

## **"Minor Genres and Marginal Realities: Kei Miller's Blog Posts and Facebook Notes"**

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### **Abstract**

In his blog posts and Facebook notes, Jamaican author Kei Miller writes about his experiences in Glasgow and the US, emphasizing the different "realities" and notions of "reality" coexisting in these places. More specifically, Miller's writings call attention to the hierarchies operating to elevate some "realities" and silence others. This article argues that Miller's pieces can be regarded as a hybrid of two minor genres, the blog and the essay, as well as of the subgenre of creative non-fiction. This hybridity mirrors and illuminates some of the themes explored in the writings, such as authenticity, authority, subjectivity and voice. When Miller's online posts are read alongside his essays – and precisely because they are in a virtual space that allows for contributions from his readers in the comment section – they help to expose the hierarchies that he writes about, and demonstrate the urgency of giving voice to marginalized realities.

### **Keywords**

Kei Miller; blogs; Facebook; genre; postcolonialism; Caribbean literature

It has become common for creative writers to have an online presence. Jamaican poet, novelist, essayist, short-story writer and academic Kei Miller is no exception to this trend, as he also writes blog posts and Facebook notes. Miller's posts and notes resist easy generic categorization because they adhere to, and sometimes diverge from, the traditional characteristics associated with the blog post and the essay, as well as the broader category of creative non-fiction. The totalizing effect of this is, as I will argue, that they can be considered as generic hybrids. Even though creative non-fiction, essays and blog posts are all considered to be minor genres, the latter, being relatively recent and as yet uncanonized, exists on the margins of literary genres as a whole. Facebook notes written in blog post form rarely receive any attention at all. Moreover, discussions about generic hierarchies do not just involve the amount of critical attention paid to different genres, but also necessitate looking at who traditionally composes these works. For example, the essay may be a minority genre in terms of the critical attention it has received, but its history shows it to be an elitist form. This contrasts sharply with blog posts, which bypass publishing houses and are created by people from all walks of life.

As well as exploring the generic hybridity of Miller's blog posts and Facebook notes and the hierarchies involved in the study and production of the genres of which they are comprised, this article will also focus on the theme of existing hierarchies of lived realities that Miller writes about in these texts. These realities include his own experience of "reality", which involves the complexity of his subjectivity that can be disadvantaged and/or privileged depending on the context and situation. In this way, questions about genre mirror the questions that Miller addresses in the pieces that I have chosen to focus on; thus, as I will argue, the form complements the content. To demonstrate this correlation, I will discuss some of the generic attributes of the blog, the essay and creative non-fiction alongside his work.

Kate Eichhorn (2008) explains that "blogs have been understood as a genre, usually a sub-genre of the diary". She goes on to argue, however, that seeing them "as a form of life writing is at least somewhat misleading", because they are "'linked' to the public sphere" and bloggers are often connected to a "larger community through the device of a 'blogroll'". Julie Rak (2005) also discounts the idea that blogs are a continuation of the diary form, by elucidating that they began as a "public service" to help people negotiate the Web by accessing information that was ideologically overt; thus users could enter into a "non-corporate public space". However, this maybe rather idealistic, as Stadtler, Laursen, and Rock (2013) point out, because questions can be asked about how cyberspace may be co-opted to serve "corporate interests" or to "saturat[e] consumers with hegemonic representations of cultural and global events" (503). Rak (2005) stresses that "the interactivity of blogs became an essential part of blog rhetoric and essential part of blog ideology". Blogs evolved, she further clarifies, to move away from weblinks to instead include "a links list of other blogs".

Most Caribbean blogs follow these general rules. For example, Saint Lucian freelance journalist and novelist Anthony Williams created the *Caribbean Book Blog* because, as he states in an interview with Barrington Salmon, "Caribbean writers, especially those who reside in the region, continue to struggle to get the attention of publishers, the majority of whom are based outside of the region" (Williams 2011, n.p.). He discovered in "personal interviews and [...] online message boards [...] that there is a demand for Caribbean books", and also

what [Caribbean people] read and [their] knowledge and images of the world are largely being decided by a very limited incestuous collection of cliques with bases beyond the reach of Caribbean-based writers, and many of those who live in North America and other parts of the developed world.

His site, like early blogs, obviously has an ideological agenda and provides many links to other blogs, thus delivering a public service that helps readers negotiate the Web as well as offering information about Caribbean literature. Williams posits that social media is "indispensable" to Caribbean writers because they "can now post their work and discuss it with their readers, even sell it directly to those readers, without a middleman". Jamaican writer Geoffrey Philp and Trinidadian writer Nicholas Laughlin also use their blogs to promote Caribbean literature and literary events. In contrast, Jamaican writers Marlon James and Miller use their blogs to write pieces of non-fiction. James's blog (which he has not used since 2009) does list the blogs he reads down the side of his page; these include Philp's and Laughlin's pages, whereas Miller's does not contain any links to other blogs. This differentiates his blog from others and from Caribbean blogs specifically, yet his posts do not fit into an extension of the diary genre either. I will argue that Miller's blog posts and Facebook notes – where he first began to exhibit his non-fiction – are more easily classified as a hybrid of the blog and the essay, including creative non-fiction. Yet this argument comes with its own set of generic complications.

Miller began posting his nonfiction in the "Notes" section on his Facebook writer's page on October 30, 2009. The first instalment, entitled "The Last Warner Woman", is merely a plot description of his 2011 novel of the same name. This post conforms to the notion of the blog as a public service and reflects the need for Caribbean writers to use the Internet to gain readership for their work. Yet Miller's pages also dissent from an essential component of the blog as genre. Rak (2005) maintains that the blogger's identity is crucial, as he or she must "assert their representations of themselves online as 'real' and 'true'. [...] Blog identity involves a recouping of strategies of the real, which include the use of offline experiences as a guarantor of identity." Miller's Facebook page has consistently had a picture of him for his profile picture (2009, updated 2014 and 2015), a stack of his published works for his cover

photo (2014), two published works listed in the "About" section, as well as contact details for those who wish to book him (2010). There are no other pages "liked" on this page; that is, no links to connect him with the wider Caribbean online worlds. To find his Facebook page, someone has to search for him (Miller n.d.), and his page can be verified as being his "official" page by the contact details. Even though the first note functions more as an advertisement for his upcoming novel, the second note, entitled "Bad Man Nuh Dress Like Girl" (June 24, 2010), lets the viewer understand that the assumed reader of his notes is Caribbean from the first line: "Most of us may remember, of course, this monster hit by Harry Toddler and Scare Dem Crew even as we don't remember Harry Toddler himself." Non-Caribbean readers would probably know of the subject of the note, Christopher Dudus Coke, a Jamaican Don (a criminal area leader), who tried to evade Jamaican police by dressing as a woman, but they are less likely to know the initial reference that Miller uses to make his humorous comparison. In fact, the comments written underneath appear to have been written by Caribbean people, as is generally the case for his later notes.

On April 28, 2011, while living in Glasgow, Miller created his blog that is now entitled *Under the Saltire Flag: Small Essays on Race, Gender, Literature and Jamaica*. In the "About" section there is a short bio that ends:

It's where I test out ideas that might later develop into larger essays. They are often polemic – and often angry about social injustice, especially those surrounding issues of race and gender – I'm sorry about that. But I hope they're always honest, and even in this draft-stage, that these are things you might enjoy reading. (Miller 2011–17)

Even though Miller starts off his description likening his blog to others and participates in blog ideology in so far as he claims that his blog posts are honest, it is clear that he regards them as essays, albeit "small" essays: they are essays on a blogging platform. The in-

betweenness of his work fits with the original title of the site: *Under the Saltire Flag: Jamaica, Scotland, and the Places Inbetween*. Both Jamaica and Scotland have saltire flags and the places in between could be interpreted both as the Atlantic and the virtual space that the Internet provides, as well as the in-betweenness of the essay on a virtual platform. What is more, the first short post that Miller wrote on his site draws a connection between the blog post and the telegram. Miller's posts appear to write back to the region (as well as to the diaspora) from Scotland, yet this virtual space is both everywhere and not anchored anywhere at the same time.

The selected texts that this essay will focus on in depth appear on Miller's Facebook page, his Saltire blog and on an additional blog entitled *Writers in Motion Blog Spot* (Miller 2011–). In April 2011 Miller took part in a two-week tour of Gettysburg, Baltimore, New Orleans, Birmingham and Washington, DC. He was asked to reflect on how places "have faced disasters and how they have tried to bring themselves back from it" ("On Meanings and Monuments", Facebook, April 5, 2011). Miller wrote ten Facebook notes during this trip, four of which appeared on the tour-group's Blog Spot alongside those from the other writers. Furthermore, "On Meanings and Monuments" also appeared as the second entry in *Under the Saltire Flag*. In addition to these, I am going to discuss a blog post from December 9, 2012 entitled "The Occasionally Dangerous Thing Called 'Nuance'". These pieces were, in part, later published in Miller's (2013a) essay collection, *Writing Down the Vision: Essays and Prophecies*. In this volume, "Nuance" is published in full and the piece has been only slightly adjusted in terms of punctuation, grammar and vocabulary, whereas the published essay entitled "Making Space for Grief" contains a small amount of reworked material from his tour pieces. Thus, some of the content of the collection arises from material that first existed in a virtual space and was supplemented by online interactions. As mentioned above, Rak maintains that the issues of "realness" and "reality" are pertinent to a discussion about the

Internet itself and to blog ideology, and these are also the themes that Miller addresses in the selection of his work that I have chosen to focus on, in terms of identity, authenticity, nuance and place. I will argue that the hybrid genre of the post/note and essay/creative non-fiction complements Miller's content. In order to do this I will consider recent theoretical scholarship on the essay and the broader category of creative non-fiction in light of Miller's online work.

As Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Elizabeth Mittman (1993) posit, the essay has always caused problems for those who would define it [...]. For some, the result is a persistent uneasiness about where the essay "belongs" in the standard division of genres. Others would elevate it to the status of "anti-genre," a site for critical reflection. [...] In any case, it is generally consigned to a netherworld of something different, borderland, extra-ordinary becoming the subject of academic conference sessions with titles like "Boundary Genres" or "Marginal Literature". (12)

Their use of the terms "boundary" and "marginal" is even more apt in the case of the essays appearing on the Internet, which is itself located in a virtual world. Furthermore, Miller's themes in the works that will be discussed in this article are concerned with boundaries and margins, in terms of identity, experience and place. As I will argue, his writings share aspects of different genres, and they do so in a particularly postcolonial and Caribbean way, which often turns the traditions of these genres on their heads by deconstructing and problematizing issues of hierarchy and marginality.

Theories about the essay often involve the notions of a journey and discovery. Boetcher Joeres and Mittman observe that essays are "frequently marked by a tendency to wander around a subject, to investigate various paths toward a point, to enjoy the possibility of digression" (1993, 17). These observations concur with what Miller said in a personal interview with me on April 23, 2015:

When there is something I want to say and I want to say more plainly that this is an idea that I am working through, but there is a point to it, or really when I am angry about something, those occur to me as essays. I do not want to hide behind fiction or poetry. When I think it is important, I just want to say it in the most direct way possible, even though my essays are not really direct.

Miller does admit that his essays are indirect and this is also true of his notes and posts. What is more, even though he initially maintains that the essay and the blog post are essentially the same, he goes on to explain in the interview how the blog shapes the essay, thus highlighting possible generic interactions between the two forms as he perceives them:

I don't see that the blog post does something that the essay doesn't do. The blog is a place to try out essays. I write to an audience and I think the blog gives you that immediate audience; lots of the things I say in a blog post are immediately contested. You write something and in a couple of days it is read by a few thousand people; they are commenting and you know how that idea works, and you develop it further into an essay that is more polished; but by the time it gets into the book the audience takes longer to get to it. They have to go to the bookstore and buy the book and get around to reading the book, whereas the blog gives you that immediacy, but also just that contestation where I can think probably I didn't express that as well as I could have, I accept your point in rejecting that part of the essay or I think I need to think a little bit more.

Miller, ostensibly, seems to elevate the literary merit of the essay above the blog post and speaks about his online work as if it were merely a draft, yet he does highlight the post's ability to reach a wider audience at once and the influence that the commentators have on the later published work. Even though this means of construction may initially appear to be derived solely from the invention of the Internet, we cannot really know how the first



essayists produced their work. It is possible that oral and written discussions played a part in their initial production. As Boetcher Joeres and Mittman suggest, another traditional aspect of the essay is "dialogue, as initiating discussion, as inviting reaction, response [...]. In this instance, it is important to realize that many essays originated – particularly in the case of women essayists – as talks or speeches" (1993, 18). Nevertheless, what is new about a blog post that subsequently becomes an essay is that the contribution is unrestricted: anybody with Internet access can comment on the blog at any time. What is more, readers of Miller's essay collection have access to the online dialogues, enabling them to discover some of the voices that may have been part of its production.

Boetcher Joeres and Mittman (1993, 12-13) further explain that the essay, as we think of it, emerged from patriarchal, white, wealthy and privileged Renaissance Europeans. Michael L. Hall (1989) notes that the works of Montaigne, Bacon and Donne share "a common attitude, a spirit of exploration". He goes on to suggest that

the "idea" of discovery is not the same thing as discovery itself. [...] We generally do not find something unless we have some "idea" of what we are looking for. Columbus was looking for a new trade route to the East, not a new world. (73)

A similarly deliberate purpose also characterized Miller's tour of the United States: he went to explore how these places have coped with disasters. This type of trip, Miller contends in his first Facebook note about his journey, "On Meanings and Monuments", is a form of "disaster tourism" usually undertaken by westerners to places like the Caribbean, most recently to Haiti. In contrast, Miller, if positioned solely as an African Jamaican writer, travelled to an economically advantaged country. Thus, his writing tour becomes figuratively colonial exploration and "disaster tourism" in reverse. The idea of wandering becomes literal where his trip is concerned and is mirrored in his writing because he wanders around an idea whose

subject arises out of the memory of a place that he has previously been walking around. Whatever location he is writing about, his thoughts are concerned with the multiple lives existing in these places, including those that no longer remain.

Duane Edwards (1989) maintains that, even if it does not always appear so, the "subject of an essay is the author" (137), and Barrie Jean Borich (2013) elaborates on this idea by arguing that actual geography always permeates non-fiction. He argues that when such work is creative non-fiction, "place – particularly our autobiographical relationship to place – is not just a story element but also our subject" (98). He coins the term "autogeography" "to define the creative nonfiction project concerned with the ways that we might map our bodies and places as interdependent historical strata". He continues: "an autogeography is self-portrait in the form of a panoramic map of memory, history, lyric intuition, [and] awareness of sensory space" (99).

This description aptly describes Miller's notes and posts, thus indicating that his online work shares traits with not only the essay, but also creative non-fiction. This is particularly evident in the Facebook note entitled "On Blacks & Birds and Bayous: Day 7 of a Trip around America" (April 10, 2011) in which Miller reflects upon stories that rarely get told. This note results from a coach trip through neighbourhoods in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. The white tour guide "tuts" at black neighbourhoods and praises white ones:

she is cooing: Oh look at the pretty [white] neighbourhood! Oh, this was such a good area. Yes, yes – it was a real upscale area. Look how lovely it is. And look, look at that house over there! Oh thank god they've restored it! It's so big and pretty. It looks almost like a plantation. (Really, you can't make this shit up.) (April 10, 2011)

The tour guide's way of seeing this area is not only highly subjective, but also transforms what Miller, the tourist, sees. Her shockingly racist remarks render "reality" more "unreal"

than fiction and make the history of slavery suddenly materialize in the present. The woman also adds her own view of her surroundings when she points out that the black community do not "even have proper signs". Miller supplements this by providing his own alternative autogeography because he sees beauty in the fact that there are signs for such things as "Children at Play" and "Slow" that have been hand-painted on bits of discarded wood; he views this as a sign of the "community fighting to come back". Thus, he transforms the geography of the place for his reader through his thoughts and observations, which shows how this typical trait of the creative non-fiction is rendered in note form. This is further enhanced when he becomes aware that there is another "other" story that has been silenced. The guide tells them that the area was "supposed to have been a bird sanctuary, but it never became that. You will see that all the roads have the names of birds." This revelation astounds Miller because it compels him to see the whole area in a new light:

I am stunned. I look through the window and now I cannot see the white community, or even the black community. I can only see another population that used to live here – a community of birds and a community of bayous.

(April 10, 2011)

Miller becomes absorbed in this other story, what he terms "the story of the most desperate Other", "the story of nature". He reflects that for the birds the whole city may have become a disaster zone. The guide also tells them that after the water receded, sunflowers rose up all over the city, which may be because the birds had dropped the seeds after the hurricane; Miller reflects that these might be the birds' own signs, like the black community's signs, which could be interpreted as the birds also "trying to replant their own cities". The whole "official" story of Katrina is fragmented: the story is white, the black story is the other story – sidelined or spoken about in a pejorative way – and the birds' story is often overlooked as it is

not about the human at all. Miller's note, as autogeography, rewrites and gives voice to this other "reality".

In this note Miller deliberately emphasizes the fact that he is a postcolonial scholar by telling us that the piece was not "meant to be a postcolonial rant" and he rephrases "the stories of others" to "the story of The Other" so as to "put it in the proper grammar of Poco theory". Through stating "facts" about himself and being blatant about his postcolonial ideological slant, he conforms to blog ideology. In terms of the essay Boetcher Joeres and Mittman discuss subjectivity and authority in the history of the genre:

subjectivity, for example, becomes a political issue if we view the expressed presence of a subject – most often an explicitly present narrative "I" – in terms of the problem of author/authority. [...] Experience is indeed the/an authorizing force in the essay. (1993, 18)

The issue of subjectivity and authority is more complicated for black essayists. Miller reflects in "On Blacks & Birds and Bayous" that the "story of the white man [...] is more easily the story of Everyman. A universal story" (April 10, 2011). In this way, white stories contain an authorizing universal force that black stories are not allowed. Not only does Miller emphasize this point, but by stressing the fact that he is both a disaster tourist in reverse and a postcolonial scholar, he is drawing attention to what also constitutes authority even in a Facebook note: that which derives from a proximity to whiteness. As a postcolonial scholar rather than a postcolonial subject and writer, he assumes the authority of the one who analyses others using the jargon of the academy, instead of being the one who is analysed.

What is more, Miller's own subjectivity and his experiences of being a postcolonial academic, a writer, an African Jamaican and also a middle-class person, often become important themes in his posts and notes. The online interactions beneath them demonstrate not only his argument that the postcolonial writer lacks authority about his own experiences, but

also that he is considered to lack authority even in his own Facebook notes and blog posts; and possibly even more so precisely because the work is online: notes and blogs are on the margins of minor genres and have a comment section, which conveys the idea of a very "real" and egalitarian dialogue. Miller as a postcolonial essayist and scholar may belong to an ethnic minority in these areas, but he is also afforded a position within the elite because of the status afforded to this genre and to his academic job. Yet, when writing on the margins of a minor genre, or what could be termed a minor minor genre, he loses the authority of postcolonial scholar and postcolonial published writer because the related experience of a middle-class African Jamaican man in this virtual world, as will be argued, is contested in the same way that it is in the non-virtual world, either because he is a member of an ethnic minority or because he is part of a middle-class privileged minority.

In the texts that I will now discuss, Miller exposes the tension between different "realities" that exist in a hierarchy of "realities". This tension is the subject of one of his posts and one of his notes. In his blog post "The Occasionally Dangerous Thing Called 'Nuance'" (Miller 2011–17; December 9, 2012), Miller begins by exposing the problems with generalizations and stereotypes and relates this to marking students' essays at the University of Glasgow. When he teaches he explains that "in the marked-up essays that I hand back to [the students], the word [nuance] screams from the margin". The word "margin" here, of course, symbolically represents the marginal subjectivities that are being generalized about or stereotyped. Moreover, because it is Miller who is writing the word "margin" he is the one who is literally screaming from the margins, while at the same time attempting to exercise the authority that being an academic and teacher usually brings.

What is more, Miller, in his post, playfully uses generalizations himself to draw attention to them. He tells us how when he taught Chinua Achebe's essays, his students were "generally bright", "generally white", and it was "generally true that the North Americans of

the class were less sympathetic to Achebe's politics than the British students". Some of Miller's students accused Achebe of lacking nuance about racism, even though Achebe did occasionally acknowledge that not all white people were like that. Miller reflects upon how strange it is that a black person who encounters racism from one person in a room often should need to acknowledge that the other nine people were not racist. His first argument is that racism is "profound and experienced in a place beyond the kind of statistics that try to nuance away the horribleness and the stark specificity of what happened". The main thrust of Miller's argument is that sometimes nuance "becomes a way to sweep emotional and physical bruising" "under the carpet", "into the systemic denial of wrongs". He suggests in this instance that nuance is "ultimately dishonest, not because it isn't true, but rather because it tries to suppress a more urgent truth". In order to help his students, Miller, in the role of the postcolonial university lecturer, resorted to the authority of being a postcolonial subject too, when he told his students about his own experiences of racism while asking for directions in Glasgow, so as to aid their understanding of how all the people who are not racist to him cease to matter when actually confronted with someone who is. However, the result of this, he explains, is that he ended up having to acknowledge all the people who are not racist. Miller's personal revelation about this experience (his nuance) was, thus, undermined by the students' inability to really hear him because their "white fragility" needed to be prioritized (their nuance).

In this blog post, as opposed to the later published essay, Miller includes a picture of a black man in the foreground with a white house in the background with over 20 Ku Klux Klan members coming out of it. His use of this mass generalization symbolizes the felt experience of racism, the reality of racism, for a black man living in a white supremacist society. The piece also has readers' comments posted underneath, heightening, as previously mentioned, the dialogic aspect of the essay, yet doing so in a direct way that also bypasses the elitist

access to talks or speeches in the academy. Also, unlike essays in online editions of newspapers, the essays on Miller's blog are unedited, the comments are not screened before appearing online, and Miller responds to many of them. Even though comments can be deleted, readers can witness them appearing in "real time", print them or take screen shots to preserve them, and possibly see if something has disappeared if a section of dialogue does not make sense and appears to have vanished. Furthermore, these comments involve online disputes, most often those between Miller and the St Lucian poet Vladimir Lucien. Under the "Nuance" post, it is one of Miller's students who was actually present during the seminar he mentions who challenges him. In the comment section the female student writes that she appreciates Miller's seminar, yet what follows demonstrates that she appears not to have properly read or understood the part in which Miller informs us how he dislikes and fears asking for directions in Glasgow because people at best look nervous and seek an escape, which makes him feel humiliated, and "most other times" he is "not allowed any space to speak", as they either rush on by or tell him they do not have any money, which presumably suggests that they assume he is begging. Miller writes that he rarely tells such stories because it makes him feel like a contortionist of sorts when his tale becomes about not making his "mostly white audience feel accused". He has to silence his experience, his reality and his truth. His post is a way of giving voice to his reality, yet his student who responds (the same day that the piece was posted), like the students in the class, refuses to really "hear" the nuances of Miller's experience. Instead, she tells him that after reading his post she had felt guilty about all the people she had said "Sorry, no" to in Glasgow and goes on to explain the necessary precautions of "female street-wisdom" that entail acting that way to *all* men. His student, in typical defensive white woman fragility mode, excuses unknown persons of racism by entering into a competition of white woman versus black man experience, as well as overlooking the fact that Miller does not even specify who snubbed him. Some people may

have had racist reasons and others may not, but the important point is that Miller experienced it as racism because in his collective encounters in Scotland some are undeniably racist. Effectively what this student argues is that Miller's experiences of racism in her "reality" are not real. It is important to observe that Miller did not respond to her comment and her response is not mentioned in the published essay. The student's contribution to the piece effectively demonstrates Miller's argument and it is only through reading this essay in blog post form that one can benefit from this particular attribute of this hybrid genre.

Hybridity is an important aspect of creative non-fiction. Margot Singer and Nicole Walker (2013) argue that "creative nonfiction [...] stands at the vanguard of this movement [of blurring genres]. Hybrid, [groundbreaking], and unconventional, creative nonfiction is the pre-eminent expression of the blurry reality of our times" (1). However, the notion that there is a singular blurry reality today is precisely what Miller disputes. Realities and experiences may occupy shared spaces – geographically, temporally and imaginatively – but Miller's accomplishment in these pieces is to disentangle them and extricate them into becoming distinct realities. The only aspect of his work that could be said to blur "reality" is the fact that they appear on the Internet, which is often considered to be a virtual reality that is less "real" than what occurs in "meatspace" (the term used in cyberspace for the world not online). Even this hierarchy of "realities", of course, is open to debate, and the interaction in the comment space, one could argue, actually makes the dialogic part of the essay more "real". Indeed, if one happens to be online when people are responding to the blogs and notes, the discussion even occurs in "real time".

During Miller's time in New Orleans, the American television company Home Box Office (HBO) was filming the third season of their post-Hurricane Katrina series *Treme*. When walking around the city Miller finds himself literally on set, and in his Facebook note "On the Realness of Places" (April 8, 2011) he asks "How is that for walking in and out of



reality?" Like Miller's notes, the series documents how people cope after a tragedy. The series is obviously fictional, but Miller's notes and posts cannot be said to be "factual" either, as I will demonstrate later. In the same post Miller recounts how, when walking through the city, he also sees signs advertising "real Cajun cuisine" and "authentic voodoo dolls". After he "accidentally touch[es] a voodoo altar" the woman in the shop shouts at him: "Don't touch that, please! It's real!" The issue of authenticity is not only important in terms of objects, as it can also relate to places and people. Miller admits that, when he arrived in New Orleans, he went against his chaperone's advice and deliberately walked into neighbourhoods that he had been told not to. There he discovered that they were just places like any other: nobody snatched his bag and nobody invited him to eat with them, and he did not feel as if he was "suddenly seeing the REAL New Orleans". This makes him reflect upon his own experience as a middle-class Jamaican writer when a friend had recently asked "what is it like writing about Jamaica without having grown up in the real Jamaica?" He replied by saying that he did not know that his "whole life was made-up", that somehow it "was all made-up – matrix style". He goes on to reflect that there is an old compulsion to elevate the lives of the poor to actual "real" lives: "Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit reality. Everyone else is disinherited, even from their own countries." Miller argues that there are "many concurrent realities happening at the same time". These points bring into sharp focus the hierarchy of different realities. In the comments under this note, a day after it was posted (April 9, 2011), Lucien argues that the working-class cultures in the Caribbean are more "authentic" than the imitative upper-class cultures. Miller responds a few hours later by arguing that he is against privileging one culture over another, does not believe in statements like "genuine culture" and is against the tendency to homogenize culture rather than acknowledge "all the nuances that potentially undercut it". In Miller's "Nuance" blog he writes: "I feel I hold dual or even multiple citizenship – for I belong to both an oppressed race, and to a privileged class." The

word "citizenship" is particularly telling because it evokes the concepts of access, rights and legitimate documentation, thus conveying the idea that there is some sort of authority that can deem him a legitimate oppressed or privileged citizen of a particular group. Miller, in the comment section under the Facebook note "The Realness of Places", has the same experience as occurred under the "Nuance" blog post with his student: Miller posts and notes about his experience in "meatspace" of being denied his own "reality", which is then replicated in his "virtual space" when a person commenting on his blog insists on, yet again, denying Miller's reality. What Miller is claiming in his online work, and what the commentators are actually helping to expose, is the need for what I will term "nuance as social justice". By this I mean allowing people who are simultaneously marginalized and privileged – privileged because they are able to have a platform to speak – to have the space in which to voice their reality/ies and experiences without being silenced by others trying to nuance their reality away, either by claims that the person is not taking into account the realities of the more privileged, or that they are neglecting those of the more marginalized.

The consequences of Miller's work appearing in a virtual forum and attempts to classify it generically will now be explored and problematized. The academic need to trap, control and categorize is what concerns Michael Martone about genre classifications; this tendency, I would argue, is even more problematic if it is a postcolonial academic doing it, as attempting to constrain challenges to white supremacist systems is at odds with postcolonial ideology. Martone (2013) suggests that there should be more apprehension about "the genre of *genre*" (54; original emphasis). He posits that the academy and publishing venues use genres to make a text "harmless, tamed, and controlled", which by the use of categories and frames inform the world that fiction and non-fiction are art and, therefore, "not really a part of your life" (54). It could be argued that the ability to participate in a virtual forum and contribute to the art and/or contest what is written makes art more directly part of the reader's

life, as it has not passed through traditional publishing venues. Martone prefers to see art appearing "in settings not thought to be artistic, not sanctioned precincts of appreciation. At the crosswalks and the crossroads. Contested spaces" (54). Blogs and Facebook are not yet appreciated as places for art and Miller's choice of the "Saltire Flag" for his blog title suggests a symbolic crosswalk or crossroads. This in-betweenness corresponds to the form of the virtual world, which could also be seen as a crossroads, in between an embodied reality and a disembodied one. It is also a place where people with Internet access can read Miller's notes and posts and interact with them/him wherever they are. However, even though this forum makes his work appear to be less strictly "art" and also less fictional and controlled, this is but an illusion. Through Miller's posts and notes we are given the impression of gaining direct access to Miller, especially because of the comment section in which he often replies. An example that contests this intimacy arises when one compares the tour notes with the published essay "Making Space for Grief". Miller's pieces about his tour appear to contain his thoughts and feelings. However, he omits one important presence that gets mentioned in the published essay: "My mother recently accompanied me on a two-week trip overseas. [...] I still did not expect it other for the simple reason that she was dead" (2013b, 64). During the tour he was in fact grieving her recent demise. In the published essay he reveals how he saw and heard his mother's ghost speak to him: "'Grief and calamity' she said again, as she would say in New Orleans" (67). His mother's words are about the things that she and Miller witness, but, of course, they also resonate with Miller's own grief. The memorial at Gettysburg and the seeds that the birds scatter are, as he says, "grief spaces" (67), just like this particular essay becomes a space for his own grief. Through putting her into this version of his narrative, he exposes yet another reality existing simultaneously with and between others. Nonetheless, this insertion does not make his published essay more "factual" than the notes; rather it highlights the fictional quality of his online work and makes us aware that these

pieces are not merely a record of events. What is more, knowledge of his grief and his mother's ghostly presence also makes us cognizant of the fact that he has a literary persona on the Internet. As Dave Gunning (2015) states, the "essay is a key site for the consolidation of authorial personae" (134). This characteristic of the essay that appears in Miller's online work contrasts sharply with the ideology of the blog, in which the "realness" of the author is essential. Miller's highly stylized and controlled simulacrum of related experiences is, in fact, what makes his posts/notes essays and creative writing, and what provides them with a heightened existence for the reader. As Martone (2013) argues,

fact has no reality once it is done. It has no existence, is unreal. [...] A fiction, on the other hand, is a thing made and once it is made it comes into existence.

It has a reality. It can be sensed, stored, savoured even. (53)

Choosing to write on the Internet intensifies this effect because, through writing about the nature of reality/ies in a virtual forum, Miller compels his readers to assume that they have direct access to his experiences, thoughts and feelings – as if they are witnessing the writing taking place in real time, which helps them to imagine that they are also present on his travels. Likewise, the dialogic aspect of the comment space helps create this impression, as the readers can literally communicate with the author. This promotes the idea that Miller himself and his experiences are "real" because the form provides immediacy and an intimacy with the reader. However, as some of the comments demonstrate, this effect can compel readers to not hear his "reality" because it does not correspond to their notion of it. They instead choose to explain their idea of "reality", as Lucien does, or their own experience of it, as Miller's former student does. Somewhat ironically, not only do these comments function to confirm Miller's points, they also add additional realities to all those that Miller is presenting in this forum, which reflect the many realities existing in "meatspace".

To reiterate, I have argued that Miller's posts and notes could be considered as a hybrid genre of the essay and the blog post, which would make them a minor genre comprised of two other minor genres. Furthermore, the inclusion of creative non-fiction into the category of the essay, and the inclusion of Facebook notes in the blog genre, make them even more of a minor genre. In contrast, Miller himself states that his pieces are drafts of essays, which would demote them to hardly being able to be classified as a genre at all. From this perspective, the "Nuance" post and the tour notes could be viewed as being on the margins of the published collection of essays. The "Nuance" piece is more overtly in this space because in *Writing Down the Vision* the original blog post is mentioned and referenced in the introduction (Miller 2013a, 9). However, the writings from the tour are not. Miller only references the original text as an essay entitled "The Grief Spaces" that he wrote for the US State Department (8). This makes his online work, when viewed in relation to the published volume, appear like drafts sent to publishing houses that can be found by scholars in archives. However, unlike the elitist academic world of archives, these archives are available to anyone with Internet access. This ability for a majority of readers to retrieve previously hidden cultural material ties in with Jussi Parikka's (2013) observation that, today, "the labor of how culture remembers and retrieves from memory is shifting from the official institutions to everyday media environments [such as] social media" (16). This freedom, in the case of Miller's online and published work, corresponds to the fact that the reader decides (if both options are feasible) which format to access first or access only, which is out of Miller's control. It is also up to the reader to decide which version they prefer. Unlike some other types of Caribbean digital experiments, such as Robert Antoni's (2013) digital appendix to his novel *As Flies to Whatless Boys*, Miller's online work arose before the published essays and each piece functions as self-contained literature.

Attempts to categorize Miller's work into single generic categories mirror online commentators' attempts to categorize the author. Miller, as he tells us, holds multiple citizenships, which, as has been shown, is often contested. This equally applies to his posts and notes, insofar as they are generic hybrids, and because the Internet is still a contested place for art. The virtual world itself, together with the texts and contributions from readers, heighten the effect of a "real" dialogue about "real" experiences and, somewhat ironically, help to disclose the hierarchy of and competition between "realities" in "meatspace" and the pressing need for nuance as social justice.

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