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Abstract / Resumen

This review of Ana Rodríguez Navas' *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk: The Uses of Gossip in Caribbean Literature* (2018) provides a comprehensive overview of the study, its contributions to the field, and demonstrates how it presents innovative approaches to post-1960s Caribbean literary production.

Keywords / Palabras clave

Caribbean Studies, Performance, Gossip

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A comparative study on the amalgam of roles that gossip plays in Caribbean literature, Ana Rodríguez Navas' *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk: The Uses of Gossip in Caribbean Literature*, published in 2018 under the New World Studies imprint at the University of Virginia Press, approaches Caribbean Studies in a manner that transcends barriers of genre, language, and public versus private speech acts. *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* suggests a comparative approach to Caribbean literary production utilizing gossip as its base, characterizing gossip as an adversarial phenomenon that unites the meta-archipelago regardless of the linguistic code in which it is transmitted. Gossip occurs naturally in the Caribbean, as Rodríguez Navas argues, it "hops between islands" (5), due to its multilingual, multicultural society that is marked by processes of constant motion, both physical and political, and serves as a weapon of the marginalized to (de)construct local and global narratives of Caribbean history and identity.

In its introduction, *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* traces the etymology of the term, "gossip," and its often controversial role as socially toxic, amoral, or destructive speech in Western literary production. As evidence, it refers to the portrayal of gossip in the English literary canon, in particular, in the novels of Henry James and Jane Austen, as poisonous discourse that negatively impacts the lives of its characters and those around them, as argued by Patricia Meyer Spacks and others. Still, this historical exploration of gossip also reveals that no rigid, absolute definition of gossip is agreed upon by scholars. In order to situate gossip within the study, Rodríguez Navas provides the following definition: gossip is "a malleable form that at its most basic constitutes an act of revelation in which a person discloses or comments upon private, privileged, or unauthorized facts or stories about an absent third party, typically without regard for, or in active opposition to, the wishes of their subject" (13). Gossip blurs the lines between public and private speech acts and is, at its core, a subversive act. This study also signals the historically gendered conceptualization of gossip as effeminate speech, common among women and otherwise effeminate male characters. Departing from these theoretical tendencies, *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* posits that gossip functions not as a toxic force, but rather as a unifying device that spans boundaries of language, gender, and literary genre in Caribbean literature. Rodríguez Navas argues that gossip is inherently subversive, although its function is not necessarily antagonistic, as in the works of James and Austen, due to the postcolonial, post-authoritarian nature of the region in which speech and written language production was heavily regulated. This study explores gossip not in opposition to "good" or "bad" speech acts, but instead attempts to deconstruct this binary and reveal the spectrum of rebellious uses within which specific mediums of gossip situate themselves.

Idle Talk, Deadly Talk represents a culmination of Rodríguez Navas' scholarship in the field of contemporary, post-1960 Caribbean literature and performance. Rodríguez Navas' research both in this book and in peer-reviewed journals spans late twentieth-century cultural production in Spanish, French, and English, including canonical works such as Rosario Ferré's *Maldito amor* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, but also incorporating lesser-known texts, some which push the limits of what has been historically regarded as

literature, including pamphlets and personal letters. Rodríguez Navas' work realizes a needed addition of scholarship to both Caribbean and performance studies because of its diversity of languages and mediums. It reads between the lines of contemporary Caribbean cultural production to find innovative commonalities and strategies of (re)presentation of diverse identities.

The chapters of *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* are carefully curated in a manner that starts with the intimate, local community and expands to include the global, international sphere. The first chapter explores the (de)constructive power of gossip in intimate groups and communities in works such as Gabriel García Márquez's *La mala hora* (1962); chapter two introduces the role of gossip as a knowledge base for forming identity, studying Rosario Ferré's *Maldito amor* (1986) and Maryse Condé's *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000); the third discusses how gossip, an otherwise private speech act, publicly destabilizes political regimes, as in Graham Greene's *The Comedians* (1966) and Reinaldo Arenas' *Antes que anochezca* (1992); the fourth, and last, examines the political legacy of Caribbean gossip on the world stage, referencing the term "gossip state" to discuss authoritarian regimes that regulated speech acts and deemed those that spoke ill of the government as subversive. This last chapter is where Rodríguez Navas incorporates several diverse genres of written word, exploring personal memoirs written by Caribbean prominent figures and politicians, including Joaquín Balaguer of the Dominican Republic, to demonstrate the prevalence of rumor and gossip as each text reconstructs its own version of national identity that often runs contrary to regime-approved, white-washed version of history.

It is through a postcolonial, gendered methodological approach that Rodríguez Navas achieves a fluid, clear argument for the performative nature of gossip as a means to (de)construct intimate communities and narratives of identity in the Caribbean. *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* incorporates canonical postcolonial Caribbean philosophers such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Édouard Glissant, among others, but also includes voices from recent scholars in the field of Caribbean and U.S. Latino Studies, such as Rafael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez. It is through a close reading of each primary source that Rodríguez Navas also questions the manner in which canonical works have been historically read, such as Rosario Ferré's *Maldito amor*. Traditionally read as a feminist narrative, *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* argues that, in the novel, gender is not the basis of subversion against patriarchal values like *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, due to the fact that gender alone cannot account for racial and class differences that exist among the women characters. Gossip, rather, becomes the unifying force behind the actions of women in the novel that permits their transgressions against the patriarchy. Rodríguez Navas' study demonstrates an original approach to gender and gendered speech acts in Caribbean cultural production and reflects methodological paths to analyzing gender that account for racial and class disparities.

Extending across literary genres and linguistic fields, *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* stands out for its innovative approaches to canonical and lesser-studied examples of Caribbean literary production. Rodríguez Navas' research reconsiders previous scholarship with regard to gender and performance in the Caribbean and invites future studies to realize the same task, similarly encouraging less insular, more multilingual comparative studies across the region, simultaneously pushing the limits of what we consider literature. Just as the Caribbean itself transcends frontiers of identity, *Idle Talk, Deadly Talk* demonstrates that the variety of mediums analyzed that question the limits of literary, on a symbolic level, reflects the inherent diversity of the region.