Among the missed opportunities most strikingly revealed here is an accounting of the special comparative functions of gossip across the postcolonial Caribbean, where linguistic differences intertwine with those of gender, race, and power.

NEW WEST INDIAN GUIDE

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In making good on this, the book gives readers a crash course in post-1960s Caribbean literary culture. In addition to a sweeping range of fiction and poetry from the 1960s to the present (the cast of writers includes Gabriel García Márquez, Jean Rhys, Maryse Condé, Reinaldo Arenas, Rosario Ferré, and Junot Díaz), densely textured readings of political essays, memoirs and letters, popular music and film create a kind of literary thick description that captures the cross-cultural uses of gossip during the period. Put politically, the book is organized around the historical flashpoint of the early 1960s that produced Castro in Cuba, Duvalier in Haiti, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and the independence of most of the British West Indies. From these combined perspectives Navas's Caribbean is very much, as she says, Antonio Benítez-Rojo's "meta-archipelago," meaning the islands of the circum-Caribbean as well as the farther-flung cities of the Caribbean diaspora, New York, Miami, London, and elsewhere—connected by the nodes of a global gossip network.

In short, Navas has more than succeeded in her twin mission to show how much Caribbean literature is shaped by the use of gossip and to shed new light on the scholarship of gossip. Yet the book has a tendency to understate, downplaying the scope of the argument, that I'd like to end with here. The introduction makes a concerted effort to say what the book and author are not ("neither a survey nor a panorama," "I do not seek to classify all the instances of gossip in recent Caribbean literature," "neither do I offer a systematic examination of the differing deployments of gossip"), while the conclusion ends on a note of appealing modesty. "I have sought simply to show that contemporary Caribbean texts and writers use gossip in rich and interesting ways." The two blurbs on the back cover suggest much more. "Long overdue" is Junot Díaz's assessment, as though he's been waiting for, expecting, wanting a book "on the 'Caribbean's obsession with gossip,'" and here it finally is, while Peter Hulme sees the book as "imaginative enough to reshape our understanding of Caribbean literature." Pulling in such opposite directions, these two enthusiastic readers convey the risks and possibilities of *Idle Talk's* central proposition, that the multilingual, multicultural Caribbean makes the case for taking gossip seriously. Nothing simple about it.

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