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A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY  
OF THE WEST INDIAN NOVEL

by

Ruta Mara Sani

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment  
of the  
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Ruta Mara Zucker

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## INTRODUCTION

The concern of this paper is to survey West Indian fictional writings in the English language with the main emphasis on the novel as a representative expression of West Indian literature. For the purposes of this paper, 'West Indies' and 'West Indian' refer to the former British islands in the Caribbean Sea and to Guyana which is located on the northeastern tip of the South American continent. All the authors covered in this work were either born or raised in the West Indies.<sup>1</sup> The original language of their fictional writings is English, but this literature is distinguished from all other English literature because these novels draw on West Indian materials.

This paper is the outgrowth of an effort to collect and organize a list of representative West Indian authors and their works which could serve as a critical survey of writings for the study of this literature. Many of the novels of these authors are 'out of print' and difficult to secure, others are published by small publishing houses in limited quantities. While it is one of the hopes of this author that by compiling such a list, the republication of some of these volumes might be facilitated, it also has the interim

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<sup>1</sup>The author, Peter Abrahams, is an exception. He was born in South Africa and did not make his home in Jamaica till he was in his twenties. However, Abrahams claims to be a Jamaican and his works are included in the Appendices of this paper.



effect of limiting the details which this paper can supply. It is for this reason that some of the 'out of print' novels, which could not be secured in the rare book collections of New York and the local libraries of the islands, are discussed in the main body of the paper referring to materials gleaned from secondary sources.

The body of this paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter II is an historical essay tracing the socio-economic, political and cultural factors of the islands as they influenced the development of a literature and the novel in particular. Chapter III is a chronological survey of West Indian authors and their works. The individual writers are discussed separately using their novels to give expression to their authorial voice. Chapter IV summarizes the general trends in the West Indian novel as a whole giving titles of novels to illustrate a specific trend.

Appendix A is a bibliographic listing of West Indian novels including both inprint and out of print works. The arrangement is alphabetical by author and title. Appendix B gives an annotated bibliography of selected inprint novels. The arrangement is alphabetical by author and chronological by the first publication date of that author's work.

Before entering into the main body of this paper, certain limits must be recognized lest the reader expect more guidance than is available. Though effort has been made to locate several reviews of those novels which are 'out of print' and the originals unavailable, the completeness of this paper has been obviously limited. It

has also been necessary to omit some recent titles from Appendix B, the annotated 'inprint' book section of this paper, because these volumes could not be obtained on the island of St. Thomas.

The general procedure followed in compiling the material has been to check all possible periodical publications for complete bibliographical information, talking to librarians and knowledgeable people on the islands and checking all materials in the island libraries and private book collections pertaining to the West Indies. Once a West Indian author's name was found, a methodical search was made through the American Books in Print,<sup>1</sup> and British Books in Print,<sup>2</sup> covering years 1960-1970, to find titles of publications.

An invaluable source of materials has been Ramchand's<sup>3</sup> work which was published after this paper had already been started. Ramchand's "Author Bibliography",<sup>4</sup> covering 1903 to June, 1967, served as an excellent check list. A most helpful source has been the bibliographical articles written by the same author in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Books in Print; an author-title-series index to the Publishers Trade List Annual (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1948 \_\_\_\_).

<sup>2</sup>British Books in Print; the reference catalogue of current literature (London: Whitaker, 1965 \_\_\_\_). Formerly the Reference Catalogue of Current Literature (London: Whitaker, 1874-1961).

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber, 1970). (Hereinafter referred to as Novel and Background.)

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 274-278.

<sup>5</sup>The Journal of Commonwealth Literature (London: Heinemann, 1965 \_\_\_\_).

## CHAPTER II

### THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE WEST INDIES

This chapter dealing with the cultural background of the islands proposes to trace the major economic, political, social and cultural factors as they supported and hindered the growth of the novel in the West Indies.

If West Indian literature is to be defined as those works written by people who were born or raised in the West Indies,<sup>1</sup> the earliest acknowledged novel is Tom Redcam's Becka's Buckra Baby which was published in Jamaica in 1903.<sup>2</sup> Although a considerable exotic writing has been done about the Negro and the West Indian scene prior to the 20th century,<sup>3</sup> much of this cannot be properly considered West Indian literature if we follow our definition. The recent emergence of West Indian literature and the fact that only 162 works of prose fiction have been produced by 54 writers from six West

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<sup>1</sup>For the purpose of this paper 'West Indies' refers to the former British islands in the Caribbean Sea and that South American mainland territory now known as Guyana.

<sup>2</sup>Ramchand, Novel and Background, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>See Wylie Sypher, Guineas's Captive Kings (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942); Eldred Jones, Othello's Countrymen (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Norman Verrle McCullough, The Negro in English Literature (Ilfracombe, England: Stockwell, 1962).

Indian territories between 1903 and June 1967<sup>1</sup> allow us to survey this literature in some detail.

Before determining the reasons for the late development of the novel in this area, we should look at the man whom we call a West Indian. Culturally and racially he is a rich blend of peoples from Africa, Europe and Asia. He is the descendant of European colonizers, African slaves and indentured laborers from India as well as a mixture of these. He carries a heritage from all of them even though his literature reflects a life style distinctively West Indian. As a conglomerate of many cultures and races, he has borrowed and adapted cultural traits from all his ancestors to suit his island living needs. Through his tumultuous colonial history, he has added concepts apparently his own, yet they all persist and are slow to change. He has erected social systems, evolved his own dialect, even developed an elastic family structure and moral concepts that suit him because he is familiar with them. It may be called the 'island way of life', but the way is a distinctive and a finely tooled product combining what was imported to the islands and what was developed on them.

Such a life, which we will call the West Indian experience, is by definition parochial in the sense that it comes from strictly defined geographic regions with very similar socio-economic backgrounds. The West Indies is an interesting case in world history because a human society was artificially created for the economic goal of sugar production. The island economy was based on slave

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<sup>1</sup>Ramchand, Novel and Background, p. 3.

labor and propelled by a minority group of white plantation owners. When emancipation rendered this previous agricultural arrangement unprofitable, the entire social structure of the islands was shaken. Abolition meant that the enforced ties between ex-master and ex-slave were cut. The whites were facing economic disaster and, although they maintained their superior status within the social system, they felt the psychological need to reinforce their adherence to British norms. The middle class of plantation overseers and mulattoes, who were free at the beginning, felt threatened and had to find new ways to adjust to the new social order. The now released black masses formed the largest segment of society and, for the most part, were unskilled and uneducated. For some of them, the revitalization of ancient tribal memories and patterns developed during slavery was reinforced, while others tried to duplicate a European cultural system.

The West Indies are not unique in this -- Africa has and still is undergoing the experience of adjustment after a colonial history. But the important point remains that after a radical political change -- the emancipation of a large mass of slaves -- the psychological fitting into the new scheme is bound to be slow and in many cases painful for the individuals involved.

In their novels the West Indian authors reflect the voice of such an experience within the framework of these mini societies and micronations. Theirs is a representative voice of ex-colonials, from Africa to the Caribbean, representing people who must adapt from rural isolation and white mastery to the beginnings of self-

determination and political independence.

However, for the first West Indian novel to emerge, certain conditions were necessary. The most obvious ones were: a) that there had to be a West Indian who felt like a West Indian, and b) there had to be one who was able to write a novel. But it was not until the Act of Emancipation in 1833 that education was officially endorsed for most West Indians.<sup>1</sup> Consequently a literary Negro was an exception in the 19th century. Although the absence of indigenous West Indian literature can be explained by the lack of literacy among the underprivileged black masses, this is not the case with the equally silent white creoles<sup>2</sup> and light skinned mulattoes. Both of these segments of population were equated with mainland educated upper classes. Thus, for this life without fiction, other contributing factors must be found.

In the 19th century there was a lack of nationalistic feeling among all the people of the islands. The white planter class with its economical losses more than ever identified with England and English ways of life. The mulatto was caught in the dilemma of neither belonging to the pure white class nor willing to identify with the larger black masses. The blacks were too poor and too down trodden to do much more than feed themselves and their families. In a sense, everyone was too busy establishing himself and his personal

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<sup>1</sup>Shirley C. Gordon, A Century of West Indian Education (London: Ginn, 1963), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>The term 'creole' denotes a person of any race who is born in the West Indies.

identity to worry about nationalistic feelings and the unified sense of the islands.

As a result, after the Act of Emancipation and during the subsequent slow steps in popular education, the social structure of the islands remained static until the 1890's. At that point, the society underwent its first social reconstruction. The white planter class, without the support of slave labor, started leaving the islands. A black majority rule became more imminent, and those whites who, apart from economic considerations, could not face living in an egalitarian society with blacks left for the continent. Those who stayed moved into commerce or public offices alongside the educated creoles. For those people who remained, the islands became a home and a sense of national feeling and belonging was born. Against this cultural background emerged the first West Indian novel written by Redcam. Viewing the situation in this light, and considering the literature is less than seventy years old, it is not suprising that the voice of the West Indian author may still be unsure.

However, concrete literary expression had to wait for general literacy to take root during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and for this period of discontent in the islands was fostered, in part, by the economic depression and, in part, by Pan-African and Pan-Negro movements. More effective popular education, combined with the achievement of universal adult suffrage, gave rise to feelings of nationalism among the blacks. These feelings could be and were vented in literary expression by a few people. But, by then, a set of

attitudes and traditional conditioning had already been built up among many people. The underprivileged classes, through hard physical labor and lack of exposure to written materials, had been inculcated with an indifference towards the abstract arts. They had learned to enjoy and enforce the oral tradition of their ancestors and relied on these forms of expression for their amusement. The colonized middle classes resisted everything native that was not the English literature they had been taught to appreciate in mainland universities. These two factors played a distinctive role in the delayed and slow development of a literary tradition in the West Indies. Later it also caused the emigration of the authors who wished to live by the efforts of their pens. The dormant capacities of the masses thus have remained without concrete motivation to turn to literary expression. From the West Indians' point of view, their own authors write more for foreign audiences than for them -- and above all a song and a tale can be told so much more effectively with immediate enjoyment and within a group activity.

When a few more writers emerged during the 1930's and 1940's they still lacked a reading public. At best, they reaped a super critical condescension for their efforts from the middle classes for this class failed to identify with anything that concerned the masses. The authors emigrated -- mostly to Great Britain -- to gain their initial stamp of approval. These authors continued to explore their native islands from abroad, but basically they were writing for a foreign public and slanted the content, mood and expression of their novels



for those readers. The situation became ironic. The characters and settings of most novels by West Indians were taken from the islands they had left and dealt with the issues that are crucial to the West Indian people. Yet the price of the imported British or American volumes was, and is, beyond the financial means of the majority of West Indian readers. Even today, the gifted men leave, citing such reasons as the scarcity of publishing houses at home, the lack of an audience, and the general intellectual torpor on the islands. Furthermore, as they succeed abroad, they reinforce the myth of England as the place of promise and value where one can achieve his goals,<sup>1</sup> while at home the historical and cultural inhibitions continue to operate:

The reading of literature outside of school is not a general practice in the West Indies. Many people do not have enough leisure for reading much more than newspapers. ...There is also a positive indifference to literature on the grounds that it is neither enjoyable nor useful. It is seen as the worst of school subjects, something which has to be learnt, 'sic' but which, after all the trouble, has no connection with one's life and interests, a 'bookish' subject which is useless as soon as one leaves school and has to earn a living and face life.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the writing of novels continues, even if to a large degree it is from abroad, and that in 1969 the School of Caribbean Studies was established at the University of the West Indies, is a most encouraging sign. Some of the younger voices are

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<sup>1</sup>Ivan Van Sertima, Caribbean Writers (London: New Beacon Books, Ltd., 1968), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Ramchand, West Indian Narrative (London: Nelson, 1968), p. 1.

returning home and establishing their careers in educational fields. It would appear that future writers, living on their own soil, will speak more directly and reflect the island mood more accurately for the citizens of the area.

### CHAPTER III

#### A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF WEST INDIAN AUTHORS AND THEIR WORKS

This chapter proposes: a) to give a chronological survey of West Indian authors and their novels, and b) to indicate that a direction and a unity can be assumed for this literature within specific time periods. Although such an approach has its inherent limitations due to its mechanical division, this particular literature seems to be an offspring of literary readiness at a particular time rather than an awakening sparked by a genius who happened to be a West Indian. The previous chapter has already pointed out the cultural and historical events that prepared the ground for the growth and development of the novel in the West Indies. Starting with 1903, the first two decades are slow -- producing a mere twelve titles.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent twenty years form another grouping that can be discussed as a unit. It is not till the 1950's and the 1960's where an abundance of written works makes this a cumbersome arrangement. It is during this period of time that the ideas of the authors, writing styles and schools of thought start overlapping. Yet, the author of this paper hopes that the concluding chapter on general trends in West Indian literature as a whole will compensate

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<sup>1</sup>See table on p. 24.

for this shortcoming.

The following discussion is divided into five sections:

(1) 1903-1919, (2) the 1920's and the 1930's, (3) the 1940's, (4) the 1950's and (5) the 1960's. A brief summary at the end of the discussion for each time period brings out the salient literary facts of those years. Although full biographical information on the authors mentioned can not be provided due to the limited space, a note is usually made of the author's background as well as his birth-date. The number placed in the parentheses after a title refers the reader to an entry in Appendix A for full bibliographical information of the work cited.

#### 1903 to 1919: The Early Years

In Jamaica two white creole authors emerged: Thomas Henry MacDermot and H. G. deLisser.

Thomas Henry MacDermot (1870-1933), using the pen name of Tom Redcam, was the first who could be called a practicing literary man. His poetry and fiction are disappointing to those who would wish him a literary genius, yet he remains an important personality in this literature. He strove to create a reading and book buying public in his home island.

As a son of an Anglican minister, Redcam was brought up in relative poverty, and, before he became the editor of The Jamaica Times, he tried his hand at school teaching and journalism. He was

a nationalist and expressed this in his creative writings.<sup>1</sup> In One Brown Girl and ... (93)<sup>2</sup> he uses as a central character a young girl who returns home to Jamaica alienated because of her English education. The novel centers around this girl's search to return to her grass roots existence as a true Jamaican. His first novel Becka's Buckra Baby (92) was published as No. 1 of The All Jamaica Library<sup>3</sup> which he intended to issue serially to deal with Jamaican literature. The All Jamaica Library failed since Redcam could only find two other contributors besides himself (E. Snod and W. A. Campbell). However, five volumes were published. While Redcam's work was not of a high order, the comic sketches of Snod in Maroon Medicine (214) and the literary romanticism of Campbell in Marguerite (21) were even less likely to inspire a national literature. One Brown Girl and ... (93), a last attempt for The All Jamaica Library, was again Redcam's own work, but it was a losing battle as far as financial gains or prestige for the authors were concerned.<sup>4</sup> Yet Redcam in his capacity as an editor was able to encourage and help other aspiring authors.

H. G. deLisser (1878-1944), though antinationalistic in his

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph and Johanna Jones, Authors and Areas of the West Indies (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn, 1970), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Appendix A, entry 93. All such numbers following a title refer to Appendix A for full bibliographical information.

<sup>3</sup>The All Jamaica Library published five volumes between 1903 and 1909: Redcam's Becka's Buckra Baby (1903, No. 1), E. Snod's Maroon Medicine (1905, No. 2), William Alexander Campbell's Marguerite (1907, No. 3) and Redcam's One Brown Girl and ... (1909, Nos. 4 and 5).

<sup>4</sup>Ramchand, Novel and Background, p. 54.

attitude, tried to interest Jamaicans in his writings by publishing his works locally. Here again there were no profits for either the author or his publisher. deLisser was a Portugese Jew with a touch of African ancestry. He was a librarian until he turned to journalism and became the editor of The Jamaica Gleaner, a post he held for forty years.

His novels have earned him honors because of his knowledge of island history and his fine control over dialect speech. His first novel, Jane: a Story of Jamaica <sup>(36)</sup>, is notable mainly as the first novel in which a black West Indian is used as a central character. The book fluctuates between protest against British Colonialism and a detached endorsement of Fabian Socialism. The girl's early village years are told with some insight, her years as an apprentice domestic in Kingston with considerable anger, and her eventual marriage into lower middle class as an achievement from which the heroine can start hiring apprentice domestics of her own.

Each of deLisser's novels is set in a specific time in history. His first, published in 1913 was a novel dealing with Jamaicans of the early 1900's. His other works moved on in time ending with his last novel Arawak Girl <sup>(34)</sup>, which is set in the 1490's.<sup>1</sup> Between these two times the other novels are systematically located.<sup>2</sup>

As deLisser grew older, he abandoned his early socialistic

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<sup>1</sup>Ramchand, The West Indian Novel, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

views and became an arch conservative spokesman against self-government and selfrule for the blacks. His novels indicate this trend in his thinking-- only his first heroine is black and subsequently his heroes grow lighter skinned and the authorial sympathy with the local scene ceases. deLisser's antinationalistic views have precluded West Indian esteem of him.<sup>1</sup> Although he is not a strong writer, his place in the history of this literature is important because of Jane (36) which in many respects is a precursor of later West Indian fiction. In it he explored the growing up process, lower class life in Kingston and the individual's adjustment to urbanization.

#### Summary for the years of 1903-1919

Neither Redcam nor deLisser were black although both were creoles. When they wrote, the prevalent attitudes were to glorify England and to apologize for the black man and his indigenous culture. The major contribution of Redcam and deLisser was that they wrote, and that they used the West Indies as a setting while employing West Indians as characters in their novels. The apologies for the black characters in these novels, the emphasis of white culture as the panacea for achievement and the denigration of the local customs have to be accepted along with the cultural tone of colonialism.

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<sup>1</sup>Ramchand, The West Indian Novel, p. 56.

## 1920-1940: Setting the Mood

For the next step in literary development we have to move to Trinidad and the years of the 1920's and 1930's. At that time, there was a group of literary and artistic talents which met to discuss anything pertaining to the arts as well as social and political conditions. The group was interested in creating a periodical in which they could give expression to their views and talents. Two key figures were Alfred H. Mendes and C. L. R. James. They published two issues of a magazine called Trinidad<sup>1</sup> which contained stories, articles and poetry by people who later were to become famous on the West Indian scene. James and Mendes had started something and although both of them were soon to leave Trinidad --James emigrated to England and Mendes left for the United States<sup>2</sup> -- the idea of a literary periodical had caught the imagination of another young man. At his own expense, a Portugese creole, Albert Gomes, started to publish The Beacon.<sup>3</sup> For the majority of the contributions, the magazine depended upon those who had already left the island; yet between 1931 and 1933 it was a lively periodical that stirred imagination of the islanders.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel And its Background (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>3</sup>The Beacon (Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1931-1933).

<sup>4</sup>"The Grand Mixture of Trinidad's Culture," Carib (St. Thomas, Virgin Islands) October 28, 1971. p. 9.



The importance of this group, aside from the individual talents, should not be underestimated because the combined efforts of Mendes (bl897) and James (bl901) established social realism as a trend in the West Indian novel. They, at first in short stories and later in novels, gave artistic authenticity to that grim West Indian experience that is the lot of the underprivileged classes. Their stories offended the bourgeoisie of their home island, but these authors also brought about an unforgettable awareness of their island condition.

James' Minty Alley (76) contains most of the West Indian novel's virtues and one significant fault. As a description of slum living, it records the life of the 'dungle',<sup>1</sup> and expresses it in rich dialect showing how the under-privileged West Indian survives in the midst of poverty and frustration. Unfortunately, it also points out the frightening gap between the writer and the society that he describes. The central character in the story, Haynes (the author?), comes to dominate the life of the slum yard -- participates in its life -- yet at the end he leaves it to remember it as a bad waking dream.

James emigrated and distinguished himself internationally as an imaginative political theorist and a sensitive commentator on the West Indian social and cultural scene. Minty Alley (76) has remained his only novel. Yet it is one of the important landmarks in

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<sup>1</sup>'Dungle' is the Trinidad word for a slum -- possibly derived from 'jungle' and 'dung-hill'.

establishing West Indian literature.

Mendes, his contemporary and co-pace-setter in literary trends, is a Portuguese creole who wrote two novels before emigrating to the United States. Pitch Lake (107), his first novel, is a staggering account of the alienation of a young Portuguese man who is caught in the black slums while aspiring to the hollow social life of second generation Portuguese who have succeeded in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Mendes is impressive in describing the youth's tortured consciousness, his fears and insecurities, his vacillations and disgust at others and at himself. The author implies that the struggle for integrity can be achieved only through an alienation from any given society. Both James and Mendes have indicated in their works a forced yet positive separation between themselves and the people they write about.

Another group of early writers came from among the large group of West Indians who emigrated to the United States in the Harlem era and before the emigration laws of the 1920's. Some lost their national origins and are hard to trace.

The problem of national origin arises chiefly in regard to West Indian authors. On the grounds of national consciousness I have excluded Eric Rasmussen who was born in the Virgin Islands, who has lived sporadically in New York, but who writes of Caribbean life in The First Night (1951). For similar reasons I have excluded B. Archer Tracy, who was born in the British West Indies, who practiced medicine for a time in Georgia, but who writes of island life in The Sword of Nemesis (1919). Also excluded are Thomas E. Roach and W. Adolphe Roberts, two authors of West Indian origin whose inept fantasies and historical extravaganzas reflect little knowledge of American life. Included, however, are Nella Larsen, born in the Virgin Islands and Claude McKay, born in Jamaica,

because they participated actively in the Negro Renaissance and write primarily of the American scene.<sup>1</sup>

The distinguished figure of this group of emigrants is Claude McKay (1890-1948) who was the first black novelist from the West Indies and the first of the exiles. Although the chosen direction of the later emigre writers was England, not the United States, McKay was the first in a long line of expatriats. While Redcam and deLisser could earn their living in Jamaica by journalism or business and write as amateurs, McKay had to become a professional writer and go abroad. This was 1912. Not only by exiling himself, but also in other ways McKay seems to anticipate patterns among West Indian writers. An example of this is his early concern with race and color problems and his involvement with international Negro movements. These have left their mark on his fiction as well as on later West Indian writers.

McKay's main talent was obviously displayed in his poetry, but for the purposes of this paper we cannot omit his novels. Home to Harlem (98) and Banjo (96) deal with the place of the black man in a white civilization. This approach in McKay's fiction fosters a cultural dualism that he expressed through the celebration of Negro qualities and an angry attack upon the civilized white world. In these two novels the author deals with the expatriate Negro, the homeless vagabond who is forced to rejoice in Negritude because his

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<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Bone, The Negro Novel in America (rev. ed.; New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 256.

only alternate choice is the fringe of society.

Banana Bottom (95), his last novel, begins with the return of the native -- Bitá Plant, the daughter of Jamaican peasants, who comes home to an island community which McKay imagines as one where it is possible to belong. After seven years at an English University, Bitá returns to strip from her continental experience all that is non essential for her living in the village of Banana Bottom. The theme of cultural dualism is inherent in the story; this is a powerful novel, artistically told and recognized as the first classic of West Indian prose with Bitá Plant as the first West Indian heroine.<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary for the 1920's and the 1940's

While the earlier writings of the West Indies betrayed its colonial origins by their celebration of foreign and white cultural values and were essentially alienated from the facts of the West Indian scene and situation, the 1920's and the 1930's began to come to grips with the reality of life on the islands. James and Mendes focussed their attention on the Trinidadian scene as it was experienced by the majority of the population. McKay brought attention to Jamaica and Negritude while deLisser, who continued to write, brought further awareness of Jamaican cultural factors in a historical perspective.

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<sup>1</sup>Ramchand, Novel and Background, p. 259.

### The 1940's: Trying out Literary Wings

The 1940's mainly produced a few literary periodicals which gave young authors the opportunity to try out their literary wings while the reader was exposed to the intellectual and spiritual possibilities of the islands. Kyk-over-al<sup>1</sup> (1945) in Guyana, Focus<sup>2</sup> (1943) in Jamaica, Bim<sup>3</sup> (1942) in Barbados, and Caribbean Quarterly<sup>4</sup> (1949) in Jamaica gave West Indian writers a chance to appear within the same covers for the first time. But the reading audience was not there and the big book publishers were abroad. In 1946, BBC started an overseas broadcast, the "Caribbean Voices." Poems and short stories were sent to Oxford Street, London from Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica and other islands. The program paid for the work and suddenly there seemed to be a literary future in England for those West Indian authors who had the courage to leave. In April, 1948 a complete issue of Life and Letters,<sup>5</sup> a British periodical, was devoted to Jamaican writing. Again in November, 1948, the same periodical covered West Indian writings as a whole. The promised land was only an ocean voyage away. With so little economic and

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<sup>1</sup>Kyk-over-al (Georgetown, Guyana, 1945-1961).

<sup>2</sup>Focus (Kingston, Jamaica. Issues in 1943, 1948, 1956, 1960).

<sup>3</sup>Bim (Woodville, St. Michael, Barbados, West Indies) current.

<sup>4</sup>Caribbean Quarterly (University of the West Indies, Department of Extra Mural Studies: Kingston, Jamaica, 1949 - current).

<sup>5</sup>Life and Letters (London, England, 1948).

intellectual encouragement at home the continued departure of the authors was inevitable.

Edgar Mittelholzer, a Guyanese who had been in Trinidad, arrived in London in 1948. His novel, A Morning at the Office (120) was published by the Hogarth Press. In 1950 Samuel Selvon from Trinidad and George Lamming from Barbados made their voyages and were published by Wingate and Joseph Michael respectively. Next, in 1951, Roger Mais left Jamaica and his The Hills Were Joyful Together (104) was published by Jonathan Cape. Emigration had become a way of life.

#### Summary for the 1940's

The 1940's are important largely for the literary periodicals that were started. Many of the authors who became novelists abroad had spread their literary wings with short stories that had been published in the periodicals. Two novels of importance were published in these years. Mittelholzer's Corentyne Thunder (111) was published in 1941, but Mittelholzer as a novelist did not emerge till the 1950's- after his emigration. Reid's New Day (170) came at the close of the decade and the 1940's served mainly as a preparatory period for the great exodus of the next two decades.

#### The 1950's: Voices from Exile

The 1950's and 1960's have been termed the period of West Indian renaissance. Certainly in quantity that claim can be supported by the following table:

TABLE 1

NOVELS PUBLISHED BY WEST INDIAN AUTHORS  
BETWEEN 1900 AND 1967

Years of publication	No. first pub.	Place of publication:			
		Britain	West Indies	U.S.A.	Elsewhere
1900-1909 .....	5	0	5	0	0
1910-1919 .....	7	2	4	1	0
1920-1929 .....	7	1	1	5	0
1930-1939 .....	9	4	1	4	0
1940-1949 .....	15	1	8	6	0
1950-1959 .....	52	42	7	1	2
1960-1967 .....	74	69	4	1	0

<sup>a</sup>Source: Data taken from: Ramchand, Novel and Background, pp. 282-286.

The writers that emerged during the period after 1950 are too numerous to discuss individually. During the period between 1950 and 1959, some of the major voices that emerged are Mittelholzer, Selvon, Lammie, Mais, Hearne, Naipaul, Carew, Reid, Drayton and Salkey. For most of them, their writing career did not end within that time period, yet they published their first books then -- with the exception of Mittelholzer who, prior to 1950, had published his Correntyne Thunder (111). However, his actual literary career can be considered to have begun with his emigration and The Morning at the Office (120).

For the group as a whole, it is important to remember that they were writing from a self-imposed exile -- for all the previously mentioned reasons -- and while recounting their personal

West Indian experiences they were still writing for a foreign audience. It may have lent a sharper focus to some of their novels, yet in other cases the distance may have blurred memory. However, a literature was produced under these unique circumstances and it is distinctively West Indian in flavor.

Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965) led the postwar exodus. Of Swiss-African descent, he was born in the brooding landscape of Guyana where he grew up and was educated. With him he carried his racial heritage and a sense of the spectacular terrifying history of Guyana imbued in myths and superstitions. His twenty-three novels are centered around the exploration of fear and loneliness as they create and enforce prejudice. He varied and intensified them with his probings of psychic phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

Essentially Mittelholzer carries a tragic vision of life, as in the above mentioned context (exploration of fear and loneliness combined with psychic phenomena) which in his later works culminates in the exploration of the death wish. Possibly as a consequence of this later development, he committed suicide by incineration in a lonely Sussex field.

In his early novel, Morning at the Office (1920), he already is presenting his two basic themes. The story is a delicate analysis of four and a half hours in a Trinidad office where the bones of a

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph, Elsie M., "The Treatment of Sex in the novels of Edgar Austin Mittelholzer" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 1966).



multiracial society are laid bare because of prejudice created by individual fears and loneliness. The psychic phenomena theme is introduced in a daydream sequence of the office workers. In a later episode, a dead man appears to finish a job and a key becomes a living, fearful thing.

Mittelholzer's later works are variations of these two themes. Some of the novels were successful while in other cases the results were negative. Several novels created a positive world where the redeeming factor became a cooperation among interested people to overcome the inherent evil in the world the author had established. Understanding and mutual self-help, aided by psychic phenomena, extended hope in Shadows Move Among Them (126), My Bones and My Flute (122), and The Wounded and the Worried (134).

Shadows Move Among Them (126) creates an isolated communal world in the Canje jungle. A missionary and his family run a Utopian plantation, plagued by psychic forces of environment and the human subconscious. To this place comes Gregory, a mentally ill youth, who regains his sanity because of the help of the community. The society there is artificial with its own rules that in Mittelholzer's vision are curative. Sex is easy and natural and religion is an emotional and cultural experience. The control factor, though, is that any show of weakness (which Mittelholzer always sees as a social evil) is punishable by death.

My Bones and My Flute (122) isolates psychic phenomena for concentrated exploration. A family with the aid of a friend try to

release themselves from a curse which during the story assumes powers of evil and produces emotionally terrifying experiences. Again, salvation is based on the help of interested people.

The Wounded and the Worried (134) espouses Eastern philosophies, religious experiences and psychic phenomena. Four characters in this novel have attempted suicide, but through the help of one believer in the philosophy, they find reasons for living. With this novel Mittelholzer has reached a stage of destructive writing in which his frustrated characters yearn for death.

Sylvia (127) had already introduced this key theme of frustration intertwined with the necessity of dying. Sylvia, the daughter of a white father and a black mother, finds no support in her society after the death of her father. Further cheated, rejected, jilted and degraded she briefly struggles with starvation, but finally welcomes death.

The tragic vision that Mittelholzer held was probably inherited from his Caribbean world, but it grew stronger as he encountered what he considered to be the decadence of the more sophisticated British society. In The Piling of Clouds (125) he writes about a middle class British family of the suburbs. Sexual deviation and sexual promiscuity lead to murder and death. Here Mittelholzer gives evidence of evil within another society. At the same time, a new development in Mittelholzer's philosophy appears -- the necessary and justifiable taking of another's life. The person who carries evil has to be killed -- no other justification is needed.

In Jilkington Drama (114) his society suggests that weakness fosters ineptness which furthers life's complexities, and eventually gives way to frustrations that lead to death.

Mittelholzer philosophized that frustration and loneliness will destroy the weak characters and that this death wish vies with the will to construct a perfect society as advocated by his stronger characters.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1952 - 1958 Mittelholzer completed his Kaywana trilogy (110, 115, 113). It is an historical novel trying to capture the raw and violent spirit of Guyana of 1612-1953. It is a narrative of blood and adventure with constant recourse to sex and violence. The men and women of the Van Groewegel family are strong, crushing the weak in their path. Eventually, they become human monsters, maddened and perverted by exaggerated visions of family pride and destiny. By acts of abominable cruelty they succeed in creating a dynasty, but this brutality finally backfires, setting in motion events that undermine the foundations of the family.<sup>2</sup> But good or bad, the trilogy won for its author an enormous popularity.

Samuel Selvon (b1923), a Trinidadian, with little formal education followed Mittelholzer to England. He is the first East

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<sup>1</sup>William J. Howard, "Edgar Mittelholzer's Tragic Vision," Caribbean Quarterly (Jamaica), Vol. 16 - No. 4 (Dec. 1970), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Van Sertima, Caribbean Writers, pp. 24-26.

Indian<sup>1</sup> on the West Indian literary scene.

At this point it should be noted that the East Indian communities of Guyana and Trinidad, in spite of the displacement of life involved in the momentous passage from India to the Caribbean, have been able to preserve their cultural identity to a large degree. Hindi is still spoken, women still relegated to the level of chattel in society, Hindu and Mohammedan religions are not uncommon (though Christianity is making inroads), exotic festivals, memories of the caste systems and the tradition of betrothing children at birth still exist in East Indian villages of the West Indies. These enclaves of varying tradition have exerted their influence on the general culture.

In Corentyne Thunder <sup>(111)</sup> by Mittelholzer we first encountered a portrayal of this East Indian experience, but it did not assure a literary perspective until Selvon, an East Indian, wrote of it with intimate authority in A Brighter Sun <sup>(204)</sup>. The young Indian couple, Tiger and Urmilla, grow together and adjust from life on the land to the life of the town. Sensitively portrayed with delicate touches of beauty in common things, the novel allows the Chinese grocer, the Portugese neighbor and the African mother to come to life in the housing settlement outside Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

In Turn Again, Tiger <sup>(211)</sup>, a sequel to A Brighter Sun <sup>(204)</sup>, Tiger senses that restlessness of a man who has been educated enough

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'East Indian' refers to those citizens of the West Indies who are direct descendants of Indians, the indentured laborers brought from India to the Caribbean area.

to wish for better, but is not equipped to change his condition. Tiger, bewildered by his discontent, journeys backwards to the land to feel his roots again. The experience proves a failure and he returns to the suburbs. This, however, brings him closer to self-understanding and a realization of what he must face in order to live.

These two novels, though simple, achieve a poetic portrayal of a segment of life in the West Indies. Selvon is capable of light hearted humor and this reaches its height in The Lonely Londoners (209). Here Selvon experiments with the regional dialect among West Indian immigrants and shows their plight through hilarious pathos. In his I Hear Thunder (207) he explores the common West Indian dilemma of educating someone away from home and the familiar. His last novel to date, The Plains of Caroni (210), attacks the problem of political ambitions and the possibility of breaking East Indian ties through intermarriage.

Selvon's contribution to this literature is notable as it adds a necessary dimension to West Indian life and experience and does it well.

George Lamming (1927- ) left for England in 1950. Born in Barbados, he now lives in London. Few writers have enjoyed such spectacular success as he has after the publication of his first novel In the Castle of My Skin (83). Though autobiographical of his own boyhood, it is also a lyrical description of the psychological landscapes of a rural society coming to grips with urbanization and

political independence. In his next novel, The Emigrants (82), Lamming explores the varied personalities and backgrounds of West Indians bound for England aboard a ship. It, however, lacks the sparkle and fine imagery of his first book.

His next two works, Of Age and Innocence (85) and Season of Adventure (87), are political novels dealing with an imaginary Caribbean island, San Cristobal. This island is the symbolic stage for experimentation with a mixture of races as they strive for political supremacy and self-identity. At the same time they give a portrait of the problematic growth and evolution of a cosmopolitan society. There are flickers of brilliance in these novels, flashes of poetry reminiscent of his first book, yet they are not successful works. Now, after ten years of silence, the more mature Lamming has produced his fifth novel: Natives of My Person (84) where he returns to fulfill the promise of his first novel.<sup>1</sup>

Roger Mais (1905-1955), a Jamaican, by his life, as much as by his three novels, has become a legend in the West Indies. He was a man of violent sympathies, dedicated to an independent Jamaica. When he was sent to prison in 1944 for his 'treasonous' editorials, protesting Jamaicans suffered with him. The political strife of the 1940's with its early enthusiasm and the subsequent disillusionment left its mark on Mais. Yet his novels are free of politics. His first two books, The Hills Were Joyful Together (104) and Brother

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix B for annotation of the novel. .

Man (102), deal with the unfortunate underprivileged who live in Kingston slums. He crystallized his personal indignation in these novels by putting the down-trodden man, the everyman protagonist, amid eternal processes to fight for his existence and his beliefs. His portrayals are like large jagged canvases, boldly painted, filled with dramatic energy and whirling colors, yet full of compassion.

His last novel, Black Lightning (101), is more subdued in tone and removed from the slum setting. The antagonist in this novel is physical nature rather than other men. The main character, though a figure of tragic proportions, finds a dignified response. 'Mais's sense of the tragic in life, and his compassionate understanding were stimulated by the society in which he lived. In his most assured fiction he attained a genuine tragic vision by separating the stimulus from its special social context.'<sup>1</sup>

John Hearne (b1926) returned to Jamaica after his initial wanderings on the continent and presently is on the staff of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University of the West Indies. At least for him, the island life is a continuous source of materials to be used in his novels. Like Lamming, he has mapped out an imaginary island that he calls Cayuna, but his Cayuna is very much a re-creation and an extension of his Jamaica with rhythms of not only its human life, but also of its birds, beasts and legends. Hearne is capable of sensuous harmonies between men and nature; his

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<sup>1</sup>Ramchand, Novel and Background, p. 188.

physically intense imagery is a vivid description of taste, smell, faces, places and people.

His characters move in a frenzied activity to reach varied goals. They storm through the pages with hopes that grow into a sense of futility caused by treachery and betrayal. But, somehow, these characters created by Hearne fail to convey a sense of tragedy. The author's general theme of 'there is a knife for every back' is expressed by his main characters being disenchanted or betrayed by the ideals for which they are fighting, yet these tragedies never assume universal proportions.

In his first novel Voices under the Window <sup>(71)</sup>, Mark Latimer, disenchanted by his marriage, turns to politics to meet betrayal and death. In The Land of the Living <sup>(69)</sup> and The Faces of Love <sup>(68)</sup> personal insecurities and racial dictates destroy relationships.

Love in all its varied facets is one of Hearne's themes. This is explored in both Autumn Equinox <sup>(67)</sup> and The Faces of Love <sup>(68)</sup>. Self love, paternal love, sexual love to gain power and compassionate love--all play roles in his novels, yet the outcome is bitter -- an intense disillusionment or death follow.

Hearne in his probings between personal allegiance and political conflict tries to make love a positive element to reclaim the distressed, to inject a pureness, but personal insecurities and ultimate selfishness makes it a sham.

Lanning has criticized Hearne for being obsessed with "an agricultural middle class in Jamaica" and having "a dread of being



identified with the land at peasant level".<sup>1</sup> It is true that his characters are more urbanized and middle class, but this only adds a different perspective to the West Indian literature.

Vidiadhara Surajprasad Naipaul (b1932) along with Samuel Selvon is a Trinidadian East Indian. Like Selvon he is a satirist and humorist drawing upon the regional dialects and the rich natural folk humor to give his characters a quality of quaintness while bringing to novels unforgettable sketches of a society uniquely West Indian.

Naipaul is the best known West Indian novelist. His writings, through all their comical and satirical emphasis, center around dispossessed and alienated people. This is not surprising given Naipaul's own background. He is the grandson of a Hindu who had come to the island from Uttar Pradesh (India) as an indentured laborer. As such, the family started as colonials and yet not colonials, on intimate yet alienated terms with life about them. They were the members of a minority group among exiles -- Indians among the Negroes of Trinidad. The burden of such alienation is reflected in all his writings though Naipaul himself, as a very young man, vowed to leave his racially strife-ridden island. After his college education in Britain, he remained there. Since then he has revisited Trinidad and made a sort of homecoming journey to India. Both these trips proved a disappointment to him, and he continues to pursue his

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<sup>1</sup>George Lamming, Pleasures of Exile (Longon: Michael Joseph, 1960), pp. 45-46.

writing career from his self imposed exile in England.<sup>1</sup>

In Naipul's first novel, The Mystic Masseur (142) his ability to highlight the absurd in a variety of completely believable characters and situations is clearly demonstrated. The tale of a young East Indian's rise from abject poverty to a position of power and wealth while pursuing the professions of a mystic and a masseur is full of laughter that criticizes the fossilized East Indian community within the static Trinidad society.

The Suffrage of Elvira (143), his second novel, further established him as a satirist. Here he Lampoons elections in Trinidad where a rich Indian candidate, in an attempt to bribe for votes, stirs up all possible modes of corruption and cunning.

One of Naipaul's strengths as a novelist is his ability to strike a balance between pathos and humor, but behind this friolity one can sense the humanity and seriousness. His best example of this is A House for Mr. Biswas (137), a novel which established him as a major 20th century author. The three-generation span of an East Indian family epic gives Naipaul free range to exercise his considerable talents for the accumulation of realistic particulars from a social scene and to convince the reader that any society has an inevitable existence.

Naipaul, humorous and compassionate, is the most observant and

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<sup>1</sup>Israel Shenker, "V. S. Naipaul, Man Without a Society," The New York Times Book Review (Oct. 17, 1971), p. 4.

the least metaphysical of West Indian novelists.

Jan Carew (b1922) is a Guyanese. Educated at Howard University, Western Reserve and the University of Prague, he now lives in Canada. Despite his cosmopolitan education, his first two novels are set in Guyana among descendants of African slaves. Central to the essence of his writings is the search for continuity of African culture among Guyanese slaves and their descendants. Scenery of Guyana dominates these works even though frequently it is of a reminiscent nature. His narrative thread and scenery combine to yield a deliberate cultivation of a neo-African primitive style. "If a theme common to the novels of Jan Carew may be discerned through a study of his work, it is the theme of flight from origins and the quest for roots, the legend of men who make a journey in search of a new sense of home or status or image of themselves and lose or discover identity and direction somewhere along that journey."<sup>1</sup>

His first novel Black Midas (22) pursues the upriver journey of an orphan from his poor native village to become a diamond king in the jungles of Guyana. He loses his wealth when he returns to the city because he has always remained that naive primitive. It is a rugged first novel steeped in the folklore of Guyana which vividly portrays the rough men of the diamond fields.

His second novel, The Wild Coast (24), again deals with a youth trying to find his roots. Hector, an orphan, with a white father and a promised inheritance, feels more allegiance to his

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<sup>1</sup>Van Sertima, Caribbean Writers, p. 30.

black nurse who raised him. Hector's struggle to identify with the barbarity and superstitions of the villagers is futile as is his ability to accept the citified weakness of his father's people.

The Last Barbarian (23) speaks of West Indian life in Harlem with a young artist as the central character. Tiberio, the artist, wants to be judged for his merits as an artist, not talked about because he is a Negro artist. Futility pervades this work; and it culminates in murder and death.

Carew did not fulfill the promise of his first novel in his subsequent two novels and since then he has been silent.

Victor Stafford Reid (b1913) is one of the few West Indian writers who has never left his native Jamaica. He is an advertising executive there and his literary activities seem to be part-time, though his talent is considerable. His last novel, The Leopard (169), is one of the most powerful literary works to have emerged from the Caribbean. It is intensely anti-white and set in East Africa. Its questing, searching quality identifies it with those West Indian novels that seek for individual roots on the African continent -- a psychological past in the womb of Africa. The story revolves around the half-Kikuyu, half-Masai man, Nebu, who hunts down and kills his white employer in the jungles of Kenya. The protagonist is wounded and in turn is relentlessly hunted down by a leopard. Within the framework of the hunted hunter is intertwined the story of the crippled half-caste child, the son of Nebu and his employer's white wife. The child symbolizes the problematic half-world of the races,

stranded between the hate and hurt of his divided parents.

Reid's first novel, New Day <sup>(170)</sup>, is thoroughly and passionately Jamaican. It was created in the aftermath of Jamaica's nationalistic enthusiasm that led to the island's independence and which had also fired his compatriot Roger Mais. The spirit of hope and the consequent disillusion left their different marks on Jamaica's authors, that is, Hearne's despair and Mais' passionate social protest. In Reid's first novel, however, we feel all the vigor of new national optimism. The novel starts with the fateful Morant Bay uprising in 1865 and covers Jamaican history until the 1940's and the first general election. Similar to many historical novels, this work follows the lives of the simple people from generation to generation as they are set against the socio-political background. These people evolve from an oppressed condition to witness the challenge of a new age of self-responsibility.

One can only hope that Reid will once again turn his pen to fiction because both of his novels are excellent. Stylistically they are different, and among those who still hope to hear from him, there is no little curiosity as to what turn the author's next work will take.

Geoffrey Drayton (b1924) also appeared in print in the 1950's. His is a different perspective from the previous authors mentioned. He is one of the minority group known as a white West Indian writer (born and raised in the islands but of European origin). Drayton spent three years at Cambridge after his education in Barbados and

then moved to Canada which he is making his permanent residence. He is best known as a poet who celebrates Barbados and Canada in his poetry, but his first novel Christopher <sup>(46)</sup> is a significant contribution to this corpus of literature. It is a novel of childhood in the West Indies at a time "when all the planters went poor -- and the merchants rich".<sup>1</sup> The novel is narrated from the boy's point of view.

Christopher lives in the isolated Great House of his unsuccessful father, and the reader is made to look in upon the boy's feelings as he prowls silently about the grounds, extracting lonely pleasures from his observation of plants, trees, insects, birds and fish. As the boy grows, so grows his social awareness representing a white boy's developing involvement with, and understanding of, his black countrymen. His black nurse, Gip, plays an integral part in the boy's transition from the childish fears of a culture to an understanding and acceptance of it.

Andrew Salkey (b1928), a Jamaican, also resides in Canada. In the recent years he has become a children's story writer at which he has been successful.

His first novel, A Quality of Violence <sup>(201)</sup>, takes for its springboard the socio-economic depression of the masses and the "great emptiness, somewhere in their life, that gnawing at them and begging for plenty satisfaction."<sup>2</sup> The setting for the novel

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<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Drayton, Christopher (London: Collins, 1959), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Salkey, A Quality of Violence (London: New Authors, Ltd., 1959), p. 59.

is in a Jamaican bush village in the year of the great drought, 1900. In the fields crops wither and all things die under the burning sun. The people turn to religion for their salvation. But for the descendants of African cultures and inheritors of Christian teachings there is no clear cut religion. Christianity and Pocomania intermingle. The two forces, Christian and pagan, European and African, conflict to bring into a sharp focus all the ghosts of the ancestral past and the living present. Two spiritual leaders emerge in this novel. They are antagonists since they have come to represent the two forces. During a spectacular Giant X Dance with its elements of drums, rhythms, sacrifice, flagellation and spiritual possession (in which the dancers equate their bodies with the dry land) both antagonists collapse exhausted -- both sacrificial victims. The rains do not come.

This fierce vision of human aberration under burning stress and the deafness of gods allow Salkey to explore the irrational elements in human existence. In language and imagery the novel is a powerful one.

His second novel, Escape to an Autumn Pavement (197), is set in London and has for its protagonist a middle class West Indian. While such a man had no doubts about his social standing at home, London is imposing an inferiority which erodes his protective dykes of status and comparative affluence.

His last two adult novels, The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover (200) and The Adventures of Catullus Kelly (194), again deal

with the West Indian middle class. Civil Service workers are at the center of The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover (200), a novel which satirizes the political situation in Jamaica where there is little real difference between the majority government and the opposition. The Adventures of Catullus Kelly (194) follows a young Jamaican University graduate in search for a place and an identity as he wanders from Jamaica, to the continent and finally to London.

None of the last three novels is particularly strong or noteworthy.

Salkey's novels for young readers did not meet with much success in Jamaica where he tried to interest the Department of Education to use them as readers in schools. However, they have been translated in several foreign languages and are used for teaching reading to slow readers in Germany and Japan.

These children's novels, Hurricane (198), Earthquake (196), Drought (195), The Shark Hunters (203), Riot (202) and Jonah Simpson (199), are set in Jamaica, and each of them presents a central Jamaican experience. Salkey uses little dialect speech and the parent characters are sympathetically portrayed. However, one should note that a West Indian writer like Salkey, who attempts fiction for children, will find himself writing for adults too. In the Caribbean there is not the division between the generations that we find in Europe or the United States. The child rapidly becomes subject to the same impulses and assumptions as the adult, if in a more positive or a more resigned way. Color, colonialism, money or



the brute lack of it, the curious sense of 'not being'—these will shape the awareness of adult and child alike.

#### Summary for the 1950's

The 1950's saw the first real flourishing of West Indian literature. The novel seemed to have become the media of expression for the West Indian author. With the emigration from the West Indies many of the authors were given, so to speak, on permanent loan to Great Britain. While they maintained their ties with their home islands by writing about them, they also were writing for the British public and the British publisher. So in many ways, both England and the West Indies have to be held jointly responsible for this literary endeavor. In retrospect, given the socio-economic and cultural climate of the islands in the 1950's, it seems that their departure from home was inevitable if a West Indian literature were to develop within the 20th century. England as a choice for exile was also inevitable: after all it is the 'British' of the British West Indies that is the only common denominator. Their uncertain roots, highly original racial mixtures, scattered island geography, claims to nationhoods and their turgid colonial history gave them few choices.

In the 1950's the themes of the writing have been passionately serious, involving protest and revolt or at least inspired by these. Wit and humor, when used were only tools for a more serious purpose. A thread of self-conscious realization of West Indian values through

self-criticism is interwoven in most of these works.

Yet the men who write these novles also hold differing points of view and their ambitions are different, as well they might be, since hundreds of miles separate their home islands. If any over simplification could be made as to a unified directions taken by people coming from one specific island, then a quote from Salkey puts it succinctly:

...the Trinidadian's irreverent wit, wry humour, and, at the same time, his obtrusive sentimentality; the British Guianese and his penchant for mysticism, legend, and jungle lore; the Barbadian's regard for rhetoric and his overbearing seriousness, the Dominican's inventiveness and easy belief in superstition and myth; the St. Lucian's lyrical melancholy and brooding resentment of "Small Islandism" -- feeling of inferiority shared by most of the "small islands"; and the Jamaican's restlessness, class consciousness, and intolerable arrogance.<sup>1</sup>

#### The 1960's: The World without Heroes

The outstanding names that appeared on the West Indian literary scene in the 1960's are, without a doubt, Wilson Harris, Michael Anthony, Orlando Patterson and E. R. Braithwaite. Jean Rhys reappeared after twenty-seven years of silence with an excellent and a thought provoking novel. Names like Lindsay Barrett and Garth St. Omer can not be left out although both of these men are still young and at the beginning of their writing careers. V. S. Naipaul, a writer identified with the 1950's, wrote his major novel, A House for Mr. Biswas (137), in the 1960's. With this work Naipaul brought

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Salkey, West Indian Stories (London, Faber, 1960), p. 11.

the West Indian novel to a recognizable stance. Naipaul proved for all West Indians that a complete novel, set in the West Indies, even when following the tradition of epic novels everywhere, could be written. The cultural awareness and the community structure within a totally West Indian framework were there; they were effectively used to create a novel that could emerge from no other place.

The 1960's brought Wilson Harris to the West Indian literary scene. He was born in Guyana in 1921 but did not start publishing till he was in his forties. As a writer he has no peer in the corpus of West Indian literature. In recognizing him we must acknowledge in his novels his artistry in dealing with the Guyanese setting, the fine existentialist philosophy which impregnates the carefully drawn characters and situations, and the new dimension which these factors bring to the West Indian novel. Through his depth of intensity and insight, "...the structure of the novel undergoes a change and we see emerging a new kind of work, native and true to the deepest and most authentic levels of experience in the region, and yet alien to all that has gone before in the Caribbean novel."<sup>1</sup>

Harris's novels are short, varying from 81 to 156 pages, yet each is a complete expression which achieves a remarkable mixing of the world within and without. Every character and event, however real, allegorically represents something outside and beyond itself. The characters act and interact as if in strange primordial ballets.

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<sup>1</sup>Van Sertima, Caribbean Writers, p. 33.

There are backward and forward flashes in time, "...time past, the ancestral womb of history, time present, the actual stage and living moment of action, and time future, which is contained in time present and time past. Something of the Eastern mandala ..... like a wheel of time, with spokes of life radiating outwards into the future and inwards from the past to meet in the hub of the present."<sup>1</sup>

His first two novels, Palace of the Peacock <sup>(61)</sup> and The Far Journey of Oudin <sup>(59)</sup>, treat slave history except that in Harris' context the individual characters and their societies have been denied any real existence. Palace of the Peacock <sup>(61)</sup> is the story of a journey of a river crew through the jungles of Guyana -- but the crew is a phantom crew reliving their first life and death. In spite of their metaphysical entities, their life and experience are concrete and real. On the surface, The Far Journey of Oudin <sup>(59)</sup> tells the story of Oudin, who as a slave suffers a suppressive social order and who dies having covenanted his unborn child to the money lender. The Whole Armor <sup>(66)</sup> explores the possibility of mending the dissimilar parts of broken cultures and varied heritages for a wider possibility of relationships. It is his most political novel and lends hope to the unborn children to create a new race.

With Secret Ladder <sup>(62)</sup> and Heartland <sup>(60)</sup> Harris concentrates his efforts on the individual person. Peasants are replaced by

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

servants of modern technology. In these novels they are confronted with ancestral figures who represent the past. From these works emerges a sense of man's primal condition as one of terror and freedom.

The Eye of the Scarecrow (58) and The Waiting Room (65) put his characters at the edge of self-discovery. The state of helplessness that angers other authors in the West Indies is to Harris, only an ambivalent condition which through self-discovery can foster a new social structure. Tumatumari (64) deals with the need to be the iconoclast of the new, if there is to be a continuum in universal humanity. His last two works, The Sleepers of Roraima (63) and The Age of the Rainmakers (56), bring man into close identification with birds and beasts as tribal ancestors of man thereby giving mutual responsibilities to all living things.

One can almost summarize all that Harris tries to say in his own words:

They were an actual stage, a presence, however mythical they seemed to the universal and the spiritual eye. They were as close to me as my ribs, the rivers and the flatland, the mountains and heartland I intimately saw. I could not help cherishing my symbolic map, and my bodily prejudice like a well-known room and house of superstition within which I dwelt. I saw this kingdom of man turned into a colony and battle-ground of spirit, a priceless tempting jewel I dreamed I possessed.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Anthony (b1932), a Trinidadian, lives in London and at

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson Harris, Palace of the Peacock (London: Faber, 1960), p. 20.

first glance, appears to be different from all other West Indian writers. His three novels are set in Trinidad and deal with that society, yet he refuses to identify any problems in that context. His themes center around the transition from a tribal childhood to a world citizen. The Games Were Coming <sup>(10)</sup>, The Year in San Fernando <sup>(12)</sup> and Green Days by the River <sup>(11)</sup> all take a youth for a central character and the world is experienced through a child's eyes. In The Games Were Coming <sup>(10)</sup>, a competitive skill (bicycle racing) and a disciplined desire to win displace dispossession pins. Satire against the exploiting middle class and educational system are part of his comment. He is well received as an author and justifiably so since his writing is vivid and artistic control on his characters is tight.

Orlando Patterson (b1940), born in Jamaica, too young to have left with the exodus of the 1950's has forged his career at home. Educated at the University of the West Indies and at the London School of Economics, he teaches at the University of the West Indies. His novels have been angry and centered around identity crises of Jamaicans. The questions that remain unresolved for the author are whether the descendents of Jamaican slaves should resolve these crisis at home or follow the Rastafarian cult of back-to African movement.

His first novel, The Children of Sisyphus <sup>(167)</sup>, is an angry novel of a Kingston dungle and shows the futility of trying to escape one's slum origins. There is no beauty and no kindness in

these slum dwellers of Patterson's. When the central character, Dinah, tries to escape, she is pulled back by those who have been unable to leave. In a perverted way poverty and despair triumph as the central characters of the novel.

Though this novel won first prize for fiction at the 1966 Dakar Festival of Negro Arts, the work has basic faults. The characters are crudely drawn and the plot fragmented. Patterson has lived among the slum dwellers, but has remained an outsider. The moments of gaiety and tenderness that survive in the extremities of poverty, and which would have given the book perspective, are lost in Patterson's flood of anger.

His second novel, An Absence of Ruins (1966), is a quest for identity novel which adheres to the Rastafarian cult that sees the return to Ethiopia as the return to Eden. The author chooses for his hero a Jamaican Negro, heavy-handedly named Alexander Blackman. Blackman goes on a snarled narrative quest for identity passing through stages of cruelty and noble cowardice to emerge as the "second Adam".

Orlando Patterson, in many ways, represents the young educated West Indian whose voice is angry and who, though well informed, finds it more difficult to evaluate his position than his predecessors. Violence seems to be the only way of resolving the tensions that he sees.

Lindsay Barrett, another young Jamaican, falls in the same group of angry, frustrated artists. His Song for Mumu (1963) is the

most explicit novel of frustration. Death and murder, insanity and poverty converge like dervishes. Yet out of it, Barrett succeeds in creating a world of physical liberation through song and dance celebrating black African heritage in Black America and Jamaica -- recounting the ex-slave's oral tradition.

Barrett makes carnal love and violence an end in itself. They serve no higher purpose than an occasional breaking into momentary joy. The indulgence becomes private and willful -- a brief escape out of hopelessness.

Barrett's indulgences represent a break into emotion while Garth St. Omer, from St. Lucia, embraces futility -- a sense of nothingness and the acceptance of it. His characters are middle class men celebrating a life of non-achievement. The mood of this and other young authors reflects the continuing West Indian sense of political and cultural rootlessness and failure. In his last book, Nor Any Country (190), St. Omer, despite all the pessimism, expresses some sort of a commitment to the islands -- a promise to stand by, at least.

Patterson, Barrett and St. Omer, all three young and making their home on the islands, carry the present tone of island sentiment. It is bitter, violent, seeped in pessimistic views for man's future. One can only hope that fear of the void created by such a vision will steer them towards a brighter star.

The 1960's cannot be left without mentioning E. R. Braithwaite (b1922) who is presently serving as a Guyanese ambassador in



Venezuela. He has been roundly criticized for minimizing the problems of the black experience and oversentimentalizing hollow successes. He certainly is not in the mainstream of West Indian literary movement, yet his writings, especially To Sir, With Love (20) have met with success.

Namba Roy (1910-1961), a descendent of the Maroons of Jamaica, distinguished himself in areas other than novels, but his one published novel is a rich bed of African cultural survivals. Roy was proud of his Maroon descent. The Maroons of Jamaica were among the earliest of the black men in the West Indies to achieve and hold their freedom from slavery. They ran away from the slave plantations and established themselves in communities in remote parts of the country. His novel, Black Albino (189), is set in such a community in the Jamaica hills in the eighteenth century. The novel shows prejudice from an unusual angle in taking a black albino child as its central character. The reconstruction of a Maroon village life is well done. Africa appears in a semi-historical way through the customs of the people involved.

Jean Rhys (b1894) from Dominica, is one of the minority voices of white West Indian authors. She has returned to the literary scene after almost thirty years of silence. Her themes have always been alienation and loneliness. Her last novel, Wide Sargasso Sea (179), is an ambitious work. For many years Jean Rhys was obsessed by the first Mrs. Rochester, the mad creole wife, locked in Thornfield Hall in Bronte's Jane Eyre. Rhys' novel is divided in three

parts. The first represents the heroine's story of a disastrous forced marriage. In the second Mr. Rochester describes his arrival in the West Indies, his marriage and its subsequent break down. The last part is written from the attic tower by the now mad heroine.

The novel exists on its own, independent of Bronte's original. Jane Eyre is no more than an inspiration to return Rhys to the spiritual country of her birth -- and as life turned out for her -- the country of distant dreams. In this work she rediscovers it in all its beauty and finds it to have been a nightmare. What emerges in Rhys' novel is the intimate knowledge of the central character and the conflict of status facing a 19th century creole heiress. On one hand she represents the people who are essentially inbred degenerates constituting a decadent expatriate subculture while, on the other hand, they also face the resentment of their equally superstitious, newly freed slaves. The plight of the white creole of the Emancipation era who is caught up between social forces and with nowhere to belong follows the heroine. It is a brilliant novel of point-counter-point.

#### Summary for the 1960's

If any major point can be discerned in the novels of the 1960's, it is that the West Indian world as revealed by its authors is devoid of heroes. The world is peopled by characters who have either already lost the fight against life or are about to lose it. In part it is a world that: a) the West Indian has left for abroad,

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b) is leaving or c) if he has returned, the acceptance of home is mingled with disillusion and bitterness. If there are any victorious conquerors of their fate, they are not the adult characters.

Anthony, with his childhood novels is the exception, but his characters are only on the verge of discovering themselves and their world. The adult characters for the other writers are seeking an identity, the concept of which is expressed by Harris as well as the younger men like Barrett, St. Omer and Patterson. Violence as an outgrowth of frustration frequently becomes an end in itself. While song, dance and humor have not left completely, there are less of these elements than in previous decades. Yet the novels of the 1950's were more serious and more earnest in their intent to carve a place for each individual in his world. The characters had to come to terms with themselves and their environment, and human worth was implicitly stated. The 1960's are almost nihilistic in that respect, and futility becomes the implicit factor that precludes the individual from coming to concrete terms with his world or with his own worth.

Wilson Harris, the major writer of this decade, avoids explicit nihilism by erasing all habitual boundaries for the characters as individuals and for the time and place of their existence. His characters are securely masked as they delve in their archetypal memories to find unity and meaning that transcends one birth or one death, one race or one world. Every man and every object in Harris' vision becomes a paradox with a twin somewhere else and at some

other time. If there is to be a rehabilitation for the frustrated West Indian in the frustrating West Indian world, then it lies in the dehabilitation and subsequent reconstruction for a new and a unique concept that Harris is seeking. The anger, frustration and violence that seethe in the younger writers may cease if a new meaning is found for the West Indian world that either unites him with his past or frees him from its bitterness.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY: GENERAL TRENDS IN THE WEST INDIAN NOVEL

This chapter proposes to survey the West Indian novel as a whole with emphasis on general literary trends within this literature. Since West Indians are identified as a specific group of people from a specific region with a history of their own, the novel is bound to reflect at least some of that West Indian experience which is unique to this group of people.

Due to the historical circumstances surrounding the islands, literary development was late in starting and slow in developing. The first two authors mentioned in this paper, Redcam and deLisser, though creoles, could by no means be termed black West Indians glorifying the indigenous West Indian culture. In the early years following emancipation, England and English norms represented the panacea of achievement while local customs needed an apology if they were noticed at all. Social awareness of the local scene and acceptance of values within the indigenous culture did not become part of West Indian literature till Mendes and James entered the field. As education spread among all the people of the islands, more authors emerged. At first they wrote short pieces and the need for publication was achieved by starting local periodicals in the 1940's. But by the 1950's, the authors who wished to become novelists realized that they could not depend on a reading public only among the islanders. Since England had never ceased to be a

'mother country', the place to look to for intellectual guidance and willing publishers was there, emigration became inevitable. The novels of the 1950's reflect the emigrant's experience yet as always these novels are seriously concerned with the West Indies and West Indians.

By the 1960's, a few authors who had earlier left the islands returned to their home base in the islands. However, the majority continued to live and write from abroad. The new authors who entered the literary scene reflected the thinking and experiences of the new West Indians who were in the throes of carrying out their island independence and coming to grips with their political and economical problems. Some of the younger men continue to travel abroad in order to find a place to write and become known. Like the politics and economics of the islands, the literary scene seems to be in a flux. There appear to be fewer heroes and fewer positive values in the current novels. Still, the probing and searching for values that embody the West Indian identity go on.

Within the framework of West Indian writing, from its inception till today, certain major themes continue to reappear. It is apparent that no one theme is not limited to one time period.

If one major theme can be indicated for the West Indian novel, it is the urgent persistence of the authors to analyze and interpret the shortcomings of their society. The authors are almost unanimously concerned with race and color, the economical and social manifestations of the under-privileged class existence, the political

farce of present day self-rule, and the absence of an historical tradition of settled values. But the West Indian author cannot be accused of writing only about one class or one group -- his concern seems to be with the West Indian society as a whole. And his unfailing concern with his own people and land (even while residing abroad) is expressed through the use of black and West Indian characters as central figures in the novels.

Unlike the previous governments and departments of educators, unlike the businessman importing commodities, the West Indian novelist did not look out across the sea to another source. He looked in and down at what had traditionally been ignored. For the first time, the West Indian peasant becomes other than cheap source of labour. He became through the novelist's eye a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality.<sup>1</sup>

Although there is, among the authors, an acceptance of racial and ethnic mixtures in the West Indian they are still exploring and expostulating about a hitherto unknown type of individual. It took the West Indian author writing about his own people to bring into focus a true picture of a West Indian, but in exploring the West Indian, the authors are also persistent in searching for the 'roots' of the individuals who are involved. For some of the authors, it is expressed in retracing their steps to Africa. An outstanding example of this is William's novel, Other Leopards (222). It is one of the more explicit 'quest of identity' novels centered around a

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<sup>1</sup>George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1960), pp. 38-39



West Indian's sojourn in Africa for that purpose. If the novel concludes with any kind of an answer, then it is that the centuries in the Caribbean racial and social melting pot and the different environment of the West Indies form a gulf that can not be recrossed.

William's hero has a European name, Lionel, and an African one, Lobo. He was born, like his author, in Guyana, and his surname, Froad, suggests that behind his complexity lies an emptiness -- he is a 'fraud'. This man, a West Indian, comes to Africa in quest of an identity -- the Europeanized Lionel seeking Lobo, the alter ego of ancestral times. But all his attempts are abortive, and at the end of the novel Froad is up a thorn tree, daubed with mud that hides the color of his skin and the smell of his body. Thus, at least for Williams, the search for roots in Africa is futile.

However, the quest for roots within the African continent does have a logical basis. Patterson in his The Sociology of Slavery<sup>1</sup> documents several African cultural traits within the West Indian society. But we must remember that through the years of slavery and relocation to a new geographical environment, these African cultures were bound to be modified both physically and psychologically. West Indian novelists have noted and dealt with several of these remnants.

In Cactus Village (157) by Ogilvie the system of exchange labor is used in a true African village fashion. Another possible influence of African cultural life may be noted in the novels that

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<sup>1</sup>Orlando H. Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (London: MacGibbon and Kee, Ltd., 1967), pp. 147-154.

deal with the under-privileged classes where the characters live together without marriage vows. Examples of this are explicit in Mais' The Hills were Joyful Together (104) and Brother Man (102), Selvon's A Brighter Sun (204), Austin Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns (25), and Carew's Black Midas (22). Concubinage is implied in many other novels, but the important factor is that it stretches across all the islands.

Obeah and other cult practices in the islands are well documented by novelists of every racial origin. Emtage mocks it in Brown Sugar (50) while Drayton brings psychological understanding of its function in Christopher (46). Naipaul, in Suffrage of Elvira (143), still underlines with his comic spirit the sociological truth of these practices. Mais, in Brother Man (102), has used an Obeah man in a negative context as a central character against whom educated and enlightened resistance has to be mustered by those who subconsciously still fear these powers. On the other hand, a positive view of Obeah as a natural and spiritual calling is developed as the novel's central theme in Khan's The Obeah Man (80). Sylvia Wynter in The Hills of Hebron (224) includes a range of cults from Obeah to pocomania. The examples of this are too numerous to cite, but an African religious survival is strongly indicated in West Indian novels.

The scope of this paper does not permit us to explore the validity of African cultural survival in the West Indies, yet the indications are there and West Indian authors have shown a great deal

of interest in Africa and things African. Lamming's Season of Adventure (87), Roy's Black Albino (189), The Leopard (169) by Reid, Scholar Man (30) by Dathorne, and many others have included African traits or used Africa for a background.

West Indians have searched for their roots among the aborigines -- the original Indians of the islands as well. Harris has explored this theme to a great extent by trying to establish a continuity between the present West Indians and the ancestors of the land. Palace of the Peacock (61), The Whole Armor (66) and especially The Sleepers of Roraims (63) and The Age of the Rainmakers (56) are strong examples of this idea. Arawak Girl (34) by deLisser is another example, except that as an historical novel of conflict, it demands the reader to take sides with one faction while Harris' fiction is exploratory of roots to establish a common base for all people.

When viewed in a broader perspective, the searching for roots by West Indian novelists can also be understood as a need for a society to create an historical sense. In a place where, for many, history is the recollection of the incidents of two previous generations, it is imperative that depth and dignity be given to that which is recalled -- to be reinterpreted in a way that would give a sense of dignity to the amalgam of influences which have contributed to the present social complexity.

West Indian authors' concern with the whole society lends itself to an introspective study of the West Indian within the context

of island society and, in the first novels of the emigrants, his trauma of adjustment to a new society. For the most part, the characters in West Indian novels come from the working class. This is probably due to the fact that the West Indian roots are deeply imbedded in that milieu. Political awareness predominates many works which, considering the need of this society to come to grips with self determination and self rule, is not unusual.

Claude McKay, in many ways, exemplifies the thematic trends of West Indian novels. In his first two novels, he has a vagabond Negro for his central character who searches from Harlem to Marseilles waterfront to find his identity and a place to belong. In these two novels, McKay fails to find a place of belonging for his hero, Ray. Ray remains a vagabond but finds a solace in the universal community of Negrohood. McKay's last novel, Banana Bottom (95), attempts to establish a certain identity and roots for a West Indian character within the island context when Bitia returns to her native village.

The island context, as mentioned earlier, was very much scrutinized by earlier writers such as Mendes and James. Social realism and a compassionate protest were introduced and both of these trends have persisted in the West Indian novels. The island society was dissected and its ills drawn in bold strokes. It shocked the island public then, but the West Indian author had come to grips with his society's shortcomings of poverty and frustration.

In the 1950's, with the emigration of so many authors (Lamming, Selvon, Mittelholzer, Carew, Salkey, Hearne, Braithwaite, Mais,

Naipaul, etc.), a new concept was introduced in the literature -- the West Indian experience in exile. The Emigrants (82) by Lamming, The Lonely Londoners (209) by Selvon, To Sir, With Love (20) by Braithwaite, Voices under the Window (71) by Hearne were such novels. In the 1960's many of the authors were still in their self-imposed exile and their novels continued to describe life abroad, yet the West Indian and his recollection of home were always present. Some of the novels with West Indians as central characters, but living abroad are: Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement (197) and Adventures of Catullus Kelley (194), Dawes' The Last Enchantment (31), Carew's The Last Barbarian (23), Williams' Other Leopards (222) and The Third Temptation (223), Dathorne's Dumplings in the Soup (29) and The Scholar Man (30), Braithwaite's A Choice of Straws (18), Selvon's The Housing Lark (206), Clarke's The Meeting Point (26), Harris' The Waiting Room (65), parts of Naipaul's The Mimic Men (140) and the ending of Patterson's Absence of Ruins (166).

One of the developments within the West Indian literature was the 'childhood novel'. Possibly because childhood memories are poignant or because the authors' childhood was home based, all of these works have been successful for the authors who have attempted them. We have talked before about Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (83) and the works of Michael Anthony as well as about Geoffrey Drayton's Christopher (46). All these works are characterized by sensitive portrayals of island life and segments of its society. The child's eye sees with more innocence, but the innocence brings the

reality in sharper contrast within the context of the sensual and visual experiences of growing up. The later works by Salkey for younger readers again are sensitive and valid in bringing out experiences that are central to West Indian living. But these childhood novels do not bring the West Indian to terms with his society. They are reflective, exploratory, yet a departure from the home base is explicit or implied.

Naipaul built a house for Mr. Biswas <sup>(137)</sup>, and in this novel we see the modern writer taking a cultural setting within a West Indian society and creating a complete novel with a fully developed character. It is also a novel which incorporates a protagonist who is totally rootless. Biswas essentially comes from nowhere, belongs nowhere and has nowhere to go till he builds his own house. However, within this lack of identity, cultural values are expressed. A house is a symbolic thing implying social and cultural values besides serving the need of physical shelter.

Houses with their implications have figured in other West Indian novels: Mittelholzer's Life and Death of Sylvia <sup>(118)</sup>, Hearne's Stranger at the Gate <sup>(70)</sup>, Allfrey's Orchid House <sup>(8)</sup>, Drayton's Christopher <sup>(46)</sup> and Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea <sup>(179)</sup>. In the last three novels the house represents something old and decaying -- the remnants of a dying tropical civilization of the post slavery era. In this sense there was a house, though it had outlived its usefulness. But if a literary house, is to be constructed, then Biswas brought a consciousness back to the West Indian scene where

belonging is possible notwithstanding rootlessness.

The present day younger authors in a sense have returned to a house concept -- they do not center their works abroad. Their novels have returned to where McKay left Bitá Plant in Banana Bottom (95) and use the dissecting methods of James' Minty Alley (76) and Mendes' Pitch Lake (107). The novels have been, for the most part, of a descriptive and narrative character. Some have protested violently the social scene of frustration and poverty while others have accepted these frustrations by finding consolations among the existing factors.

The best examples of subdued protest are Anthony's The Games were Coming (10), The Year in San Fernando (12) and Green Days by the River (11) where, although there is protest implied at the existing conditions within the society, alternative joys are found in personal accomplishments. Others that find consolations within the island situation in spite of frustrating experiences and manage to bring a sense of dignity to their experiences are: Kempadoo with Guiana Boy (77), Fraser with Wounds in the Flesh (52), Bennett with God the Stonebreaker (16), Lovelace with The Schoolmaster (90), and While Gods are Falling (91), McDonald with The Humming-Bird Tree (94), Hearne with Land of the Living (69), Fergusson with The Village of Love (51), and Wynter with The Hills of Hebron (224).

The novels of angry frustration are: Dawes' The Last Enchantment (31), Clarke's Survivors of the Crossing (27) and Among Thistles and Thorns (25), Kempadoo's Old Thom's Harvest (78),

Entage's Brown Sugar (50), Salkey's The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover (200), St. Omer's Room on the Hill (191) and Shades of Grey (192), Patterson's Children of Sisyphus (167) and Barrett's Song for Mume (13). Violence as a mode of solving problems predominates in these novels. Individuals are caught in vertiginous social and personal crisis that are pessimistically predicated. The society is frustrating and frustrated and as such it is condemned. The more recent works like Barrett's Song for Mumu (13) and St. Omer's Nor Any Country (190) signal a willingness to explore further new possibilities with the hope that they will lead to solutions alternate to violence and pessimistic negations of workable solutions.

Before leaving the general themes of West Indian literature, a note should be added about what Ramchand calls the 'terrified consciousness' -- the voice of the white West Indian author. This group includes four authors: Geoffrey Drayton, Phyllis Shand Allfrey, James B. Entage and Jean Rhys. Their writings add a different dimension to this literature due to their different vantage point.

All four of these authors were born or grew up in the islands. They differ from the other authors included in this paper only in that their European origin was never racially altered. Their voice, therefore, is a minority voice for this group of writers. Their racial purity sets them apart on islands where few of the natives can claim such a thing. Historically, their families belonged to the old planter class, but the Emancipation laid bare the spiritual



failures of these people and hastened their financial ruin. And ever since that time, the social change of the decolonization process has brought fears, insecurities and guilt feelings to the descendants of the original colonizers. As such, the voice of the white West Indian adds a dimension to this literature of which only he has had first hand knowledge and only he has experienced intimately.

Emotionally he is bound to island life and identifies with it the same as the others -- he is an islander yet with the problems of minority group people everywhere. This dilemma is described by Rhys as:

It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and why I was ever born at all.<sup>1</sup>

Entage, with his extremist white planter beliefs, has written a satire. His Brown Sugar (50) is neither socially perceptive nor an artistically strong novel. The other three writers have produced novels of social relevance.

It is interesting to note that certain themes are central to this group of writers. These arise not because the authors are familiar with each other or even come from the same island, but because the white experience in the West Indies has a common basis. The white minority experienced a predictable shock and disorientation

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Rhys, Wild Sargasso Sea (London: Andre Deutsch, Ltd., 1966), p. 102.

as the black population was shifted into an awareness of its power.

The central themes of these novels are: emotional attachment to the physical landscape with its tropical and sensuous beauty intertwined with dreams and nightmares of Obeah, the political insecurity and the collapse of socio-economic situations, a frightened attitude towards the black masses, and an emotional concern with black nurses and servants. They are novels of alienation with central characters as rootless as in the other works.

To formulate a prognosis for West Indian literature is dangerous. The society is still in a flux. Economically the area is depressed, the islands are small with limited possibilities for autonomous economics. The political scene is still uncertain as self-rule and self-determination are undergoing the initial phases of formulating a political way of life. Individual national identity has always presented problems in this area. The pull of African forces and cultural factors are coupled with the pull of European Standards while the West Indian's own awareness of who and what he is frequently deteriorates in a complacency. After all, there are no outside forces that threaten his physical safety, and life can meander along on its half-crippled course encouraged by the excellent climatic conditions. The era of colonialism is over and one can almost assume that the pain of remembered slavery is fading. Yet, from another point of view, the urbanization process is extending the slums of Kingston and Port-of-Spain, as well as making its inroads on the smaller islands. The congregation of large masses of

poor people has removed the individual from the kindness of the land and the sea which never failed to provide him with some of the necessities of life. Pessimism and bitterness have sprung from this as well as fostered a more violent approach. Yet, the violence as expressed in the West Indian novel is always inwardly directed. The fight is against the individual himself rather than against an outside oppressor.

And so, the West Indies and its people are forever propped on the horns of a dilemma or shifted between two poles: the beauty of the islands against the frequently defeated people, the frustrations of their existence against the aspirations of the individuals, the adverse conditions against the continuing life that remains unruffled by major upheavals. Possibly the sense of such a condition expresses itself in the West Indian's psychological tension and excitability. These tensions and excitability have been culturally translated into laughter, tears, dance, the sport of cricket, the celebration of carnival as well as in the waves of emigration.

On the abstract level they find expression in a literature that is filled with paradoxes.

If West Indian literature is to continue, West Indians will have to come to grips with themselves and their social realities. The solutions to their dilemma will have to be found in the West Indies rather than in Africa or Europe. The West Indian's autonomous consciousness will have to provide the matrix for their national literature. The author who traditionally has been able to identify

and understand a national experience, i.e. measure the pulse of a society, will continue to express it in his creative writings. If the writings of today are less affirmative, if the characters are middle class bureaucrats rather than the peasant types, if an existential dissatisfaction has replaced the fight against the evil force, then that, too, is a reflection of today's social reality.

From the days of Redcan and deLisser, West Indian writing has developed to a point of great sophistication, refined perception and a truthful reflection of the West Indian consciousness. If the writers of the 1960's seem of lesser stature than those of the 1950's, one hopes and presumes that it is only a swing of the pendulum reflecting a portion in the cycle of evolution.

## APPENDIX A

### A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WEST INDIAN NOVELS

## APPENDIX A

## A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WEST INDIAN NOVELS

The purpose of this bibliography is to gather West Indian authors and their works in one list to provide an overview of writings accomplished to date. The arrangement is alphabetical by the author and alphabetical by the titles under each author. All the known works of each author are listed notwithstanding their inprint or out of print status. If a novel is out of print, the first publication date is mentioned with the o.p. symbol following it. For inprint titles only the inprint publications are mentioned; however, the original publication date can be ascertained by referring to Appendix B where that date is included at the end of the inprint title annotation.

Since many of the authors reside and most of them publish abroad, it would be dangerous to vouch for the completeness of this bibliography. But great care has been taken not to omit authors or their works through the method of checking literary periodicals in the Caribbean, general reviews dealing with Commonwealth literature and all known publications of West Indian literature. All omissions from the list are inadvertent and some inclusions are deliberate. Peter Abrahams was included after much debate although he was born in South Africa. However, he has made his home in Jamaica for the last twenty-five years and claims to be a Jamaican. Others, like Eric Walrond — certainly a West Indian, have published only one

volume. Yet Walrond's Tropic Death is pertinent in the corpus of this literature as well as distinctively West Indian in flavor.

C. L. R. James with his only volume of prose fiction written in his youth can scarcely be called a novelist, yet his Minty Alley is most important to the development of this literature.

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<sup>1</sup>Pseudonym name used by Christopher Nicole.

## APPENDIX B

### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED INPRINT BOOKS

## APPENDIX B

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED INPRINT BOOKS

The purpose of this annotated bibliography is twofold: a) to aid librarians in selecting those materials in which their reading public might be interested and b) to add a dimension to the overall paper for the purpose of further exemplifying the subject matter with which the West Indian author is concerned. The selection of titles included in this section was dictated by the availability of the volumes on the island of St. Thomas. Of the one hundred inprint titles listed in Appendix A, eighty-seven have received annotations. No criticism of the work is implied by its omission from the following list. The authors whose works were selected are arranged in an alphabetical order. Their respective works are listed in a chronological order by first publication. When the year of the original publication date differs with the inprint publication date, the former is included in parenthesis at the end of the citation.

Abrahams, Peter. Tell Freedom. London: Faber & Faber, 1954.

This is an autobiographical novel of the first twenty-two years of a man's life in the slums of Johannesburg, South Africa. After the death of the hero's father, the family is dispersed, and the son realizes that to be back in South Africa means to be less than a man. Recounted are the rebellious youth's adventures as a slum arab who leads his gang of young desperados in thieving exploits. The novel explores the underworld of jails, prostitution and boot-legging. The passages which speak of the discoveries of art, literature and learning are touched with rare beauty as are those passages which speak of the youth's love for the people who helped and sustained him. The novel is filled

with poetry and laughter though the tale is often bitter in recounting the coming of age for a black man in this tragic land.

Abrahams, Peter. Mine Boy. London: Faber & Faber, 1954.

Xuma, a young man from the north, comes to live in Malay Camp, the Negro section of Johannesburg, and to work in the mines. Xuma is strong, straight forward and filled with tribal honesty. The impact of the seething metropolitan life is brusque, and he has to learn the law of the city. The contacts with the white and colored section of society bring him to an awareness of his precarious, danger fraught status as a black, yet he never loses his personal respect as a man. Underground in the mines he assumes a position of leadership and earns the respect of the black man as well as the friendship of his white boss, Paddy O'Shea. When the dangerous state of the mines causes deaths, Xuma and Paddy fight for improved conditions.

On a personal level Xuma is involved in the communal life of Leah, the strong black woman, who organizes and earns money for her group by selling beer and paying off the police. The two women in Xuma's life are Eliza and Maisy who represent two distinct ways of life. Eliza, the black educated teacher, aspires to the white man's ways of life. At the end of the novel, Xuma turns to Maisy, the laughter filled girl who finds joy and comfort with her own people.

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. A Wreath for Udomo. New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1971. (1956).

This novel's central theme is African struggle for self-rule and the factional quarelling for power within that framework. It deals with two fictitious countries on the African continent. Panafrica is engaged in the process of liberating herself from British colonial rule while Pluralia is struggling against white dominance. The central character is Udomo, a natural leader who was born to command. He, together with a group of young African students in England, is engaged in the organization of a revolution while awaiting a call from Africa for the proper moment of assuming control. Udomo succeeds in freeing his country from outsiders, but is ultimately sacrificed in the internal conflict of tribalism versus modernization as Africa chooses its future political ideology.

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. Wild Conquest. London: Faber & Faber, 1961.

This historical novel tells a passionate story of the Great Trek of the South African Boers in the 1830's from



the point of view of both the Boers and the resisting Matabeles. Death and violence shatter the peaceful valley as the Northwest Trekking of the Boers begins which leads to the eventual defeat of the Matabeles. The novel explores the wanton motivation of the Boers and the fears, dreams and resistance of the Africans who fought to keep their land.

Abrahams, Peter. A Night of Their Own. London: Faber & Faber, 1965.

Set in and around Dunbar, this politically oriented novel deals with racial conflict on a personal basis between East Indians and Negroes in racially segregated South Africa. A black South African artist, Richard Dunbee, having lived for ten years in Europe decides to do his part for the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Under the assumed name of Richard Nkosi (a name that is passed on to other spies and agents in the same struggle) he delivers money to the Indian resistance movement in Natal. The relatively simple scheme goes astray after the money is delivered. Unable to reach the border of Basutoland Protectorate, he becomes a wanted man by the police. He also becomes a valued fugitive to be protected by the East Indians because his death or capture would alienate the black segment of the underground movement.

On a personal level a love affair develops between Nkosi and the Indian doctor's crippled sister, Dee. In this as in the political realm the racial prejudices are explored between African natives, East Indians and whites. Abrahams' sensitive portrayal brings to life the motives and tensions of racial struggle in South Africa.

. This Island Now. London: Faber & Faber, 1966.

The novel deals with the agonies of a power struggle on an unidentified Caribbean island after the death of its President Moses Joshua. The factions in the struggle are the wealthy local merchants, the Negro elite and the seething masses of the poor Negroes. The protagonists who clash are Josiah, the charismatic leader of the poor Negroes and Presidential Secretary Stanhope who is uncompromising in his stand for a constitutional government and the rule of the law. Josiah wins and with his idealism and determination struggles to change the power structure of the island. The conflict is fierce involving money, color, family, custom and commerce as these underlie the heated political conflicts. Through these forces and through Josiah's necessity to compromise are exposed the harsh truths of freedom in underdeveloped countries.

Anthony, Michael. The Games Were Coming. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968. (1963).

This is the story of how the central character, Leon, wins the fifteen-mile Blue Riband cycle event at the Southern Games. The Games Were Coming is not just a story of the winning of a cycle race -- though it is simply told and deals with cycling -- it is also the story of a small community in Trinidad. Young romantic love is sensitively portrayed as are all the inter-involvements of the people living in a village. The family relationship of father and son is honestly explored lending dignity to human aspirations, dedication to a cause and the necessity of working together for mutual achievement.

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. The Year in San Fernando. New York: Humanities, 1970. (1965).

The novel records one year in the life of a twelve-year-old boy who leaves his native village, Mayaro, for the city of San Fernando to go to school and work as a servant-companion in the house of an old lady. It is narrated in the first person by this boy. People and places are seen objectively through his eyes and subjectively in terms of his response to them. The image of this child, deprived and tethered to the Chandles' house in a circumscribed world of which he is trying to make sense, is an image of the conditions of the modern West Indies.

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. Green Days by the River. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

The central character of this novel is a sixteen-year-old Negro boy, Shellie, who has to face too much responsibility too soon. As the story opens, his family has just moved to Pierre Hill in Trinidad. The father is critically ill, and the boy is forced to provide a livelihood for his mother and for himself. He is befriended by an East Indian, Mr. Gidharee, on whose cocoa plantation he works. There Shellie experiences his first romantic love for Rosalie, Mr. Gidharee's fourteen-year-old daughter. The story builds to a climax with Shellie's father's death, his involvement with another girl, and Mr. Gidharee's dogs attacking the unfaithful Shellie. A Hindu engagement ceremony for Shellie and Rosalie assures financial security for his mother, but it also demands the sacrifice of Shellie's childhood and youth.

Barrett, Lindsay. Song for Mumu. London: Longmans, 1967.

The central theme of this novel is death. The flimsy disconnected plot is obscured by references to African legends, Pocomania, folk songs and Jamaican folktales. The prologue is the funeral of the young girl, Mumu. The story opens on a time prior to Mumu's birth when young Skully

returns to the country and is taken in by the hard working and loving farmer, Papa Pedé, and his wife Olida. Their daughter Meela is seduced by Skully, and the angry father throws them out of his house. On a job, Skully receives an injury that causes muteness and insanity. Back in Papa Pedé's house Skully witnesses Meela giving birth. While Mumu, their daughter, is born painlessly, Meela screams expelling Mumu's twin brother. Insane Skully uses a whip on the new born child, killing it and with the same strike blinding Papa Pedé. Mumu grows up as a laughing sensuous beauty while Skully hangs himself in the insane asylum. Mother and daughter take on lovers, but they all die when they become important to them. After a move to the city and more disastrous love affairs, Meela turns to the religion of Pocomania. Mumu alone has a lover now -- Sidnisweet. This young man, in an attempt to steel a bracelet for Mumu, ends up in jail. A crazed man, The Poet, enters Mumu's life. When Sidnisweet returns from jail, in an unexplained orgy of violence, he is hacked to pieces, and The Poet hangs himself. Mumu turns to Pocomania as well and is sacrificed with a knife stab on the Jaja altar. At the funeral Meela, the mother, demands her old blinded father to kill her too. Both mother and daughter are buried in the same grave.

Braithwaite, E. R. To Sir, With Love. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1959.

This autobiographical novel is a case study in integration, British style. The author and the central character of the novel is a black teacher from Guyana who comes to Greenslade School in the heart of London slums. In this sensitive and candid story, Braithwaite tells how he and his students learned from each other, and how distrust and initial hatred grew into love and respect. It is a rewarding story of a black man's courage and patience of steering troubled teenagers toward a maturity of self-respect, goodwill and appreciation of human values.

\_\_\_\_\_. Paid Servant. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962.

In this novel Braithwaite uses his experience as a Negro child-welfare officer for the London County Council. Because of the color of his skin, he is appointed to work with the West Indian immigrants in London. With great sensitivity the author chronicles this cultural segment of London's population. The central thread of the story follows Braithwaite's endeavor to place for adoption a four-year-old boy of mixed parentage. The child, both intelligent and beautiful, is not desired by either the black or the white families. The feelings of racial prejudice on both sides of the color line are touched, and the

authorial comments are illuminating for the attitudes of older West Indians.

Braithwaite, E. R. Choice of Straws. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966. (1965).

The setting of this novel is London, and the central characters are white twin youths, Dave and Jack Bennett. These closely-knit look-alike brothers live in a lower class section of the city where neighborhoods become integrated. Among their frequent exploits is an occasional beating of a Negro. But on a fateful night they pick on a tough Negro, and Dave has to use a knife. The Negro is killed and Dave is fatally wounded. The story then centers around Jack's life during the weeks that follow as the police close in on him. Jack's grief, shame and confusion of his racial attitudes are heightened when he falls in love with a Negro girl. Essentially this fast paced suspense story is an exploration of a young man being forced to come to terms with himself and others as he lives in his multiracial society.

Carew, Jan. Black Midas. London: Longmans, 1970. (1958).

Aron Smart, the central character, comes from the small village of Mahaica in Guyana. The first part of the novel explores his idyllic youth there in lyrical passages reminiscent of paintings by Rousseau or Gauguin. Aron sails like an Adam in his fragile boat through the flowered swamps with his girl Indra like an Eve beside him. But he grows up, and the village becomes his prison. The infinite riches of the El Dorado myth that plagues the Guyanese, claim him too. He searches the diamond mines which start his downfall. When Aron's father is killed in a flooded mine, Beauchamp, his father's employer, gives Aron \$480 as conscience money, and with that Aron starts his own empire. He ends up dehumanized and lets his best friend be killed like his father was. His riches are gained and then lost, and Aron ends up impoverished with an amputated leg. The novel is rich in Guyanese folklore and ruggedly descriptive of the men who work the diamond mines.

Clarke, Austin. The Survivors of the Crossing. London: Heinemann, 1964.

The central theme of this novel, set in Barbados in 1961, is how completely money and position control and dictate the life of an entire community. The story opens with Rufus and Boysie, two cane cutters on a plantation plotting to alleviate their dire poverty by organizing a strike. The plot is doomed from the start because the participants turn informers and turncoats for a shilling.

Yet their weakness is prompted by hunger rather than lack of ethics. Through the story moves the vibrant Stella, Rufus' woman, who realistically uses her sex to provide a meal and a sleeping space for her children. Biscoombe, the owner of the rum shop, depends upon the few pennies from the miserable wages of the cane cutters to keep his shop going and becomes one of the first to betray the laborers' cause. Turnbull, the mulatto overseer, is insensitively cruel and uses every trick, including Stella, to thwart the cause. If Rufus had an idea, he fails to carry it out and certainly is made to pay through brutal beatings and final imprisonment. After a brief stoic rallying to the cause, the community returns to the original acceptance of its lot.

deLisser, Herbert G. Jane's Career: A Story of Jamaica. New York: Africana, 1971. (1914).

This novel is set in the early 20th century Jamaica with the black heroine, Jane, as its central character. The plot line follows this simple girl through her school years, her awareness of life around her and her anticipation of becoming an apprentice domestic in Kingston. The arrival in Kingston is vividly portrayed through the eyes of this girl who has never come in contact with the bustle of a city. Jane's experiences there are those of climbing a ladder in a social scale. From her domestic's position she reaches out to marry in lower middle class respectability where she can stand in the doorway of her own house to watch the arrival of her apprentice domestic from the country.

The White Witch of Rosehall. London: Benn, 1958. (1929).

The setting for this drama is a Jamaican slave plantation in the 1830's. Rosehall is owned by Annie Palmer, a Creole white, who has learned witchcraft in Haiti and uses it liberally. The basis of this novel is the legend of Annie Palmer, the female Bluebeard who slaughtered at least five husbands and lovers in the stately mansion of Rosehall near Montego Bay. To this setting comes Robert Rutherford, an English book-keeper. He becomes the main character and the remaining story is told from his point of view. Rutherford forms liaisons with Annie and Millie, the latter a free Negro native. Annie uses her witchcraft and casts a spell on Millie, causing Millie's grandfather, Takoo, a witchdoctor to come to her aid. Takoo's counter magic is unsuccessful and Millie dies. Robert is on the verge of exposing the ruthlessness of the evil Annie when a slave insurrection breaks out causing more violence which culminates in Takoo's strangling of Annie Palmer.

Emtage, James. Brown Sugar. London: Collins, 1967.

In the form of a political lampoon this novel expresses the extremist white reaction to the rise of power by the black majority. Hoggy Cumberbatch, the Negro central character who rises to political power, is the baffoon whose ineptitudes and pretentiousness exemplify the current West Indian political reality in this author's vision.

Harris, Wilson. Palace of the Peacock. London: Faber & Faber, 1969. (1960).

The historical basis of this novel is the Europeans' pursuit of gold and Indians in sixteenth century Guyana. The basic plot revolves around a crew of men pursuing their journey up-river beyond the Mission of Mariella to the Palace of the Peacock, the City of Gold. The journey lasts seven days as in the Christian myth of creation, but death through misadventure, exhaustion and murder attends this crew as they battle their way to the great falls at the head of the river. The names of the crew members match exactly those of another crew that years before had perished on a similar journey into the jungles of the interior. As the story proceeds, it becomes clear that each of the men has lived and died once before, and now they are approaching their second death. These men, on their fated journey, are dragging with them the reflections of the past and the future which they had already experienced in the dreams of their death.

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. The Far Journey of Oudin. London: Faber & Faber, 1961.

In the coastal savannah of Guyana, Oudin, the landless, harborless jack of all trades, is exploited by both an estate owner and a money lender (symbolic of the old and new economic orders). The tale starts on Oudin's death bed with Oudin on the point of selling his unborn child and flashes back to where Oudin is employed by Ram, the East Indian money lender. Oudin, the vagrant, becomes the servant to all men but belongs to none. When Ram sends him out to abduct Beti, Mohammed's young virgin daughter, he wakes to his missionary role of saving her from the horror's of her father's house and protecting her from the evils of the impotent Ram. By his flight with her and their later wedding and union, he becomes the image and author of freedom. But new dangers lurk for the unborn child conceived in freedom as Ram seeks in a covenant with Oudin to possess it.

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. The Whole Armour. London: Faber & Faber, 1962.

The novel moves from the very margin of land and sea where Abram builds his hut to the other water boundry at the margin of Pomeroon River where Magda sets her house. Abram,

the dying recluse, decides to visit his past lover Magda. But when he arrives, he finds Magda obsessed with saving her son Cristo who is pursued for a murder. She insists that Abram hide Cristo in his isolated hut. In an argument between the two men, Abram dies and Cristo flees back to his mother's house. Cristo becomes a fugitive in the jungle wearing a jaguar hide and claws. Notwithstanding his safety at this point, he is driven to return to Sharon, his woman, whose first lover he murdered. Sharon and Cristo conceive a child in the depths of the forest. With the possibility of the child, Cristo has fulfilled his role in life and now wants to give himself up to the police for the crime he has committed. He believes that from his child in Sharon's womb a new race will spring, uncontaminated by the past.

Harris, Wilson. *Heartland*. London: Faber & Faber, 1964.

The underlying theme in this Guyanese novel is the unity of all men, and that one's ancestors may be discovered in any race. Stevenson, representing modern technology, encounters the pregnant and what might be considered promiscuous Petra, who has been cast out by her Amerindian tribe because she does not know who the father of her unborn child is. Stevenson assists her in the birth of the child, but when he goes to find food for her and her child, she flees. By the act of assisting Petra in her general plight and condition, Stevenson undergoes a self-discovery and a symbolic rebirth as if he himself had become the child of Petra. His search for Petra and her fleeting elusiveness lead Stevenson to be swallowed by the jungle. In Harris' vision, Petra is more than a promiscuous woman. She represents a unity theme through her ambiguous parentage, difficulty to come to terms with national and racial heritages, and her uncertainty about the fathering of her own child. Stevenson, the rational searcher, loses himself as a particular man in the context where any concrete belonging to anything is doomed by the fleeting quality of existence.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Eye of the Scarecrow*. London: Faber & Faber, 1965.

With a hallucinatory and haunting evocation of childhood days this story opens in a Guyanese seaport town. Family and friends there act as a counterpoint to the later events in the depths of the Guyana hinterlands in this novel of self-discovery. Mechanized acquisitiveness of the 20th century and the riches of the primeval jungle are the forces that cause conflict and destruction. The two central characters are L\_\_\_\_\_, a childhood friend and the first person 'I', the narrator of the story who signs letters as the 'Nameless Idiot.' The adult actions in the hinterland develop around the rediscovery of the gold mine, Raven's

Head, that after twenty years has disappeared. In the process there is a death-murder after which the two friends experience doubts about each other's innocence. Scarecrow, the pork knocker, absolves them officially, but the guilt separates the friends and pursues the narrator from Guyana to Scotland as he probes his psyche.

Harris, Wilson. The Waiting Room. London: Faber & Faber, 1967.

In this novel, set in Europe, a blind woman, convalescing after a series of operations, sits like a statue in a room full of antiques and relics of her past. Through involuted language and disjointed memories, the reader sees her former love affairs merge in past illusions and present realities. This woman, blind, helpless and deprived, sits in the waiting room and is involved in the development of new resources and capacities for relationships with people and inanimate objects. Through Harris' vision she becomes the exciting ambivalent emblem of the hopeless and historyless West Indian condition.

\_\_\_\_\_. Tumatumari. London: Faber & Faber, 1968.

In developing this novel through the consciousness of heroine, Prudence, Harris utilizes his character's nervous breakdown and recuperation to elucidate his point of the need to be iconoclasts of new models in society to be able to return to the psychic continuums in universal humanity. The central theme of the novel explores Harris' concept that the laws of change and re-creation in the universe produce harmony while a resistance to them leads to annihilation and destruction. Prudence in dream like sequences reaches into the well of her ancestral memory to establish her own identity. Realities shift in time and perspective. The novel opens on a passage where Prudence comes down to a river from her house on the hill of Tumatumari in the interior of Guyana. Both the lust for self-destruction and an inclination for re-creation are present in her mind. From there the scenes shift back and forth to her sick room and the nebulous spaces where she explores her ancestry and present relationships: her mother, Rakka, the Amerindian, her husband Roi Solomon, the modern technologist, her father Henry Tenby, the dreamer and her various conceptions back to the primitive South American tribes. There is no plot line in this novel -- unless the vehicle of a stream of consciousness reaching backward and forward in time and space can be designated as such.

\_\_\_\_\_. Ascent of Omai. London: Faber & Faber, 1970.

This kaleidoscopic novel set in Guyana, lacking a central character, involves flashbacks and dream sequences



while delineating various stages of metaphoric identifications in a man's life. The story whirls around three people and their relationships to each other. A father-son relationship is briefly touched upon and their relationship to a nameless judge who, by sentencing the father for the burning of a factory during a strike, assumes a moral responsibility which transcends time future and time past in the convoluted world of the son as he climbs the mountain of Omai.

Harris, Wilson. The Sleepers of Roraima. London: Faber & Faber, 1970.

This novel is based on a Carib myth of Couvade or a fable like history of the tribe which has to be passed on to each new born child. In this tale, the history from beginning of time (involving animals, birds and humans) is passed on to a lone survivor of the tribe. Visionary dream like sequences of caves filled with birds and animals, rivers filled with fish, forests and glades unite the boy child of the tribe with his ancestral beginnings.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Age of the Rainmakers. London: Faber & Faber, 1971.

A companion volume to The Sleepers of Roraima, this book further explores tribal legends of the original inhabitants of South America and the Caribbean. The author has written a historical and explanatory preface to each of the four fables in which a present day narrator of the tale becomes an intimate extension of an ancestor in the tribal legend. The author's intent in all four fables is to eradicate historical camouflage or prejudice and to arrive at the total psyche and unity of mankind in his communion with the creatures on land, in the air and under water. Through a stream of consciousness association the author attempts to incorporate the evaporation and percipitation of the spirits of the tribes. Each story deals with a different tribe (Macusi, Arekuna, Wapishana and Arawak) and can be read separately, yet each compliments and enhances the other to throw further light on the world which in Harris' vision becomes an exciting allegory.

Hearne, John. The Autumn Equinox. New York: Vanguard, 1960. (1959).

This is acknowledged as Hearne's most precise and polished exposition of the theme of love. Jim Diver comes to Cayuna, an imaginary island in the Caribbean, to set up an illegal printing press for Castro's bankrupt movement. He falls in love with the native girl Eleanor. But Eleanor is fiercely loved by her adoptive father, Nicholas Stacey. Nicholas' affection is sexual and paternal as well as a

love for Eleanor's mother who, before dying, had given Nicholas his one knowledge of meaningful love. For Nicholas time is collapsed in Eleanor. She holds within herself her mother and Nicholas' own youth and vigor. Jim Diver is threatening this love image with his youthful aggressiveness. The triangle is intelligently explored, and Hearne has brought a great deal of sensitivity to the exploration of the many facets of love.

Hearne, John. The Land of the Living. London: Faber & Faber, 1961.

The main character of this novel is a Jewish Central European refugee, a professor at The University, who is consciously making a sortie from his suburban social contacts into the Kingston slums for his affair with the black bar-keeper, Bernice. Bernice, a woman capable of giving love, can fill the void of the badly bruised hero. But personal insecurities and racial dictates destroy the relationship, and, almost with a sigh of relief, the professor abandons his secret liaison and turns to a public, socially acceptable involvement with the drunken Joan Culpepper. And though the ending is an ostensibly happy one, the reader is left with the question: Does the cosy adjustment into middle class domesticity answer the challenge posed by the life and death of those sacrificed?

Hercules, Frank. I Want a Black Doll. London: Collins, 1968. (1967).

The central theme of this novel is racial intermarriage between a mulatto doctor and a white Southern girl and their subsequent social and emotional adjustment. Barbara, the protagonist, after the death of her parents is raised by a white family in Kentucky. The father in this family, unknown to the rest, has a black son, John Lincoln, who like his legitimate son becomes a doctor. While both sons wish to marry Barbara, John Lincoln succeeds. The conflict in the marriage is intensified by murder and an abortion which culminate in the central drama of the legitimate white son killing John before he realizes that they are brothers. Because of the involved plot, the novel remains more sensational than artistic.

Holder, Geoffry. Black Gods, Green Islands. Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1971. (1959).

These five tales of a folkloristic background deal with old African and Caribbean legends. Well written, the volume abounds in rich scenic descriptions and reflects some of the island history.

James, Cyril Lionel Robert. Minty Alley. London: New Beacon Books, 1972. (1936).

James' first and only novel deals with a young middle class Negro, Mr. Haynes, who is forced by a temporary lack of funds to find cheap housing in "Minty Alley". The protagonist of the novel watches people love, marry, get sick and die within the circumscribed world of the yard. James combines vivid details and character descriptions that allow the incidents in the yard to become a tangible slice of life. The central issue of the novel remains life's triumph over the narrow surroundings that fetter these people. A somewhat nostalgic side effect is that as Haynes returns to his more respectable middle class existence, he feels the loss of the reality of the yard. This expresses the impoverishing alienation of the educated West Indian.

Khan, Ismith. The Jumbie Bird. New York: Astor-Honor, 1961.

Set in Trinidad, this novel explores the cultural conflict of the East Indian traditional way of life with West Indian mores. Jamini, the boy hero of the tale, is unable to return to the ancestral heritage no matter how much he may love and respect it. The novel underlines the cultural and generational distances in multiracial Trinidad.

Lamming, George. In the Castle of My Skin. New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1970. (1953).

This is an autobiographical novel describing the lives of four boys growing up in a Barbadian village. It presents village life, colonialism, poverty, class distinctions and the natural elements that influenced the development of each boy as well as the growth of Barbados. As the story develops, the reader becomes aware of the political and social struggles that must be reconciled by all as the island gains identity.

. Natives of My Person. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971.

Lamming, after ten years of silence, has produced a novel of adventure that attacks directly and fearlessly the psyche of the colonizer between the 16th and 18th centuries. The story centers on a peerless voyage of the ship Reconnaissance and her hand picked crew. These men attempt to escape the existing tyranny of their home land by creating a new civilization on an uninhabited Caribbean island. As the voyage for Utopia progresses, the crew members tell of their hopes for the future and of their past. The story is austere and compelling as it blends the moods of the sea and the dreams of the sailors into an unequalled adventure.

Lovelace, Earl. While Gods are Falling. Chicago: Regnery, 1966. (1965).

Walter Castle, a young lower level government clerk, is trapped in the slums of Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. In a series of flashbacks to his childhood and youth, he spends a Sunday trying to decide what to do with his future. His desire to return to the country, away from the crime, violence and the teeming insensitive humanity, is overpowering when he considers his wife and their baby daughter. He himself feels worthless as an individual and fails to identify with city life. The novel resolves on a note of hope with Walter deciding against running away and making the first effort of a community organization on the slum block of Webber Street to bring people toward self-awareness as well as self-help.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Schoolmaster. London: Collins, 1968.

The setting for this novel is the remote village of Kumaca in the interior of Trinidad. Progress of the outside world has just started to filter into this tradition bound and primitive village. The community is divided on the necessity for having a school. The progressive element in the village wins, and they approach the reluctant village priest. A school is finally built, and a schoolmaster is appointed. But the benefits of the school are partially cancelled by seeds of corruption. The school is followed by the building of a road, and opportunities to get rich quickly give rise to blackmail and dishonesty. The schoolmaster, though able in his profession, provokes a tragedy that involves seduction which culminates in violence.

Mac Donald, Ian. The Hummingbird Tree. London: Heinemann, 1969.

This childhood novel describes a twelve-year-old white boy's growing up in Trinidad and explores the theme of racial prejudice between Caucasians and East Indians. Alan, the white central character and narrator of the novel, discovers the surrounding areas of his home while playing with Kaiser, an East Indian boy a little older than he. Kaiser's sister, Jaillan, is Alan's age, and a young love grows up between them. But as the years pass, and they diverge from simple games of catching butterflies, collecting bird eggs and bathing in the stream, their friendship grows problematic. The joy in each other's company is marred by resentment and friction as their conversations grow in sophistication and they discover their differences in color, social class and educational possibilities. Alan's parents step in and dissolve the friendship. At the age of eighteen Alan revisits Jaillan with his childhood memories intact, but they cannot bridge the gap created by prejudice to recapture their friendship.

McKay, Claude. Home to Harlem. New York: Pocket Books, 1965. (1928).

Home to Harlem celebrates the Negro community of Harlem in the 1920's. Jake Brown, the central character, returns home after two years in England to immerse himself in the noises of laughter, ragtime, blues, dancing -- the thickness and closeness of the contagious fever of Harlem. At the beginning of the story he meets Felice, a brown girl, at a cabaret. She disappears, and the plot of the story is centered around Jake's search for her. This allows the author to place Jake in many situations of the Negro community of Harlem and to create that capacity for joy and life of the lower class Negro that is the central event of the novel. In the second part of the novel Ray, a Haitian intellectual, is introduced. Ray initiates an educational process for Jake -- an awareness of negritude and a search for a distinct way of life. The novel touches on McKay's central issues of race consciousness, vagabondage and the desire of being a writer. All three of these are explored in the two characters through their conversations as they continue to search for the missing girl.

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. Banjo, a Story Without a Plot. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1970. (1929).

This work assembles a group of Negroes at the Ditch on Marseilles waterfront. McKay celebrates the unfettered joy that lower class Negro life has to offer, but he does not sentimentalize it. The story is essentially without a plot, and long passages of it are devoted to debates and discussions of race questions among the international group of Negroes who meet in the bars of the waterfront. Banjo, the central character of this novel, is presented only circumstantially as a person -- he remains as a symbol for a way of life.

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. Banana Bottom. Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham Bookseller, 1970. (1933).

Bitia Plant, the central heroine of this novel, is the daughter of a Jamaican peasant brought up by a white Reverend and his wife. After seven years abroad at an English university and on the Continent, Bitia returns to her native village of Banana Bottom. The novel tells the story of how she gradually strips away what is irrelevant in her English upbringing, and how she marries Jubban, the strong and silent native in her father's employ. The theme is one of liberation of Bitia to bring her to a point of accepting only her own people in a community to which she can belong.

Mais, Roger. Three Novels. London: Jonathan Cape, 1966.

This volume contains Mais' three major novels, currently out of print as separate titles, written in the last few years of his life. The first of these novels The Hills Were Joyful Together, originally published by Cape in 1953, is set in a yard, the Kingston version of a slum block. The characters of the novel are secondary to the author's aim in portraying life in the yard as a whole. Concubinage and unrestrained sexual love provide the healing powers in people's poverty-ridden lives, yet at the same time this unbounded elemental energy binds the yard dwellers in a community. Death, disillusionment, rejection and betrayal are common-place in this work. The novel remains a jagged creation, painted on a large canvas, but compensated by the author's dramatic energy in portraying the life of lower class Jamaicans in a tenement yard while embracing the lives of twenty-five people.

Brother Man, his second novel first published in 1954, is contained in this volume. Here again the setting is the Kingston slum. The work is more polished, more mature and yet less powerful. The drama is touched with pathos as it involves a central character Bra'Man who as a convincingly human figure symbolizes the life and crucifixion of Christ. This messianic figure carries the message of Christian life in the brutal environment of the yard. The inhabitants follow him as long as it is profitable, but when Bra'Man's opponent, the obeah man, Brother Ambo, frames and disgraces him, Bra'Man is stoned and abandoned. Although the story is tragic, the sense of tragedy is lost because of the author's oversentimentalization. In the end the reader is left without any feeling of social destiny.

The last novel included in this volume is also Mais' last work. Black Lightning, first published in 1955, is a complete departure from his first two in setting and mood. The work is quiet in tone as it sets out to portray a man who is the eternal protagonist amid eternal and antagonistic processes. The central symbol of the novel is the biblical Samson upon whom Jake fastens as a model for his sculpture and whom the author chooses as a symbol to portray man's independence. As the story unfolds, the reader perceives that Samson is a symbol of both strength and weakness, essentially an archetype of the human person. In the process of this dramatic novel Jake comes to the realization of this symbolic meaning of Samson and carves Samson as the blinded figure. Simultaneously Jake, the artist, himself is blinded by lightning. The previously independent and strong figure of Jake is brought to depend upon others. Through his central character, Jake, Mais expresses a tragic view of life and a dignified response to it.

Mittelholzer, Edgar. Corentyne Thunder. London: Heinemann, 1970. (1941).

This first sensitive and lyrical novel converges on Ramgolall, an East Indian cowherder, in a tale of human frailty in the inscrutable landscape of Guyana. Ramgolall is a minor figure in the tale except that it is he who creates the mood and fathers the children who while providing the plot line ultimately depend upon him for their existence. All of them experience the peasants' relationship to the earth and its cycles. They live their lives on the terms that the Corentyne lowlands impose upon them. Ramgolall has fathered children by two wives. There is Sosee who lives with the white planter and who gives him his light complexioned, educated grandson, Geoffry. Geoffry has a child by Ramgolall's youngest daughter Kattree whom he ruthlessly rejects. There is Beena, his beautiful daughter who remains fiercely but hopelessly faithful to a married peasant, Jannee, for whom Ramgolall sacrifices his own life. A son, Baijan, returns rich and marries a daughter of a wealthy mill owner. As the story unfolds, the Guyanese East Indian society focuses back on old Ramgolall who as his children grow and expand, grows weaker and dies when there is no more that he can do for them.

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. Children of Kaywana. London: Secker & Warburg, 1956. (1952).

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. Kaywana Stock. London: New English Library, 1969. (1954).

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. Kaywana Blood. London: Secker & Warburg, 1958.

These three novels, commonly referred to as the Kaywana trilogy, should be considered as a unit. Kaywana (Guyana) is the bloody background for these ancestral novels which trace the family of a Dutch planter, van Groenwegel, through the eventful years of 1612-1953. Children of Kaywana opens the trilogy in 1612 as Kaywana, the daughter of an Arawak woman and an English sailor, and Adriansen van Groenwegel, a Dutchman, begin the family and the family tradition. Adriansen is a strong man, but he secures his ends by peaceful and devious methods. His peacefulness and European intellectuality are also potential sources of weakness. Kaywana, on the other hand, is fierce, direct and strong-willed. These explosive qualities hold potentialities for heroic action but they could lead to cruelty and callousness. Through the trilogy we follow the successive generations of van Groenwegels as the novel spans three centuries of Guyana's history. As the novels unfold, some of the members of the family reveal themselves

to be 'true van Groenwegels' imbued with the fierce spirit of Kaywana. Others are genetic mistakes -- soft ineffectual people, a kind of development from Adriansen. The family prospers, but it also acquires an exaggerated vision of family pride and destiny which prove its downfall. The Kaywana trilogy is a narrative of blood and thunder capturing the raw and violent spirit of those years when brutally hard men and women could survive against the virgin lands, raids, wars and the uprisings of slaves.

Mittelholzer, Edgar. Old Blood.<sup>1</sup> New York: Fawcett World, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_. Sylvia. London: New English Library, 1968. (1953).

Sylvia is the daughter of a racially mixed marriage. The first part of the novel explores her relationship with her white father and their love and understanding. When her father dies, Sylvia is not prepared to face the prejudiced society in which she lives. She is forced to work, but is not hired for the jobs she could do because of her color. When Mr. Knight suggests concubinage as a way out of her economic plight, her pride does not permit it. The end of the novel sees Sylvia's struggle with starvation, illness and death.

\_\_\_\_\_. Thunder Returning. London: Secker & Warburg, 1961.

The drama explored in this novel centers around two young couples: Lindy, the maternal type is married to hard drinking sterile Tommy; Lydia and Richard are their close friends in the suburban setting of New Amsterdam, Guyana. Lydia and Lindy both conceive children from Richard. After the fact all four people are aware of who the prospective father is, and the novel pursues the emotional reactions of the four main characters as they await the birth of the children. The psychological stress cracks Tommy after the birth of a male child. His personal feelings are directed against himself and his sterility rather than vented in jealousy. Lydia is jealous and after the birth of a daughter totally loses sanity and commits suicide. Richard and Lindy weather the storm of the ranting and raving of their spouses with patient understanding intermingled with personal guilt. Lindy leaves Tommy before Lydia's death is announced, but there does not seem much of a possibility of mending any of the remaining three lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Published as Kaywana Blood in Great Britain. Please see the preceding annotation.



Mittelholzer, Edgar. The Wounded and the Worried. London: Putnam, 1962.

Each of the four characters with whom this novel is concerned has his own set of frustrating problems that have driven him to attempt suicide. The temptation for self-destruction is overcome by a positive effort of mutual cooperation among them. Tom Dillon, a most unusual Anglican priest who espouses Eastern philosophies and religious experiences as commitments to psychic phenomena, is central in guiding the group. His fourth dimensional experiences allow him to help Stella Burges who has been driven to an extreme because of her desire for a clean sexual relationship after the sordidness of her marriage. He also helps Gwen Wellings, a retired school teacher, who can find no meaning in her life. Working together these people manage to find reasons to continue with their lives.

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. The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham. London: Library 33, 1965.

The heroine of this novel, Sheila Chatham, lives by her own choice in a quiet cottage in order to avoid the society which she believes to be decadent. But there is no escape for her because all the forms of human decadence and social decay impinge upon her. They vary from the sympathetic homosexuals, Archie and Finey, to the insanely frustrated Susan. There are others who enter her life: Harpo, the essayist who by his pen advocated capital punishment that resembles capital murder; Herbert, the Yogi, who introduces Sheila to psychic phenomena. These people affect her in a way that forces her to further reject any human contact. In her aloneness surrounded by violence, she resolves her problems by accepting freedom from society's impositions by choosing death.

Naipaul, Shiva. Fireflies. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

This delightful first novel is both satirical and touching in its exploration of the rise and fall of the Khoja family in Trinidad. The family clan is pompous to an extreme. But they are also the social leaders of Trinidad's Hindu community as well as awesome in their backwardness and eccentricity. It is also a family of sisters with one inept brother who is buttressed and bolstered by the females to protect his status as the leader of the clan. The heroine of the novel is the youngest sister, Vimla, who is the least important member of the clan. Her marriage is haphazardly arranged with the not too respectable Mr. Lutchman, a bus driver. The sweet tempered, accepting, yet stubborn Vimla, with all her personal set-backs through her married life and raising children, grows in humanity and becomes the strong link in the chain of events that affects the family of Khoja.

Naipaul, Vidiadhara Surajprasad. The Mystic Masseur. New York: Vanguard, 1959. (1957).

A fictional East Indian community in Trinidad provides the background for this novel. Naipaul has written this work as a mock biography of Ganesh Ramsumair, an East Indian mystic who is a masseur and a politician. Naipaul quotes lavishly from Ramsumair's 'publications' and in this way traces the man's career from humble beginnings to his rise as a decorated colonial politician with the Anglicized name of G. Ramsay Muir. Much of Naipaul's satire rests on his clever use of dialect. Since in this community social standing is associated with the ability to use Standard English, Ganesh and his wife, Leela, are exploited to a great comic effect as they struggle with the conjugation of the verb 'to be' and acquire educational standing by a mass purchase of books which are discussed in size, numbers and color rather than in content or even title. The satire of the fossilized East Indian community and the static Trinidad society is always funny, yet it is also an alarming social comment.

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. The Suffrage of Elvira. London: Andre Deutsch, 1969. (1958).

With this novel Naipaul establishes himself as a satirist. In The Suffrage of Elvira, built around a political campaign of a Hindu speculator, Surujpta Harbans, and a Negro candidate, Preacher, the comic effect and satire are derived from the confusion of Hindu, Muslim and Christian doctrines in the newly democratic town of Elvira. Obeah practices and superstitious fears pervade all groups of this community, and Naipaul cleverly uses these factors to serve sociological truths of a West Indian society with comic effect. The atmosphere of an election in Trinidad is beautifully portrayed. All the latent corruptions and treacherous connings of the constituents are awakened as the two candidates bribe the influential vote pullers in a hilarious farce.

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. Miguel Street. New York: Vanguard, 1960. (1959).

Though published as his third novel, this is actually his first work. Miguel Street, a collection of short comic sketches, is held together by a common narrator telling the stories of the characters who live on the same fictional street in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The sketches are notable for the author's unfailing ability to define his characters through some essential trait, his precise observations of gestures and postures, his ability for the reproduction of the inflected spoken word and his uncanny sense of timing. All the stories are amusing, and the varied characters indicate the author's range of comic

inventiveness. At times the farce wears thin, and the novel as a whole lacks Naipaul's usual sparkling punch and pointed finish.

Naipaul, Vidiadhara Surajprasad. A House for Mr. Biswas. London: Andre Deutsch, 1961.

The tone of this enormous book is basically serious, but the humor through still alive with its earlier bounding gaiety, acquiring a delicately dry, ironic touch that cuts much deeper. In this massively documented study of the Indian family in the Caribbean, Naipaul follows the life of a Hindu from birth to death, embracing a huge sweep of the world that grows up around him. The story of Mr. Biswas is the story of a struggle to establish a personal identity against the tyranny of a monolithic family structure into which Biswas is unfortunately trapped by marriage. A House for Mr. Biswas, apart from all else, is filled with an insight into the depravity and meanness, the incestuous stifling clannishness of the East Indian family in the Caribbean, as well as an understanding of oriental patience, endurance and the capacity for great hardship and suffering.

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. Mr. Stone and The Knights Companion. London: Andre Deutsch, 1963.

In this work Naipaul transfers his concept of a decaying civilization where all achievement is a mere illusion to an English setting. The plot line pursues the post-retirement activities of a British librarian terrified by his approaching old age. After a thoroughly enjoyed bachelorhood, Mr. Stone marries at the age of sixty-two. Furthermore he becomes a creative man and for the first time in his life reaps acclaim for his achievement: he creates The Knights Companion which consists of a body of retired men -- an association of the lonely and afraid against loneliness and fear. The story carries great charm and is touched with Naipaul's characteristic humor. But the reader is also shocked by the reality of the human condition: all achievement is only an illusion because the loneliness and fear of death have to be faced by each man and alone.

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. The Mimic Men. New York: Macmillan, 1967.

This novel of a post independence island society satirizes the black segment of the population which in Naipaul's vision is doomed to the state of mimic men. The Negroes in this story are trying to find a meaning for themselves in the values of foreign popular cultures. Gradually they are imbued with a perplexity of their own identity as other people fail to understand them.

Naipaul, Vidiadhara Surajprasad. A Flag on the Island. London: Andre Deutsch, 1967.

In this collection of short stories, the title story is a short novel. Though most of them are funny, all of them are thought provoking. "A Flag on the Island" varies in mood from fond nostalgia to pure farce then to bitterness. Originally it was written as a story for a film with a Caribbean setting. The island is unnamed, yet given its racial mixtures and oriental characters, it probably reflects Trinidad. The central character and narrator is an American ex-service man who has unwillingly returned to the island because an approaching hurricane has made it necessary for his cruise ship to pull into the harbor. He, with a camera eye perceptiveness, chronicles the progress that the island has made since the days of occupational forces during World War II. The sensitive nostalgic flashbacks coupled with harsh and strident prose for present day activity create an unexpectedly disturbing composite in the development of the main characters. Henry, the original club house keeper who sponsored spontaneous ethnic dances, Mr. Blackwhite, the novelist who worried about Jane Austen's prose, Mr. Priest, the insurance salesman and religious organizer, have expanded to acquire the new polish of Cambridge education and the glibness to talk to New York Foundation representatives to subsidize the Negroes' artistic stream-of-consciousness. The irony and satire are subtle, but the bitterness of the author's intent explodes in the reader's face.

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. In A Free State. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

This, latest of Naipaul's writings, contains one short novel, two stories and two fragments from a travel diary. In this volume he competently pursues his various alienated characters' searches for an inner kingdom. These characters seek it in various ways, through the crude instruments which are all that daily life has to offer in the societies where they find themselves. From Washington, London, through Africa Naipaul carries his characters in their search for completeness and freedom.

The short novel, "In a Free State", is set in an African country where there is still no peace between the black and white nor between the warring tribes. The central characters are an English homosexual and his friend's wife who are driving back from the capital to their safe expatriate compound. Both neutral, white and protected they are 'in a free state,' but Naipaul in this story of adventure points out their lack of freedom while making a profound comment on colonialism and its consequences.

"One out of Many," a short story, takes a diplomat's servant from India and makes him 'free' as a U.S. citizen in

Washington, 'the capital of the world.' torn by strife and racial violence. The story ends with "I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over."

"Tell me Who to Kill" deals with two East Indian brothers from the West Indies. One has come to 'pursue his studies' and the other to work in the greatest democracy that the world has known. Both confront failure that at the end of the story is insurmountable for the main characters.

Nicole, Christopher. White Boy. London: Hutchinson, 1966.

The central character of this novel is Rupert Longdene, a white plantation manager's son. He was born and has grown up in the colony of British Guiana. In many ways the novel centers around his childhood and the racial tensions in British Guiana. But as Rupert enters school, his best friends turn out to be a Negro and an East Indian. There he also discards his white superiority feelings and becomes a Guyanese. Central to the novel is awareness of racial differences, lack of trust and fear when color lines are crossed. As Rupert grows up, he tries to love and marry Shirley, the girl with 'the drop of Negro blood', but neither he nor Shirley are able to overcome their prejudice. The end of the novel sees Rupert with a white girl, and both of them are on the verge of working for the independence of Guyana.

Palmer, C. Everard. The Cloud with the Silver Lining. New York: Pantheon, 1967. (1966).

This novel, well suited for the younger reader, is set in Boswell, Jamaica in the days before electricity (somewhere between World War I and World War II). It is filled with sun light and the simple joys of living in the Jamaican country side. The story revolves around two boys, Milton and Timmy, who are determined to keep their grandfather's smallholding farm going after an accident in which Grandpa loses a leg. The boys tend the goats, milk the cows, feed the hens and sell the produce. Milton conceives the idea of buying Grandpa a buggy, The Cloud, which not only turns into a money making success at the fair, but it also gives Grandpa mobility. The novel covers one year in the boys' life and is a delight to read.

Big Doc Bitterroot. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.

This fast moving story is rich in detail of life in Jamaican countryside during World War II. The grinding of

sugar cane and the distillation of sugar, the villagers' cooperation during a hurricane, the celebration of a wedding and the many ways in which the young and the old participate in the mainstream of life enrich this novel. The plot is simple and told through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old girl. Into the smooth running village life comes Big Doc Bitterroot who turns out to be not only the strongest man physically, but also one of the most charming quacks the village has ever seen. He gathers an immediate following, and the villagers are in danger of being fleeced of their scarce assets by this man who puts on side shows to sell his strength giving potion in the tradition of medicine men. The previously acknowledged village leader interferes, and good and evil forces clash giving the author the opportunity for the vivid portrayals of the village characters. The novel is best suited for youngsters in the age group of twelve to fifteen.

Palmer, C. Everard. The Sun Salutes You. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.

This rich, fast moving story is set in Kendal, Jamaica. Mike Johnson, after a five year absence from his village, comes home with the credentials of a mechanic and a truck of his own expecting to carry sugar cane for the villagers. But Kendal has changed, and Matt Southern, a power hungry, villanous man, has sewed up all trucking business and is buying up the villagers' land -- including the land of Mike's father. Mike bids for a share of the business, but Matt practices some more villany, and Mike finds himself accused and arrested for arson. Tragedy ensues as Mike's mother dies which causes the villagers to support Mike with their sympathy. In the final court room scene, Mike clears his name, and Matt is discovered to be the real culprit. From that point on Mike's future is assured, and the village returns to its old serenity.

. The Hummingbird People. London: Andre Deutsch, 1971.

The rivalry between the two villages of Kendal and Grange in Jamaica and how for once it was overcome are the central themes of this lighthearted novel. The time is immediately after World War II. A decorated RAF son is returning to Kendal and two ground crew boys to Grange. The villagers are determined to outdo each other in the celebration of their respective home comings. Some spying, outstanding secret plotting and great expenditures are involved. It takes Kendal's worthless drunk, Tawny, who by stealing Grange's rum supply inadvertently brings the two villages together in a communal festivity.

Reid, Victor Stafford. Sixty-five. London: Longmans, 1960.

This is a student version of his presently out of print novel, New Day, and is frequently used as a text in West Indian schools. It is a historical work of fiction dealing with the October, 1865 peasant revolt which is known as the Morant Bay Rebellion. Told in well wrought intelligible dialect by a first person boy hero, it presents Reid's views on the nature of people and the spiritual justification of freedom against the background of a hundred years of Jamaica's history.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Leopard. New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1971. (1958).

Set in East Africa, the novel centers around Nebu, a Kikuyu Mau Mau warrior who stalks and slays a white man, and now wounded is stalked by a leopard. The plot line, notwithstanding its various allegorical levels, is simple. Nebu has fathered a child by the white wife of planter Gibson. When the half-caste child is born, Gibson kills his wife. Years later Nebu is in need of a gun and is stalking a settler who is carrying one. It turns out to be Gibson, and Nebu falls back in surprise, but before he can kill the white farmer, Gibson puts a bullet through Nebu's side. Nebu's world is one of strict justice. He has wronged Gibson and is responsible for the child Gibson has brought with him. Nebu must pay his penance and take the child to the safety of the city. The boy is crippled, and Nebu is wounded. They are hunted by a hungry leopard, and in these episodes the two survivors attempt to establish a father-son relationship.

Rhys, Jean. The Left Bank. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries, 1927.

This volume contains a collection of stories and sketches about Bohemian life in Paris around the 1920's. The central characters in these stories are women, and their status as exploited underdogs in society is stated with artistic passion. This collection includes a flashback sketch of the author's childhood in Roseau, Dominica. The last and lengthier story is set in Vienna which also defines her stand on the issue of women -- that it is hypocritical to view them as good or bad women only.

\_\_\_\_\_. Quartet. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. (1928)

This first full length novel by Jean Rhys establishes her future theme and her instinctive ability for literary form. As in all her novels the central character is a woman, portrayed as the exploited underdog. The tone is haunting and the woman deeply disturbing. In Quartet Marya Zelli, an English ex-chorus girl, finds herself married to a feckless Pole in Paris. The man provides both a stability

of sorts and happiness for her. She is befriended by an English couple with the express purpose to make her a third member of a grisly sexual menage a trois. Marya is the victim, but, though numbed by misery, she is also hypnotized by a passionate attachment to the couple. When her own husband returns from prison, she mismanages her circumstance through indecision and is left alone.

Rhys, Jean. Voyage in the Dark. New York: Norton, 1968. (1934).

In this, her third novel, Rhys is still pursuing her theme of the downtrodden, exploited woman. The novel is set in England though the heroine, Anna Morgan, comes from the West Indies. At the age of nineteen she is seduced by Mr. Jeffries who fails to understand the brooding, dreaming island creature who is forever cold. Soon he abandons her, and Anna drifts into prostitution. Rhys' treatment of the subject of prostitution is sensitive and bitterly objective without oversentimentalization. The novel ends with Anna recovering from an abortion, and the doctor pronouncing her recovered and ready to start all over on the same path.

. After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. (1930).

The action of this novel moves between London and Paris and contains no West Indian material. In mood it is similar to Quartet and follows Rhys' central theme of the lonely, friendless, exploited and abandoned woman who is unable to help her condition. Julia Martin has been left by her last lover, Mr. Mackenzie, and is in need of money. The introspective desperate moods of the central character are explored as she moves from café to café in Paris where she has been living. A return to London for her mother's funeral is the same hopeless search to find someone or something. But she is beyond hope of rescue and returns to Paris for the final part of the novel and the final encounter with her empty and threatening future -- "...the hour between dog and wolf." (p. 191) The novel is written in the third person and has a clean bitter quality like most of Rhys' novels. Though Julia is worthless and friendless, she evokes pity for the condition of women trapped unprepared in an aggressive world.

. Good Morning, Midnight. London: Andre Deutsch, 1967. (1939).

The central character, Sasha Jansen, is a woman over forty, disillusioned, mistrustful and unarmed against the men she encounters. She meets a gigolo who believes her rich, and in him Sasha sees an opportunity to make one man suffer for the wrongs that other men have inflicted on her.



The relationship evolves into a mutual torture for both. The novel is subtle in its psychological drama, and Rhys' touch is masterly in building to the climax of the story. As in all Rhys' novels this woman is caught in an in-between world of loneliness -- floating between the rich and the poor -- exploited, hurt and still unable to resist. Daydreams predominate in Sasha's life as they do in the lives of the previous heroines. These daydreams turn into nightmares instituted by cruel deceiving men whom the women are too undecisive, too foolish and too weak to thwart. Sasha is a culmination of the women of whom Rhys writes: aggressively unhappy yet entertaining, introspective yet acute judges of themselves and others, unreasonable yet intuitively aware. Sasha is more than an ageing woman -- she represents men's lack of understanding of women, and the consequent mistrust that women extend to men. Though the novel was written in the 1930's, it transcends time and is probably more meaningful and comprehensible today than it was then.

Rhys, Jean. Wide Sargasso Sea. New York: Norton, 1967. (1966).

With this novel Jean Rhys returns to the West Indies for the setting of her story. This last full length novel takes for its heroine Antoinette Cosway, the mad creole wife in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. Brontë's novel is used only as a springboard for this very individualistically Jean Rhys' novel. With great intimacy Rhys describes this West Indian character who like all her previous heroines is alienated, menaced and at odds with life. The setting for the first two parts of the novel is Dominica and Jamaica of the 1830's. Antoinette is the product of her decadent, inbred, ex-patriate society -- rejected by the blacks and by the whites and caught in a web of life where only dreams of the past interwoven with superstitions are acceptable. The novel is vividly intense and distinctively West Indian in following the plight of a woman who feels the burden of the dispossessed white West Indian creole.

\_\_\_\_\_. Tigers are Better Looking. London: Andre Deutsch, 1968.

This volume contains a collection of the few short stories that Jean Rhys wrote during the twenty-seven year silence between her Good Morning, Midnight and Wide Sargasso Sea. Some of the stories deal with unsuccessful writing experiments and the agonies that writers experience when they feel that the flow of their talent has ceased.

St. Omer, Garth. Shades of Grey. London: Faber & Faber, 1968.

This volume contains two short novels: "Light on the Hill" and "Another Place, Another Time." Both novels are mainly concerned with criticizing the island society and the sense of impoverishment of the new West Indian

middle class. Unspectacular but rhythmic prose explores the under-consciousness, the perverse fluxes and re-fluxes of feelings and the social and inner life of two young men. While each novel can be read independently, one compliments the other.

The story line in the "Lights on the Hill" follows Stephenson who after years of drifting finds himself going abroad for a university education. To his surprise the backward place of his birth helps rather than hinders him in obtaining a degree. "Another Place, Another Time" begins at school with Derek who finds it hard to find worth in the studies he is pursuing. He wonders if his education -non-education is worth the striving or whether he ought to return home to his island to work and help his widowed mother.

St. Omer, Garth. A Room on the Hill. London: Faber & Faber, 1969.

The novel involves a group of young friends, possibly from St. Lucia, who are in the process of forging their different careers. The men have studied abroad as have some of the girls. The central character is John Lestrade, an introspective young man, who faces the frustrations of contemporary life through polemic brooding. In his awareness the other members of the group, their relationships to each other and to him come alive. John's best friend, Stephen, dies by drowning. Stephen had called for help which John had not extended because the man had been too far out. John agonizes over his own cowardice and over the loss of his friend to discover that prior to the incident Stephen had written a letter indicating that he would commit suicide in such a way due to thwarted educational plans. Then John's mother dies. As the story progresses, the central character becomes increasingly uncertain of what men live by and for. The ambivalence of his feelings about his mother's and his friend's deaths surprises him, and he is shocked by his own perverse indecisions and further disillusioned by the cynical defeatism of the rest of the group.

. Nor Any Country. London: Faber & Faber, 1969.

This novel contains little plot line and very little action. Its main concern is with the influence of the Church in those Eastern Caribbean islands which are almost exclusively Catholic. American cars and priesthood equate success as well as create a clash in values. Peter, the central character, is an anti-hero who glorifies a life of non-achievement because in his vision there is nothing to achieve. But, even if somewhat paradoxically, the author, with his sense of nothing, appears to be aware of the dangers involved in the acceptance of such a void. The conclusion of this pessimistic novel with its realization of

the island deprivation emerges with a commitment to the island way of life.

Salkey, Andrew. Hurricane. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

This, his first juvenile novel, is a powerfully dramatic story of a hurricane as seen through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old boy, Joe, in Kingston, Jamaica. The hurricane is seen in all its realistic details and in terms of the boy's reactions to it. Joe, his sister Mary and their parents are trapped in their battened down home waiting for the hurricane to strike and move away. The realistic description of meteorological details and the psychological reactions of the people during the initial wind, during the dead calm of the eye of the hurricane and during the time when work is in progress as the flooding starts, create a gripping tale of a natural event in Jamaican existence.

\_\_\_\_\_. Earthquake. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Three young children spend a holiday with their grandparents in Dallas, Jamaica. Earthquakes, while frequent in that part of the world, are greatly feared, especially by those who recall the devastating one of 1907. At the beginning of their holiday, the children feel an earth tremor, and they become aware of the psychological reactions of the community. A chance meeting with a Rastafarian youth (one of a group of religious men who pledge poverty and go around the country side preaching a back-to-Africa ideaology) leads them to adventures. The story's dramatic moments involve a land slide in which their Rastafarian friend is hurt and a vivid tale of the 1907 earthquake by Grandfather. A splendid story exploring the life style of Jamaican country side.

\_\_\_\_\_. Drought. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

This novel is set in the small village of Naim in Jamaica that is affected by drought. The central characters are young boys. Seth Stone with his friends Benjie, Double Ugly and Mango Head set out through a series of boyish adventures to bring rain to the parched village. The digging of a well accompanied by black magic type of sacrifices of roosters and candles makes this an interesting novel for the younger set.

\_\_\_\_\_. Riot. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

The central theme of this juvenile novel is the establishment of a labor union in Kingston, Jamaica. It is told as seen through the eyes of a fifteen-year-old boy who along with his two school friends observes the organization of it first hand. Gerald, the main character, is the son of

Martin Manson who with Alexander Crossman are the leaders of the movement. Unemployment and poor conditions in the lower class areas of the city provoke a riot which is seized by the union organizers to rally the rioters together for the establishment of the organization. The boys have varied adventures as they move in and around the riot area.

Salkey, Andrew. Jonah Simpson. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

This juvenile adventure story takes for its central character a young boy who spends his summer holiday with an uncle in Port Royal, Jamaica. The historical fort town and some of its characters are well depicted by the author. The plot follows Jonah who overhears a chance remark by a market woman about mysterious happenings in town. The mystery seems to involve ghosts that have been appearing in various deserted places around Port Royal. This leads to further adventures on a small cay off shore where the children eventually uncover a shipment of guns destined for Cuba and secreted there by the ghosts or more explicitly gun runners from South America. This is a well written story that mingles various island customs and daily events of island living with the mystery and adventure plot of the novel.

. The Adventures of Catullus Kelly. London: Hutchinson, 1969.

Catullus Kelly is a young Jamaican who spends one year in London. He is a university graduate with honours in English and a wealthy father back in Jamaica who can supply Catullus with ready cash. To follow Catullus' career in London, two distinct personalities have to be recognized for him. On one hand there is the young Jamaican country boy who speaks in dialect and moves among the London West Indian expatriates absorbing and incorporating their adjusted views of the world. On the other hand, he is the young black intellectual seeking concepts of negritude among African students in London. Superimposed over these two personalities of Catullus is Catullus, the indefatigable womanizer. His adventures in the beds of a prostitute, a nymphomaniac, an art student, a psychologist and a librarian are varied, yet all these white women fail to reach Catullus or he them. Catullus never identifies with London and returns to Jamaica at the end of the year. A letter to his friends in London, written by his mother, indicates that once home, he had failed to readjust himself to the home environment as well.

Selvon, Samuel. The Plains of Caroni. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970.

In the county of Caroni in a settlement called Wilderness, a twentieth century East Indian family becomes the focal point of this novel. Harrilal, the titular head of the family, is the overseer for the Company's sugar cane fields, but he is good only at his job. His wife, Seeta, holds the purse strings and controls the family at home. Her first born son, Romesh, is the important center of her life as she connives to push him toward success. Her other two sons -- Tekka who helps his father and Popo who is still at school -- hardly exist for her at all. The central drama occurs when a sugar cane cutting machine arrives to replace the cane cutters whose ability to cut sugar cane is their only skill. Harrilal's brother, Balgobin, is an old cane cutter who takes action against the machine with his cutlass on one moonlit night. There is an investigation to discover the criminal. By now Romesh is an employee in the Company, and he becomes instrumental in solving the crime. Through all this the old love story of Seeta and Balgobin comes to light establishing Romesh as the son of Balgobin. Romesh, in the ensuing family tragedy, cuts his ties with his mother and Wilderness to go to London.

Sherlock, Philip M. West Indian Folk-tales. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

These ancient folk tales that abound in the West Indies are retold with humor, simplicity and artistic skill by Dr. Philip Sherlock. The Anansi tales were originally brought to the West Indies by the slaves from West Africa, but were elaborated to accommodate the flora and fauna of the islands. However, Anansi himself, the spider, who can assume human form -- the greedy, lazy, cunning, mischievous Anansi who tries to outwit animals far larger and stronger, is the original Anansi from Africa. The tales of the original island inhabitants, the Caribs and Arawaks, also abound in this volume. These are the tales explaining the mysteries of the universe and talk of the by-gone times when there were communion and friendship between men and animals.

Walrond, Eric. Tropic Death. New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1970. (1926).

This collection of ten short stories recreates the West Indian world of the 1920's. The settings move from a lonely shack in Guyana, to the West Indian slums in Panama and Barbados. The stories are stark and realistic encompassing the harsh West Indian experience under the blazing

tropical sun. The rhythms of life, religion, manners and speech of the West Indians are recreated in the plots that explore black magic, leprosy, exploitation, race hatred and folk myths as they reflect the tragic existence of the Negro in the Caribbean.

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