

**Native traditions in
the West Indian
novel**

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ABSTRACT

The Introduction to this thesis argues that it is not yet possible to exclude awareness of the social and political development of the West Indies from any adequate appreciation of the West Indian novel. It is suggested that national identity and cultural values in the region are so fluid as to make a rigorous defence of the autonomy of the work of art inappropriate.

A Brief description of West Indian society is provided. The factors which make it possible to regard the West Indian territories as a single region are discussed. Individual national characteristics are mentioned and the class structures and racial compositions of the territories are examined.

Literary criticism in the thesis is divided into three sections; the intention, in each case, is to show the way socio-cultural developments in the area have produced common themes in a wide range of West Indian novels. The first section suggests that there have been attempts by novelists to apply the concept of romantic love to man-woman relationships in the West Indies. It is further argued that the concept is alien to working class West Indian setting and that the European ideal of love has been used as a criterion by which West Indian man-woman relationships are very often judged and presented as inadequate or negative. I suggest that an image of womanhood - a West Indian literary concept of femininity - arises from the conflict between the European ideal and West Indian social reality.

The second section is concerned with the growing West Indian need for a history and a way of seeing the past. I suggest that the matriarchal family-structure of the West Indian working-class has presented Caribbean novelists with a ready metaphor for examining history in fiction. The special importance of motherhood at one level of West Indian society has led to the use of the mother-child relationship as a convenient metaphor to describe the relationship between the society and its history and identity.

The third section concerns attempts to redress the balance between the illegal occult practices of the West Indian folk (obeah) and the legal and "respectable" Christian religion. These attempts may depend on equal condemnation of obeah and Christianity as superstitions or on the presentation of both faiths as equally valid. The literary consequences of these two methods are examined.

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INTRODUCTION

At a seminar on West Indian Literature, a member of the audience was heard to ask why, since we do not need to concern ourselves with the national origins of, for example, Chekhov, in order to appreciate his work, we should be particularly interested in placing the work of West Indian authors in a regional or national context. The question is important because it expressed a nagging doubt often encountered in the West Indies today. Is there such a thing as a West Indian novel? If there is, and if, by that phrase, we do not simply mean a novel written by a West Indian or set in the West Indies but rather a novel which is so far a product of the particular West Indian environment and situation that an understanding of the regional context is necessary for complete appreciation of it, does not this limitation damn the novel as art from the outset?

In this study, I intend to go some way towards establishing that "the West Indian novel", in the sense of that term already indicated, does indeed exist. The comparison with Chekhov was prompted, one supposes, by concern for the claims of any such novel to be art. The very nature of the question asked during the seminar suggests a part of the answer. It is precisely because of the West Indian cultural situation (the world of V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men) that the West Indian intellectual, artist or academic, is so unsure of relevant values that he seeks European precedents which are not always accurate in a Caribbean context.

'The Mimic Men' V.S. Naipaul, London, 1967.

The West Indian novelists sometimes share this insecurity which, as we shall see, is paradoxically, part of the reason why the regional context is so important.

Finally, I have chosen to refer to this question by way of introduction to the value of approaching the West Indian novel as "West Indian" because it expresses a concern felt by many of the novelists themselves. It is inevitable that West Indian writers will react negatively to the nationalist pressures of their emergent nations, if only for fear of becoming propagandists rather than novelists. Moreover, merely in order to function as novelists (West Indian or otherwise), the writers have to achieve some degree of "distancing" of their minds from their environment; this, in turn, leads inevitably to distrust of the limitations that an excessive identification with that environment may impose on them. It is in this light that I see Wilson Harris's criticism that V. S. Naipaul is limited as a novelist by his concern with a particular historical and regional context.

To be Russian is, at least, to be European and to be a Russian author is to operate within a body of values and conventions which belongs properly to Europe as a whole. Linguistic and other differences within Europe may mask European supra-national cultural identity to the degree that it becomes possible to contend that art knows no boundaries of nationality-using, that is, the states of Europe (or North America, Australia, and New Zealand) as the testing ground. My point is, however, that there are very few cultural factors which can be taken for granted between West Indian society and the rest of the world.

This is not only because the West Indian situation, socially and politically, is unique but also because it is and has always been a region in a state of flux so that values are not always sufficiently fixed to be taken for granted. It is a melee of races, cultures and ideals which, from a European or non-West Indian point of view, is as different as can be imagined.

I am not suggesting that a new art-form has evolved in West Indian Literature. Novelists in the West Indies have to use the forms of the literature of the former metropolitan countries. However, the metropolitan formula is used to apprehend, evaluate and portray an environment quite unlike the one that gave birth to it. Inevitably, tensions arise between the imported values that are learnt along with the literary forms and the values inherent in the local environment and in the minds of the novelists themselves. With equal inevitability these tensions result in the evolution of new thematic material.

A West Indian author, unlike his European counterpart, writes within the frame-work of a metropolitan culture which, even if it is completely his, is not really the culture of the society he portrays. Thus the fundamental problem he faces is one of nationality. The issue is so intimately a part of his approach that it becomes inescapable for critic or reader. Besides, within an established European culture, an artist can take at least some of the moral and cultural values which are "given" in that society as norms in order to transcend mere local issues.

In a culture at its point of origin, in one, moreover, which declares European ideals and lives in a West Indian reality, no artist can be so sure of any of his socially derived values, the modes of perception and evaluation which are locked into the very structure of the foreign language he writes (for English, whatever one hears, is not really the language of the West Indian people), that he can take anything at all as a social norm.

Here I would refer to Frantz Fanon's analysis in The Wretched of the Earth, of the position of the intellectual in a colonial territory. Of particular importance, in the present context ~~is~~^{is} this remark:

"The intellectual who is Arab and French or Nigerian and English, when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses, if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations. But most often, since they cannot, or will not, make such a choice, such intellectuals gather together all the historical determining factors which have conditioned them and take up a fundamentally 'universal standpoint'." (1)

In a surprising number of cases, in the West Indian literary movement, this is exactly what has happened.

There is, in the West Indies, a small but persistent group of critics (usually, like Louis James, not themselves West Indians) who would stress the presence of European culture in West Indian literature as a necessary and overwhelmingly important one. In The Islands in Between (2), Cameron King and Louis James answer critics who accuse Derek Walcott of turning to European culture to interpret the West Indies thus betraying West Indian civilisation.

1. The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon, London, 1967, pp 175-180
2. The Islands in Between, ed Louis James, London 1968.

"But the West Indies have no definitive and exclusive culture. Its peoples have come to the West Indies as travellers, forced or of their own will, from Africa, Asia and Europe. Any claim that there is one West Indian voice, at least as yet, does not bear examination." (1)

This is probably still true. However, they continue:

"Secondly, for better or for worse, although the great majority of West Indians have an African background, the peculiar circumstances of Caribbean, its slavery and emancipation, its educational and governmental systems, have all been within the European system." (2)

It seems rather odd to contend that West Indian slavery was a European cultural system. It is true that the social system of West Indian slavery was conceived and operated by Europeans. However, it evolved to suit the particular economic, geographical and social requirements of the West Indian environment; it is difficult to see in what sense it was an aspect of European culture. It is also true that the West Indian educational system is European. Yet the search for West Indian identity, in literature as elsewhere, is necessarily directed at the lowest level of Caribbean society, because of middle-class identification with European attitudes and values. The educated, for the most part, write about the uneducated, the working-class which is relatively unaffected by the educational system.

"Further, the concept that European culture has a nationalist identity in opposition to that of the Caribbean has the dangerous elements of racial mythology. The literature of England reaches backwards and outwards to the cultures of Greece, Rome and Medieval France. It touches the thought and civilisations of Europe, the New World, even Asia and Africa." (3)

This is to rebut an argument that no one would pose. No one would claim for any culture a spontaneous beginning from nothingness. What is relevant, here, is not the remote origins of English culture but the extent to which its recent and present-day manifestations do or do not differ from the nascent culture of the West Indies.

1. King and James (op.cit.) p 89

2. Ibid p 89

3. Ibid p 90

"Its preoccupation is with man as a human being and, for this reason, a culture that becomes isolationist and inward-looking can, paradoxically, cut itself off from the means of knowing itself." (1)

Cameron King and Louis James do not explain the phrase "man as a human being"; surely stripped of the tools of any culture (if one can postulate such an unlikely situation) no more can be said about man than about any other animal. To discuss man as sentient, reasoning being is to talk about man with a culturally provided language, structure of morality and mode of behaviour. The case for the "European presence" often depends on just this concept of universality and has never been convincingly established.

1. Ibid p 90

In my next chapter, I shall describe Caribbean society to indicate the difficulties faced by a West Indian author who tries to take any socially derived value as "given". For the moment, I should like to consider the problem of language in the West Indies. In his essay "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" (1) Wilson Harris discusses language as a mode of perception which "provides a medium to see in consciousness in the 'free' motion (in a still life) and to hear with consciousness the 'silent' flood of sound (in music which one ceases to 'hear')." Then he says:

"Such a capacity for language is a real and necessary one in a world where the inarticulate person is continuously frozen or legislated for in mass and a genuine experience of his distress, the instinct of distress, sinks into a void." (2)

C. L. R. James refers to this remark with specific reference to the West Indies adding:

"For a long time, I have been thinking and writing about origin and influence of language in relation to ourselves in the West Indies, also what happens to us when we use a language that originated among another and very different people." (3)

The mass of the West Indian population uses a dialectal form of English which, though highly expressive of strong emotion, is not yet sufficiently subtle to furnish any very fine distinctions of an abstract nature. The "us" to whom C. L. R. James refers is the minority of educated West Indians and that minority speaks Standard English only in a few, easily defined situations. The West Indian novelist is a part of that minority, one of the articulate few.

1. In Tradition, the Writer and Society, Wilson Harris, London, 1967.
2. Harris (op.cit.) p 32
3. In an Introduction to "Tradition and the West Indian Novel"; see Tradition, the Writer and Society, p 71

He has a choice; on the one hand, Standard English provides him with an opportunity to express moral attitudes inherent in the lives of the West Indian working-class, attitudes which cannot be expressed with the same precision in the dialect of the uneducated West Indian. On the other hand, he can impose a European-derived structure of moral values on the events he portrays as taking place in the West Indian environment. The name that comes to mind in the latter connection is John Hearne. Wilson Harris says:

"In order to achieve this classical ground, Hearne imposes a moral directive on his situations. This is a considerable creative shortcoming, especially in a context such as the Caribbean and the Americas where the life of situation and person has an inarticulacy one must genuinely suffer with and experience if one is to acquire the capacity for a new relationship and understanding." (1)

Harris indisputably transcends the regional context in his novels and criticises Naipaul for limiting his work to a particular regional, historical and individual situation to such an extent that there is never that "tragic centrality" which could transcend "the present framework". Yet he does not seem to see that the alternative he proposes, that of identification with the formless inarticulate structure of values of the West Indian working-class, tends in the direction of an even greater regionalism. It is perhaps significant that John Hearne is one of the least "West Indian" of novelists; at times, Cayuna seems only nominally a West Indian state. Yet one cannot but agree that the imposition of an external and probably alien "moral directive" on the situation portrayed is, in purely literary terms, a shortcoming. Therefore, the writer is left with the examination and consolidation of elusive, inadequately formulated regional values.

1. Harris (op.cit.) p 41

The novel in these circumstances and as long as these conditions obtain, cannot but be "West Indian" and we are justified in treating it as such.

The English nineteenth century novel has been by far the greatest influence on the West Indian novel. Referring to "the conventional mould" of the nineteenth century English novel, Harris says:

"The novel of the West Indies belongs in the main, to the conventional mould. Which is not surprising at this stage since the novel which consolidates situations to depict protest or affirmation is consistent with most kinds of over-riding advertisement and persuasion upon the writer for him to make national, political and social simplification s of experience in the world today." (1)

This remains a valid observation, though I would remark, in passing, that the sensitivity of the West Indian writer to inevitable nationalist pressures is particularly apparent here. The "conventional mould" is seen, by Harris as one which deals with "a tension of individuals..... on an accepted plane of society," and it becomes apparent that he sees this mould as one of "consolidation of character" (as opposed to "fulfilment of character" which he advocates) by means which depend on the manners and the situation of a particular place and time. Once it is defined in this way one begins to see that this "conventional mould" is in direct conflict with what I have suggested is the West Indian problem - a nebulous mass of shifting values and of images of the society and the self. For one is hard put to write a novel which depends on the values, the morals of the society concerned when coherent structures of moral values and a firmly held sense of national identity are absent.

1. Ibid pp 29, 30

In The West Indian Novel and its Background, Kenneth Ramchand

makes this point but over-states the case when he says:

"Although West Indian novelists are aware of the main pattern of the nineteenth century English novel - an analysis of character in relation to the manners and morals operative in a given period, it follows from the formlessness of West Indian society and the existential position of the individual in it that such a pattern is not one that seems relevant or comes spontaneously to the writer from the West Indies." (1)

I say he over-states the case because Harris's remark that the West Indian novel belongs..... to the "conventional mould" (or, at least, aspires to it) is as valid now as it was when he made it in 1964. That it is valid requires only a look at The Hills of Hebron (2) or The Children of Sisyphus (3) and not necessarily at the novels of V. S. Naipaul, the author who is usually condemned for the limited social and historical context of his characters. This being so, one can hardly say that the pattern has been declared irrelevant by West Indian novelists. It is rather a case of the ideal being undermined by the reality. This is why, when one thinks of West Indian novels in general, it is difficult to think of particular characters who come to mind as fully realised, naturalistically depicted personalities. There are no Dorothea Casaubons or Fanny Prices: if we except Mittelholzer's Sylvia, the rule holds good. The "existential" West Indian situation undermines most attempts to construct a coherent structure of values, attitudes and identity into a single strikingly realised personality.

1. The West Indian Novel and its Background, Kenneth Ramchand, London, 1970, p 5.
2. The Hills of Hebron, Sylvia Wynter, London, 1962.
3. The Children of Sisyphus, Orlando Patterson, London, 1964.

To this extent, we are witnessing a paradox - two contradictory trends tend towards the same result. The West Indian social situation loosens the writer's hold on his most cherished authority. What I have suggested about characterisation is only one example of the possible effects of the undermining West Indian context.

At the same time, "the conventional mould" impels anyone using it to try to establish a coherent system of values. Thus Naipaul says in The Middle Passage:

"Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands." (1)

I say these contradictory factors, nineteenth century model and "existential" reality, tend in the same direction because the former leads to a desire to examine and consolidate regional identity while the latter creates problems which, in various ways pull the West Indian novel away from its accepted English model. Ramchand does say that:

"It is worth reminding ourselves that West Indian writers in general are as much interested in society as in character. These distinguishing emphases of West Indian writing are in the minds of those who describe it as being involved with the quest for national and personal identity." (2)

In the issue of national and personal identity, class plays a crucial role. As I have noted, in West Indian society, the extent of an individual's conformity to what are felt to be English habits of speech manner and behaviour increases in direct proportion to his social status.

1. The Middle Passage, V. S. Naipaul, London, 1962, p 68.
2. Ramchand (op. cit.) p 5

This, at any rate, has been the case for many years even if we take account of rather self-conscious post-Independence attempts to alter the situation. This, in effect, means that if any truly national identity is to be found, it is not to be found in the middle-class. Here I take issue with Kenneth Ramchand who says:

"The social consciousness of West Indian writers is not class-consciousness nor is the social consciousness concerned with consolidating or flattering particular groups as Naipaul declares in The Middle Passage. Most West Indian writers write about the whole society." (1)

There is not, indeed, any marked flattering of a particular group. However, the same critic's analysis of Claude McKay's novel Banana Bottom (2) runs counter to his own statement. His own analysis shows how the heroine's downward movement in her class sympathies mirrors and makes possible a rejection of metropolitan ideals in favour of a life-style of relative honesty and freedom which rightly or wrongly is presented as the West Indian life-style. He himself notes that Powell in Lamming's Season of Adventure is the "somehow subtle spirit of Black Power repudiating a class, whose capacity to betray it has experienced only too often." (3) Andrew Salkey's The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover(4) depends on the same process. Jerry's mother is identifiably a product of a European educational system and the hero's movement, symbolically that of the West Indian intellectual, away from the world of Mrs. Stover's class and generation towards that of the Dunc'ill is clearly a nationalist as well as a personal and social emancipation.

(1) Ibid, p.4

(2) Banana Bottom, Claude McKay, London, 1933

(3) Ramchand (op.cit.) p.140

(4) The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover, Andrew Salkey, London, 1968.

Thus, whenever the West Indian novelist deals with "the whole society", given the metropolitan life-style of the middle-class, he cannot express "a quest for national identity" without some rejection of the middle class in favour of the potentialities of working-class West Indian life. Sometimes, indeed, he expresses the irrelevance of that middle-class ethic from the stand-point of the young, educated West Indian (a useful though dubious reference-point) as in the novels of Garth St. Omer, without any explicit declaration in favour of the lower class. Even this, however, is to make a choice. Social consciousness entails class-consciousness and cannot do otherwise in the West Indies. I make the point at some length partly because it will seldom be possible to ignore class in determining the exact nature of the social dilemmas which give rise to the themes I shall try to isolate and partly because this inevitable class-consciousness is yet another way in which the West Indian artist is driven to ally himself with the treacherously formless (in this case, the working-class system of values). He thus finds himself in need of close examination of the particular regional situation.

It is true that Wilson Harris transcends purely regional concerns in his novels. No one could accuse him of inconsistency between his critical attitudes and his novels. Harris's work certainly does not belong to what he calls "the conventional mould". Indeed it is probably true that, as Joyce Sparer says in The Art of Wilson Harris (1) "the art of Wilson Harris is different in kind from the art of anybody else." (2)

1. In New Beacon Reviews, ed. John La Rose, London, 1968.
2. Ibid, p 26.

The applicability of The Palace of the Peacock (1) to a timeless human search for unity of illusory opposites is apparent. The issues of guilt, responsibility and punishment within changing times and generations that figure so largely in The Whole Armour (2) bear witness to Harris's ability to use the Guyanese landscape to examine and set in motion universal human concerns. At the same time, it is clear that even this enemy of regional limitations is, in an important sense, a West Indian novelist. That sense is brought out with great clarity by John Hearne in his article "The Fugitive in the Forest." Hearne acknowledges that the precise effect of "landscape" on personality is indefinable. At the same time, he provides an accurate and sensitive description of the potent geographical situation of Guyana. He says:

"This is one of the great primary landscapes of the world and it can crush the mind like sleep. Like sleep, it inspires the dreams by which we record the progress of our waking life." (3)

As Hearne indicates, the individual in this landscape lives between two threatening worlds. To the north, the ocean is restrained by an old Dutch wall. To the south is the jungle, the subject of innumerable macabre stories of "people who disappeared". These two malevolent unknowns provide an excellent place of nurture for the introspective artist. It is a country, above all, of space and a mysterious, often violent history all too easily identified, in art, with the Amerindians, the aboriginal Guyanese who seem inscrutable, silent and remote. It seems inevitable that such a place should produce such an author.

1. The Palace of the Peacock, Wilson Harris, London, 1960.
2. The Whole Armour, Wilson Harris, London, 1962.
3. In The Islands in Between, p 41.

The concept of uninhabited vastness is present in all of Harris's works. His tendency to express the ever-present "opposites" or paradoxes of human experience in terms of splits of personality or the "dead" man and "living" man, "dreaming" man and "awakened" man, seems precisely the sort of reversal of perception back into the psyche that one would expect in the midst of such space and such potency. Lastly, Harris is more aware than anyone of the value of the power of myth and history and uses Amerindian characters to suggest the mysterious past. When it is possible to take one West Indian novelist who unquestionably transcends mere regionalism in his work, who unhesitatingly attacks such limitations in the work of others and refers to the novels of his fellow West Indian writers as "the West Indian novel - so-called", only to find such a close correlation between the elements of his native environment and the artistic methods he employs (and not merely the content or subject matter), we surely cannot deny that, in this literary context, the environment has power to dictate or, at least, to affect a writer's approach. In this sense, at least, we are dealing with "West Indian novels".

The purpose of this investigation is to examine three ways in which aspects of West Indian society have produced themes in the West Indian novel. The first is the conflict between the West Indian working-class concept of the man-woman relationship and the European concept of romantic love. Out of this conflict, I shall suggest, has arisen an image of the West Indian woman which recurs in Caribbean novels.

The second is the special place of the mother in West Indian working-class families. I shall show that a tradition has developed of identifying a mother-figure with the past and with the issue of national identity. The third is the survival of obeah or "black magic" in working-class West Indian society.

The West Indies as a single region

It is possible, for many purposes, to speak of "The West Indies" as a single region. In what follows, I shall use the term to indicate those West Indian territories which have been British colonies. I shall exclude British Honduras and the Bahamas from consideration because the novels with which I shall deal are all from elsewhere in the Caribbean.

In these territories, the basis of a West Indian culture which transcends individual territorial differences already exists. The reasons are that the West Indian populations have similar racial origins, have been subjected to very similar historical processes and have intellectual and social elites which have passed under the cultural influence of the same colonial power. Inevitably however, there are important differences from one territory to another and I shall deal with these in detail.

The black race, descendants of slaves from West Africa is numerically the major race of the West Indies. Jamaica is
(1)
ninety per cent black; most of the smaller islands are close to being racially homogeneous black communities and the black race is a minority only in Trinidad and Tobago (43%) and Guyana (41%).

(1) All percentages are those of the Sunday Times, 21st Nov. 1971.

There are, of course, minority races throughout the region and the ethnic and cultural variety of Guyana and Trinidad is of considerable importance in West Indian literature. The largest of the West Indian minority groups is the East Indian community, descended from indentured labourers, taken to the Caribbean from India to take the place of the African slaves on the plantations after Emancipation (1834). In Trinidad, they are now thirty-seven per cent of the population and, in Guyana, fifty-one per cent.

Indenture involved far less cultural degeneration than did slavery. The reluctance of the East Indian peasant community to send their children to school was one of the frustrations faced by colonial administrators in the nineteenth century; yet this reluctance must have helped to maintain their status as a distinct cultural group. In the twentieth century, however, education and growing wealth have led inevitably to a process of Creolisation which has greatly diminished the exclusiveness of the Trinidad Indian community. In Guyana, paradoxically, the decay of exclusiveness expressed itself in open conflict in the 1950's as the two separate worlds of Indian peasants and black urban workers gradually came to be forced to confront each other.

In all of the larger territories, especially in Jamaica and Guyana, there are merchant-classes of Chinese, Portuguese and Syrian extraction. The Amerindians, the original inhabitants of the islands and Guyana, have practically disappeared from the islands surviving only as a small community in the interior of Guyana.

Their importance to Guyanese literature and to the Guyanese search for history is out of proportion to their numbers.

The common historical processes to which I referred are slavery, emancipation and the allied problems of education, the economic and social consequences of sugar mono-culture and British colonialism. Of slavery, Lewis says:

"..... both under slavery and emancipation, the world of the Caribbean masses remained a dark unknown void. Transplanted forcibly from his African tribal culture, the slave became in the new milieu, a deculturated individual. Losing one world, he was driven to create a new one. The work of the cultural anthropologists has by now, fully documented that truth and it is reasonably certain that the survivals of the African transplantation were (despite the famous thesis of Herskovits) extremely small and scattered." (1)

In a later section, speaking of the falsity of the occasional claims of Guyana to a "Continental Destiny" in South America, distinct from the fate of the islands, he says.

"There was the same transition, with all of its difficulties, from a slave-system to a free society after emancipation - a transition, indeed, so traumatic that present-day Guyanese, like Barbadians or Jamaicans, continue to refer to a slave past abolished over a century ago as if it were a continuing factor in their present discontents; as if, in Dr. Raymond Smith's apt phrase, one were to attribute Britain's balance of payments problem to the Napoleonic Wars." (2)

One prefers to believe that Dr. Smith was being purely facetious in comparing the economic effects of a European war (however long afterwards) with the socio-cultural effects of a system which lasted two and a half centuries and directly and intimately affected every individual within it.

(1) Lewis (op.cit.) p.54
(2) Ibid p.259

It is, in any case, rather less than "apt" to compare the effects of war, on an economically strong and relatively resilient nation, with those of slavery, which denied even the humanity of its "negro property", on culturally deprived countries.

"Present-day Guyanese" refer to slavery not because of a lingering distortion of their mental outlook; they do so because it often seems the nearest event of sufficient proportions to explain the existence of a society of blacks disgusted by black skins. At the same time, slavery has inevitably been used a scapegoat for every kind of inaction or failure on the part of West Indian society and Governments. Dr. Smith's irritation is understandable. It is clear, therefore, that any attempt - at the moment - to evaluate the true importance of slavery in the West Indies is endangered by present interests - both those of West Indians and those of European commentators who tend towards either exaggerations or defensive dismissals.

Despite the arguments, certain conclusions are inescapable. The first is that slavery deprived the black West Indian populations of a continuing cultural tradition reaching back to Africa. The nature of West Indian slave-society also deprived them, even after Emancipation, of contact with the cultural traditions of Europe. As is well known West Indian sugar provided large fortunes during slavery; the opulent life-style of the white planter-class can be seen, in fictional representation in de Lisser's The White Witch of Rosehall. The Creole White planter-class of the West Indian slave-societies was at the same time, determinedly philistine.

According to Shirley Gordon, in A Century of West Indian Education the term "the barbarian community" was first applied to white West Indian society during slavery. Lewis provides a description of their materialism and ignorance (1) and the following is the opinion of an observer in 1840.

"Learning here is at the lowest Ebb: there is no public School in the whole Island, neither do they seem fond of the Thing: several large Donations have been made for such Uses but have never taken Effect. The Office of a Teacher is look'd upon as contemptible and no Gentleman keeps Company with one of their Character: to read, write and cast up Accounts is all the Education they desire, and these are scurvily taught." (2)

Here, I think, Kenneth Ramchand's caution against an obvious comparison is worth repeating:

"It is necessary to state that the similarity between the intellectual and cultural states of the labouring classes in nineteenth century England, and the liberated slaves in the West Indies is misleading. The existence of a cultured class in England from the time of Chaucer and earlier, setting a tone for the society and representing its finer aspirations meant that, however tenuously, the English working-man was in contact with a tradition waiting to be democratised. In the back-ground of the liberated slave was a cultural void." (3)

In such a cultural situation, emancipation through the West Indies presented the various administrations with enormous problems in the area of education. I shall deal with these in a later section. For the moment, I should like to consider an aspect of emancipation (and for that matter, of Independence) which has received little attention but which has considerable importance in West Indian nationalism.

(1) See pp 50, 51

(2) From Leslie's New and Exact Account of Jamaica: quoted by Ramchand, p 33.

(3) Ramchand (op. cit.) p 38.

It is probably in the nature of the relationship between metropolis and colony that freedom of any kind is never represented as redress of a wrong but tends to appear as a gift. The following passage is taken from a Circular of the Colonial Office on the occasion of the cessation of the Negro Education Grant, twelve years after Emancipation:

"Her Majesty cannot doubt that if the labouring classes at large shall be animated by the same spirit of steady and patient industry which ought always to accompany good instruction, the boon of freedom will not have been bestowed on them in vain but will give birth to all the fruits which Her Majesty and other well-wishers expected from it." (1)

The problem which arises is that nothing achieved within freedom of this kind can appear wholly the achievement of the "free". The paradox is discussed in Lamming's Season of Adventure in a conversation between Crim and Powell:

" 'I say it was a real freedom happen when the tourist army went away, ' Crim said, 'It look a real freedom they give San Cristobal.'
'It don't have that kind o' givin', ' said Powell, trying to restrain his anger. 'Is wrong to say that, cause free is free and it don't have no givin'. Free is how you is from the start, an' when it look different you got to move, an' when you movin', say that is a natural freedom make you move. You can't move to freedom, Crim, cause freedom is what you is, and where you start, and where you always got to stand. I put it to you, suppose your little boy come up one day and say "Pa, you free to call me son," what you goin' say? ' " (2)

Powell later says of the island's middle-class which is taking the place of the colonial power:

- (1) Gordon, A Century of West Indian Education, p 42, London, 1963.
(2) pp. 18, 19 Season of Adventure, George Lamming, London, 1960.

"..... all the powers that now be, the whole kiss-me-arse lot o' them, is like the tourist army that give them freedom to bully you and me. They harsh and cruel 'cause they think freedom is a gift they can't afford to lose. Is bad that thinkin', is the nearest any man come to killing what he is. Take it from me, Crim, you can take it from me. If ever I give you freedom, Crim, then all your future is mine, 'cause whatever you do in freedom name is what I make happen. Seein' that way is blindness from the start." (1)

A century and more after Emancipation, "the boon of freedom" was re-stated as "the grant of Independence"; the principle was the same. So in Andrew Salkey's The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover, The Termites, a group of young, educated West Indians, gradually realise that their freedom has "a tired colonial shape." The destructive paradox of the gift of freedom - destructive for so long as the free fail to reject it - is essential to an understanding of the situation of young West Indians in Salkey's excellent novel. The issue is not purely one of philosophy and semantics for, as I shall show, West Indian national identity can only develop in opposition to the notions of "the mother country".

The West Indian territories were all established as slave-societies for the purpose of producing sugar. The economic history of the area during the century after Emancipation, in 1834, is largely the history of the decline of sugar as a source of wealth. In brief, the value of sugar for the future was already doubtful in 1834; it declined with fluctuations, through the nineteenth century.

(1) pp. 18,19 Season of Adventure, George Lamming, London, 1960.

The end of preferential treatment on the British market in 1846 and developing competition from beet-sugar combined to increase the pessimism of the planter-class and made them look to their own interests. The twentieth century brought further decline despite a temporary boom caused by the First World War which served only to lead the West Indian administrations into commitments they could not afterwards fulfil. It is clear from Gordon's work that the decline of sugar was a major reason for the failures of popular education in the Caribbean before the Second World War. This failure, in turn is part of the reason for the absence of a wide West Indian reading-public for the early novels, most of which are quite obviously written for an overseas audience.

More recently, West Indian economics have become relatively diversified and there is less dependence on sugar in the region. Nevertheless, the survival of powerful sugar-interests well into the twentieth-century is illustrated by the story of the Booker group of sugar-producing and commercial concerns in Guyana. This British company has claimed, according to Lewis (1), to control, directly or indirectly, the livelihood of over eighty per cent of the population. Lewis cites the comment of the historian Daly that "under the 1928 constitution the colony was ruled, in effect, by the industrial government" of sugar, by sugar for the benefit of sugar."

(1) *Op.cit.* p. 262

The institution of slavery in the West Indies is very far from being as well documented as slavery in the United States. However, the indiscriminate mixing of tribes which slavery necessitated led to a rapid degeneration of the ancestral culture of West Indian blacks. There is considerable debate about the degree of that degeneration but the argument is about details. The west Indian black man is separated from Africa not only by the great divide of slavery but by his shame when confronted with an image of half-naked barbarians as ancestors - an image which, until six or seven years ago, was all that he knew of Africa.

In The Growth of the Modern West Indies, Gordon Lewis observes:

"The theme of Africa is not a pronounced element in West Indian English Literature and the calypsonians derisive piece on The Congo speaks volumes for the attitude of the West Indian man in the street to the pro-Africa ideology." (1)

The calypso in question, popular in 1965, was a comic-satirical piece on "The Congo Man" who was a cannibal. I feel that though Lewis's observations are correct, his interpretation is only part of the truth. The growing interest in Africa in Guyana during the years since his book was published suggests that the previous West Indian attitude of derision owed more to ignorance and self-defensive shame than to a genuine lack of interest.

(1) The Growth of the Modern West Indies, G. Lewis, London 1968. p21.

British colonialism was the fourth common factor in the histories of the West Indian territories. In all of the larger territories, the significant development at some point during this phase was that power and social prestige began to pass from the White Creoles to a small predominantly mulatto middle-class. It was also the phase during which most of the Anglicisation of the West Indies took place.

It must be stressed that the pervasive image of England which profoundly influenced the development of West Indian society has always borne a very tenuous relationship to the reality. The image of England received in the West Indian colonies was a very small part of the truth - a distinctly flattering part.

Lewis says:

"The English in the West Indies did likewise, creating a local culture almost utterly derivative of the most suburban of English values even though geographically remote from the ancestral source. They did this the most successfully in those islands like Barbados and Jamaica where a cultural tabula rasa, as it were, awaited their imprint. A society like Trinidad, with two centuries of Spanish and French occupation preceding English ownership did not so readily surrender itself to this complete Anglicisation. That, as much as anything else, explains why, even today, to pass from Bridgetown to Port of Spain is to pass from a tropical English market-town to a bizarre and Byzantine city-life and why the Centre of West Indies society, as a culture sui generis, is Trinidad and not Jamaica. Even in Trinidad however, the main directing force has been English; so much so that the territory's physical contiguity to the Latin-American mainland has had surprisingly little effect upon its socio-cultural development." (1)

It is not necessary to see the colonial administrators as egotists.

(1) Lewis (op.cit) p.70

The situation Lewis describes follows naturally from early West Indian history. As Ramchand explains, the Creole white planters of the slave societies were Anglophile as well as philistine. Born in the West Indies, they nevertheless thought and spoke of England as "home". The combination of the white planters' Anglophilia with their moral and cultural bankruptcy meant that, after Emancipation, the freed slave could turn neither to a surviving African culture nor to a thriving local one. The orientation of the Creole whites towards England set the pattern for generations of later West Indians.

The "cultural void" had to be filled. Yet all that existed to fill it was a vague yearning for "home" - England. Inevitably, West Indian Anglophile attitudes led to the importation of derivative and utterly irrelevant educational schemes from England. Academic studies developed at the expense of the technical training required by overwhelmingly agricultural peasant societies. After Emancipation, a wave of missionary societies arrived in the West Indies. Administrators admitted that their zeal was often greater than their academic abilities. Following the report of the Rev. James Stirling in 1835, West Indian education was entrusted to the care of the Christian denominations.

I have said that the image of England received in the West Indies has always been a selective one. Lewis comments that

"for a whole century..... the new, free-labour, tropical society established by Emancipation developed along lines set by Victorian Christian bourgeois modes of thought." (1)

(1) p.70

This is not surprising when one considers that popular education in the West Indies began with a missionary purpose, that of inculcating suitable moral precepts in the ex-slave populations. Stirling felt that, without such precepts, the blacks would revert to barbarism:

"It is plain..... that something must be done and it must be done immediately, for although the negroes are now under a system of limited control which secures, to a certain extent, their orderly and industrious conduct, in the short space of five years from the first of next August, their performance of the functions of a labouring class in a civilised community will depend entirely on the power over their minds of the same prudential and moral motives that govern, more or less, the mass of the people here. If they are not so disposed as to fulfil these functions, property will perish in the colonies for lack of human impulsion, the whites will no longer reside there and the liberated negroes themselves will probably cease to be progressive." (1)

Stirling's belief in the necessity for "prudential and moral motives" and his faith in their effectiveness were shared by his contemporaries and, in 1847, the Colonial Office, in a circular, set about elucidating "the domestic and social duties of the coloured races." (2) Popular education contained strong doses of Victorian, Christian, bourgeois morality because strong doses were required to keep "the African savages" and the Indian "coolie sunk in the degrading superstitions of his native India" (3) on the path to civilisation.

Unfortunately, West Indians were five thousand miles from the society they were taught to imitate. So it is that selective Anglicisation became out dated Anglicisation:

- (1) Stirling Report of 1835, quoted by Gordon, p.20
- (2) Circular: "Scheme for Industrial and Normal Schools" Gordon, p 58
- (3) The phrases are those of an 1851 Commission on Education, Gordon, p 50.

"Not the least ironic aspect of the Englishness of the West Indies is the fact that West Indians have so long preserved among themselves a Victorian Anglophilism, an almost imperialist chauvinism and an uncritical loyalty to the Crown long after those attitudes had waned in Britain itself. Only the more recent risorgimento of West Indian nationalism promises perhaps finally to terminate that climate of opinion." (1)

As late as 1957, it was possible for a St. Lucian observer in Barbados, "Little England", to see the:

"quite ludicrous sight to be seen on certain occasions celebrated by morning parades on the garrison, when the Cabinet of the Socialist Government of Barbados is to be seen, in the heat of a tropical sun, freely sweating in striped trousers, morning coat and top hat." (2)

There is an amusing comment by one character in Christopher Nichole's White Boy, set in British Guyana in the 1930's; he says that "if Christ lived in B.G. they would call him a useless goddam Syrian and not let him into the club." (3) The West Indian middle-class has always been more influenced by its image of England than the working-class because it is more educated. Its snobbery is of a kind that most English people would probably find old-fashioned although their great grand-parents would have recognised it.

It is true, of course, that the English ruling classes in the nineteenth century, Eldon, Sidmouth, Castlereagh, Wellington and even the more enlightened Tories, and Whigs, regarded the English labouring classes with exactly the same mixture of pessimism and distrust evinced by the Rev. James Stirling as he forecast a Caribbean disaster.

(1) Lewis (op. cit) p.71

(2) The Daily Gleaner (Jamaica) quoting the Voice of St. Lucia; Lewis, p251

(3) White Boy; C. Nichole, London, 1966, p 118

The rulers of England were just as interested in restraining the baser side of their own proletariat with "Victorian Christian bourgeois modes of thought" as in restraining the freed slaves.

However, there are three differences. The first is that, in the West Indies, Victorian religious organisations faced a cultural vacuum which could never avoid wholesale acceptance of their doctrines; the West Indian masses could not be critical in any significant way since they were bereft of the necessary criterion of a complex cultural life of their own. This is not to say that the actual life-style of the West Indian masses ever adhered precisely to the prescriptions of the Victorian English middle-class; as far as sex and marriage are concerned, their behaviour most certainly has not done so. Rather, I am suggesting that the attitudes and moral standards of one part of English society at one time, became the absolute determinants of Caribbean ideals and Caribbean social aspirations. (1) The difference here is one of degree. The English working-class did not escape the influence of Victorian bourgeois morality. Yet they did not form their image of their social superiors through the selective medium of Christian missionary societies. They were in contact with a broader spectrum of middle-class and aristocratic opinion.

The second difference is that, at a distance of five thousand miles, West Indian notions of "respectability" soon became out of step with the English source. Apparently anachronistic snobbery and gentility exposed the Anglicised West Indian to the amusement of European visitors and to various traumatic experiences on arrival in his English "home".

(1) It is typical of this development that cricket, par excellence the courteous game of the English Victorian bourgeois, became a West Indian mania, and a minor English cult simultaneously.

A fine description of the latter process, painful awakening followed by rebellion can be found in the story of the West Indian author Claude McKay in England in 1920 by Cooper and Reinders.(1)

Finally, an Englishman who rose from the working class by accepting English bourgeois values and attitudes, even if he felt "a traitor to his class", has always remained an Englishman with at least claim to the new world he had gained. The "black Englishman" was to discover that it was infinitely easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for him to inherit the kingdom his education had made him seek. The process of changing a black man into a copy of an Englishman, given that it is tacitly accepted that being white is an essential part of being English, could lead in only one direction - self-disgust, the schizoid individual and the familiar (though changing) West Indian situation.

Naipaul's satire, in particular, thrives on this situation, as the title of The Mimic Men (2) suggests. Lewis sums it up very well when he says that the West Indian's

".....collective tragedy is that he is, in his cultural self, a schizoid person. He is, in the Martiniquan phrase, "peau noir, masque blanc", the possessor of a pseudo-European culture in an Afro-Asian environment." (3)

(1) "Claude McKay in England," Wayne Cooper and Robert Reinders; New Beacon Reviews, Collection One, (ed. John La Rose) London, 1968.

(2) The Mimic Men, V. S. Naipaul, London, 1967.

(3) p. 392

Individual Territorial (1) Differences

The most significant difference between the West Indian lands is that they have spent widely differing periods under British rule. Barbados became a British possession in 1627 and had the second oldest colonial parliament in the world. Jamaica also "entered the Empire" in the seventeenth century (1670). Trinidad, however, was not ceded until 1802 and Guiana, actually the Dutch colonies of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice, until 1815. Accordingly the influence of the West Indian image of England has been far greater in the first two of these states.

The dialect spoken in rural areas of the Windward Islands, which were once French, is a type of French patois. In this group are St. Vincent (ceded 1783), St. Lucia (ceded (1803) and Grenada (1783). The novelist Garth St. Omer is a St. Lucian, and on the unspecified island of his novels, patois is spoken and the descendants of French Creole families appear. Because of their French history Trinidad (2) and the Windwards are predominantly Catholic islands. In 1841, according to the then Lieutenant-Governor, two-thirds of the Trinidadian population spoke exclusively either Spanish or French.(3) However, the Governor considered it "absolutely necessary that people living under British rule and claiming the benefits of British subjects, should be able to read the laws under which they are governed." (4)

- (1) I use the word "territorial" rather than "national" to include islands not yet independent.
- (2) Spanish ownership preceded French.
- (3) Lieutenant Governors Report of 13th October 1841. (Source: Gordon, p 47)
- (4) Gordon (op.cit) p 47.

French Creole resistance to the "upstart English", a policy of passive rather than open resistance, meant that in Trinidad, popular education developed as a series of battles between the Roman Catholic church and the English administrators.

The "Sunday Times" has recently (1) found an excellent phrase to describe Barbados - "in both actuality and analogy, coral in a sea of volcanoes." Barbadian society has long been characterised by reverence for (English) tradition; respectability and good manners of a middle-class Victorian sort made up the reputation of Barbadians in the rest of the West Indies. I can best illustrate what I mean by "Victorian manners" by referring to a young Barbadian who recently, in my presence, refused to specify "a certain rude word" while an Englishwoman was also present; the word in question was "blast". The island's society has also been known for the rigidity of its social structure.

Until 1945, Barbadian society, broadly speaking, consisted of a white oligarchy of planters, a middle-class urban mulatto group and a large, heavily negro proletariat. The island was a sugar-economy in which the people were increasingly divorced from the land: dispossession of ignorant peasants in pre-war Barbados is part of the plot of In the Castle of My Skin (2) a novel by the Barbadian author, George Lamming. Erosion of the power of the white oligarchy began between the two World Wars; yet Barbados remains a conservative society and its class-distinctions remain strict.

(1) 21st November, 1971.

(2) In the Castle of My Skin, George Lamming, London, 1953. For the connection between the land dispute and Lamming's actual experience, see p.74 of The Islands in Between.

It will be found that the novels of Barbadian authors such as Lamming and Austin C. Clarke show a more acute concern with class than those of Trinidadian or Guyanese authors.

However, class is also of great importance in Jamaica:

"The Jamaican social structure, in the first place, has been and still largely is, a pyramidal mound of three separate social tiers: the white upper-class, comprising the older rural squirearchy and the top mercantile families; the urban middle-class groups; and the great Jamaican working class, both rural and urban.

By comparison with, say, Trinidad society it has been a rigidly stratified structure for it has lacked, until only recently, any of the special phenomena which have loosened the structure of Trinidad.....the discovery of oil, the introduction of indentured labour, the Second World War period with its invasion of American forces and influences..." (1)

The striking difference between Barbados and Jamaica is that the traditionally deferential attitude of the Barbadian working-class is far less common in Jamaica. It is difficult to imagine, in a Jamaican context, the scene in Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns in which the poor washer-woman Ruby, furious at the flogging her son has received in school, sets out to confront the headmaster, gradually loses her courage on the way and stands perspiring and grinning submissively on actually meeting him. One is far more likely, in Jamaica, to meet such anger as that of the cultist in Hearne's The Land of the Living⁽²⁾ or the resentment and sarcasm of the Rastafarian leaders in Salkey's The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover.⁽³⁾

(1) Lewis p. 187

(2) The Land of the Living, John Hearne, London, 1961.

(3) The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover, Andrew Salkey; London, 1968.

By contrast with these two traditionalist societies, Trinidad has a relatively fluid society. The island's history precluded the development of a socially static community. The passage from the grasp of one European power to another limited the cultural influence of any one power; the presence of a large number of races and sub-cultures limited, though it certainly did not destroy, the correlation between class and colour which is a feature of Jamaican and Barbadian societies; the arrival of American troops at their base at Chaguamas (1) hastened the change to respect for wealth rather than birth and breeding; the discovery of oil complicated the usual social pattern of the Caribbean sugar state, which putting it somewhat crudely, may be described as white at the top, brown in the middle, and black at the bottom.

V. S. Naipaul writes about a Trinidad which, in many ways, ceased to exist at the end of the second World War: he does, indeed say as much in An Area of Darkness (2). Lewis describes the "mosaic of the Trinidad types" of those days; this mosaic, he says,

"French Creole plantocrat, Chinese merchant, Spanish cocoa farmer, Grenadian oil-worker, English expatriate, mulatto professional, Negro urban worker, Indian peasant, had had little time, historically speaking, to gell into a felt sense of over-riding common identity." (3)

Though the society was heterogeneous, Naipaul's novels, set in the East Indian community, often give the impression that there were no other communities - there were few points of contact between the older generations of Indians and blacks, and so blacks appear only fleetingly in his novels.

- (1) During the Second World War
- (2) An Area of Darkness, V. S. Naipaul, London, 1964.
- (3) Lewis (op.cit) p.211

Novels set in the Trinidad of more recent years reflect a rapidly decreasing sense of racial separateness. In the novels Green Days by the River (1) and The Games were Coming (2) by the Trinidadian Michael Anthony, inter-racial sexual encounters occur without the partners exhibiting any consciousness of race. Interestingly, The Obeah Man (3) by another Trinidadian, Ismith Khan, never permits the reader to deduce the racial origins of the characters.

It ought not to be important that Guyana is a part of South America while the West Indian states are islands. Effectively, Guyana's population occupies a kind of island for it is cut off from its neighbours by language, culture and - to the West and South - South American jungle Yet this fact is important partly because of a perennial Guyanese dream and partly because of its literary significance. The dream is that of "Continental Destiny", the argument that kept British Guiana out of the ill-fated West Indian Federation was that the colony was fundamentally different from the islands and would, one day, take its place as a South American state. Lewis notes the contradiction:

".....between....a denial of West Indianism, the obsessional dream of massive interior development, and an actual attitude to the interior which is compounded of fear and ignorance, summed up in one observer's remark that 'although man has carved out this little kingdom for himself, yet crouching all around, ready to pounce and regain what it had lost, is the spirit of the great, impenetrable bush with its hostile denizens.'" (5)

(1) Green Days by the River, M. Anthony, London, 1967.

(2) The Games were Coming, M. Anthony, London, 1963

(3) The Obeah Man, Ismith Khan, London, 1964.

(5) Lewis (op.cit) p.258

There is, indeed, a contradiction but this combination of attraction and fear has made "the bush" a sort of background or canvas on which the imagination of every Guyanese can depict gruesome incidents and inner fears. A tradition exists of recounting thrilling, horrifying and almost certainly apocryphal stories of experiences in the hinterland. Thus it is probably not an accident that the interior is very important in Guyanese novels although most Guyanese die without ever entering it. Indeed, in Wilson Harris's The Palace of the Peacock (1) a jungle-river becomes a metaphor for, on one level, the mind. Guyana's area approximates to that of the United Kingdom - far larger than any of the islands - but its population of 700,000 is closer to that of the City of Leeds. Most of this population is on the narrow coastal belt. The savannahs and the jungle are a large, empty region and the impression of space is reflected in Harris's novels and in Ian Carew's Black Midas (2) and The Wild Coast (3).

No significant traces of the European owners of Guiana before British possession remain today - certainly none comparable with the patois and the fetes of the Windwards. Holland owned Guiana for two centuries and for a short period during the Napoleonic war, France replaced Holland. The cultural influence of England on the black people obliterated, in a very short time, the vestiges of Dutch possession.

- (1) The Palace of the Peacock, W. Harris, London, 1960.
- (2) Black Midas, Ian Carew, London, 1958.
- (3) The Wild Coast, Ian Carew, London, 1958.

The East Indian community preserved more of its ancestral culture; the process of "creolisation", so marked in Trinidad, is less so in Guyana which can still be described, in Lewis's phrase, as "an unintegrated polyethnic society."

Mittelholzer's Corentyne Thunder (1) and Harris's The Far Journey of Oudin (2) are both set in the Guyanese Indian community and both, like Naipaul's novels, make all other races appear peripheral. Yet Naipaul depicts the Trinidad of a generation ago; Harris deals with modern Guyana; it may be concluded that where racial integration is concerned, Trinidad's past remains Guyana's present. However, in both Guyana and Trinidad, racial exclusiveness is being eroded; decay of the Indian ancestral culture under the influence of wealth, social status and educational opportunity is taking place.

Class in the West Indies

The correlation between class and colour in the West Indies is complex. The growing West Indian middle-class is everywhere minute compared with the large urban and rural working class. Jamaica and Barbados have always had white upper-classes - the rural squirearchy and urban commercial groups of Jamaica and the "white oligarchy" of Barbados. This situation is changing but, in both islands, changing slowly. Yet, in acutely class-conscious Barbados, the poor whites ("Redlegs") (3) of St. John's parish have never had any social prestige.

(1) Corentyne Thunder, Edgar Mittelholzer, London, 1941

(2) The Far Journey of Oudin, Wilson Harris, London, 1961.

(3) According to the "Sunday Times" report, descendants of West Country yokels banished by Judge Jeffrey's Bloody Assize. (21st November, 1971).

In Guyana, the descendants of Portuguese peasants occupy an anomalous position; despite the commercial success of some Portuguese, Guyanese always distinguish between "white" and "Portuguese" in ordinary speech and have been known to deny that there is any connection; there are Portuguese-descended slum-dwellers as well as occupiers of "millionaire's row". On the other hand, the Jews of Jamaica, for the first half of this century, enjoyed both social prestige and great political power. Lewis says: "As a class in Jamaican society, they (the Jews) controlled everything behind the scenes until only yesterday." (1) The importance of being white, in British Guiana before 1945, can be seen in Nichole's White Boy and Mittelholzer's autobiographical A Swarthy Boy. In short, the only strict rule, during the colonial phases of all the territories, was that when "white" meant "English by birth", it also meant "upper-class"ⁱⁿ the black West Indian's mind. Otherwise, no absolute relationship between the two terms existed.

Except perhaps, in post-war Trinidad (i.e. after the arrival of Americans), wealth has not been a sure determinant of social prestige. It is true, on the one hand, that the predominantly white residents of Barbados's "Platinum Coast" are the highest of West Indian "high fliers" in terms of both wealth and status. On the other hand, as can be seen in Carew's novel Black Midas, it has long been possible for the uneducated, brash, black "pork-knockers" (prospectors) of the Guyanese interior, to make as much wealth, in a single diamond "strike", as the wealthiest of Creole Whites.

(1) Lewis (op.cit.) p. 188.

In colonial Guiana, such an event ensured buying-power but not status. The typical wealthy black, fresh from the mines in expensive, illmatched clothes could never enter the white upper-class world of Nichole's White Boy.

In summing up, we may say that in the colonial West Indies, to be white and rich was to be upper-class; to be white and poor was to be "the lowest of the low". To be black and poor was to be in the usual situation of one's race; to be black and rich was to be an anomaly, better off than the rest of the blacks but "not quite good enough" for the haut monde. Since West Indian Independence is still measured in years rather than decades much of the colonial situation still exists.

".....the class-colour correlates of the West Indian social structure are real. But they are not the absolutes of a rigid caste system. Skin colour determines social class; but it is not an exclusive determinant.....the real divisions of the society are the horizontal ones of social class rather than the vertical ones of colour identification." (1)

Here we may consider the middle-class and the mulatto.

There is a connection between these two terms which again, is not absolute. The growing middle-class is predominantly, but not exclusively, mulatto; there are, however, mulattoes who do not belong to this group. Yet the association of brown skin with middle-class status is sufficiently clear to cause certain automatic assumptions about any mulatto to be made in West Indian society. For instance, I have known a black working-class man in Jamaica refuse to direct a mulatto (a complete stranger) to his destination because - in his own words translated from dialect - "if you hadn't wanted to know something, you would never have spoken to me."

(1) Lewis p.20

This reflex of distrust appears in Season of Adventure when Powell, who is black, finally decides to kill the middle-class mulatto girl Fola, because "I learn how any playing 'bout with your lot bound to end. You know the rules too good, an' it too late, it too late for me to learn what rules you have for murderin' me." (1)

I use the term "mulatto" in the West Indian sense to mean anyone who is visibly of mixed African and European descent - "coloured" in the South African rather than the English sense.(2) In the days of slavery, for obvious reasons, mulattoes were more favoured than blacks in the sense that they were more likely to become house servants and more likely to be freed. White slave-owners have been known to leave a part of their fortune to their illegitimate mulatto children. Not surprisingly, this curious social position led early to those traits which now make up the mulatto stereotype in West Indian fiction - acute social insecurity and vacillation between the desire to be white on the one hand, and self-serving, histrionic declarations of "blackness" on the other. The image of the mulatto as the man suspended between two worlds is most clearly seen in Alvin Bennett's God the Stonebreaker (3) in the mulatto boy, Panty, and Ian Carew's The Wild Coast, where the character concerned is Hector. The problem faced by such individuals is that of a personal and racial identity-crisis occurring within a national identity-crisis.

(1) Lamming (op.cit) p.32-8

(2) Ramchand (p.40) says "Strictly speaking a mulatto is the offspring of one White and one Black parent. But it is more realistic to use the term to refer to any coloured person who could not pass for white and did not consider himself a Negro." I consider this wildly unrealistic since, in several situations a Coloured person who considers himself a Negro finds that Negroes disagree. Classification cannot be purely individual and subjective.

(3) God the Stonebreaker, Alvin Bennett, London, 1964.

The fact that as a group mulattoes had a better start because they were "less black", accounts both for their predominance in the middle-class and their acute discomfort at that level. Their social status - "in the middle" - has corresponded precisely to their racial situation, intensifying the precariousness of their position. I have said that the significant event of the colonial phase is the gradual transfer of power from the creole whites to the middle-class. This process can be seen to have begun in the 1940's. It is far from complete anywhere; it has only begun in Jamaica and Barbados and has been most effective in Trinidad and Guyana - probably because the hold of the white in the two old "English" possessions, being uninterrupted, has been stronger. Certainly, the "aristocratic" white community of White Boy no longer exists in Guyana: today, Christ would not only be let into the club but might take some quite dusky disciples with him.

The fact that the middle-class is small and its consolidation of power only now in progress, accounts for an apparent contradiction in Lewis's book:

"Even the term 'middle-class', so honorific elsewhere can be used as a term of social abuse rather than of social praise for the reasons that i. the middle-class elements who are mostly professional and commercial people constitute only a tiny percentage of the population.....and ii. even when the class-structure is less rigidly stratified as in Trinidad, the proportionately larger middle-class groups have not yet managed to make of their type the model image, the representative man of the national community as a whole. The general result is that.....West Indian society is not, as yet anyway, a generally "bourgeoisified" society and its white collar types, the lawyer, the doctor, the Civil Servant, are properly regarded as individuals." (1)

(1) Lewis (op.cit.) p.28

Later, however, Lewis says:

"There is nothing in the Act of Independence that minimises the fact that the society continues to be a class-society in which the Creole (1) commercial and professional groups retain a halo of merit over them and sustain the pose by a sort of psychological confidence trick played by the communications media on the traditionally deferential West Indian masses. The general outcome of the transfer of power from the old Empire to the new successor states thus means little more in social-power terms than the consolidation of ruling-class hold of i. a nascent middle-class using Independence as a ladder to Governmental, Civil Service and diplomatic appointments and ii. a growing business class seeking a role in the world complex of international capitalism. For the West Indian populace as a whole, that means simply a change, in some ways for the worse. Since the bourgeois groups understand them better psychologically than did the English officialdom, their exploitation by those groups may be made that much easier." (2)

".....The result in the West Indian society of the present day is the rule of the many by the few." (3)

Though I agree with all that Lewis says in the second of these extracts it seems contradictory to speak of "middle-class elements" who are "properly regarded as individuals". That consolidation of middle-class political and economic power has been and is taking place proves that group-awareness and loyalty exists within that class. At the same time, the first passage comes close to one truth which is that middle-class status in the West Indies is a precarious thing; it is so partly because of the small size of the group and partly because few families of the mulatto middle-class are more than three generations from "the nigger-yard". It is hardly surprising, since slavery ended just one hundred and thirty eight years ago - about four generations.

(1) i.e. "white"
(3) Ibid, p.398

(2) Lewis (op.cit) p.28

One example of this precariousness of status is the young mulatto girl, Beryl, in Black Midas who tries to trap the rich, black "Diamond King" into marriage. Beryl sees the matter as a fair exchange; her mulatto skin-colour in exchange for the black man's wealth. She is urged on by her mother, a black peasant, who at first keeps out of sight and arranges for her daughter to lose her virginity to Shark (the King) in the hope of becoming pregnant and having a claim on him. Carew remarks that Georgetown was full of these black mothers who lived behind shutters to give their daughters a better chance.

In Trinidad and Guyana, the East Indian communities are still largely peasant communities. However, there is a rapidly growing class of East Indian professional people and one can easily think of a dozen Indian names belonging to families of financially and socially successful lawyers, doctors and businessmen. It is increasingly true, in the upper social layers, that class-identity is more powerful than racial identity. Thus the older Indian community of Naipaul's novels is very conscious of being Indian while the young Indian professional in Selvon's The Plains of Caroni is only incidentally Indian.

There is an important link between class and the definition of a West Indian culture.

".....if there is a common West Indian culture, it has been created first and foremost by the social classes at the bottom of the West Indian social compost; the view from the dung-hill. They, more than any others, have been the culture-carriers. The higher-rung groups have been inhibited by the hybrid forms of European culture they have imbibed from playing that role.

The bias of colonial education engendered a snobbish hostility to the popular art-forms, even to the very idiom in which they were couched for as a person rose in the social ladder he has been expected to improve his language and speaking style. For the traditionalists, West Indian culture must be seen as an integral part of Western European culture but possessing an organic relationship to the West Indian environment. The absorption of folk-culture elements is possible, in this view, but the leading offence of colonialism was not that it neglected and despised, as it did, those elements but that it failed to give West Indians full opportunity to inherit the culture of Western civilisation and especially its English sector.

For the radicals, on the other hand, the common experience which infects any cultural manifestation of genuine vitality in the West Indies is the special inheritance of the masses who have created and defended their own art-forms as against the sterile, borrowed culture of the educated classes. The radical thesis, as the record shows, is undoubtedly the correct analysis." (1)

The thesis is now less than "radical". Since, in the colonial West Indies, social status rose in direct proportion to the individual's adherence to a narrow and out-dated Englishness, it follows that West Indian culture and identity has to be sought in the opposite direction. Thus the connection between class and the definition of West Indian identity is inescapable. This fact can lead either to a romantic cult of the peasant or the cynical exploitation and falsification of peasant art. It often does lead in one of these directions. Nevertheless, West Indian art, if it seeks to give some meaning to the word "culture" in the West Indies has, I believe, little choice.

(1) Lewis (op.cit) p.28.

West Indian Authors and a Reading-public

The great majority of the West Indian novels which now exist have been written since the Second World War. (Here, I include any novel by any West Indian author, whatever his national affiliations). There is no body of nineteenth-century West Indian fiction and West Indian writing before 1930 consists of individual and usually self-conscious explorations of the possibility of West Indian literature.

If we bear in mind my earlier description of the Creole White society of the slave-territories, their failure to produce a literature of any kind need not surprise us. The complete absence of fiction in the West Indies for the rest of the nineteenth century and its relative scarcity during the first four decades of the twentieth century (1) have two causes: the failure of West Indian popular education during the hundred years after Emancipation in 1834, and the bias of the West Indian ruling-classes towards England and away from whatever was produced in the West Indies. Of these, the first is the more important element.

The failure of nineteenth and early twentieth-century popular education to produce a large literate group in the West Indies is revealed in the broad selection of reports and Circulars in Shirley Gordon's book - the definitive work on the subject. Kenneth Ramchand's chapter on "Popular Education in the West Indies" in The West Indian Novel and its Background summarises her findings and it would be tedious to examine them in detail; a few facts, however, may be repeated.

(1) The period between 1930 and 1940 is chiefly remarkable for the efforts of Claude McKay and H. G. de Lissier.

One characteristic of the growth of all West Indian education after Emancipation was the stress on academic, "bookish" subjects at the expense of the technical training needed by depressed agricultural societies. This meant that, in the nineteenth century, popular education was quite irrelevant to the sort of career the working-class West Indian was likely to pursue. Irrelevance, in turn, meant growing apathy on the part of the lower-classes; this was especially true in the case of the East Indian labourers who led a despairing Inspector of Schools to complain: "They appear to think that, by sending their children to school they are conferring a favour and that they ought to receive the same amount of money for attending school as they can earn on an estate. Even the small children.....are usually conducted to school by what is known as a 'driver' ". (1)

What the Inspector saw as "the greatest reluctance on the part of the great majority of the coolies" now appears less as ignorance than perspicacity. West Indian education developed as a road to social status for a few and a means of consolidating the power and prestige of the higher groups. If working-class individuals survived the formidable barriers, they were likely to be no better off in occupational and financial terms, and dissatisfied as well. Inspectors of Schools were supposed to seek all truants from the school system but one sees the point of the magistrate's remark to an Inspector who brought in a truant pupil that he (the Inspector) was "spoiling a good shovelman." (2)

- (1) Report of Inspector of Schools, 1893 -4 for British Guiana. (Source: Gordon, p.125)
- (2) Magistrate in British Guiana, 1894 (Gordon, p.121)

In the 1840's the decline of sugar led the planter-dominated West Indian assemblies to establish secondary schools for their own class at the expense of elementary education. Even today, as a result of the class-bias, there is a great gap between the quality of West Indian secondary education in a small group of excellent schools and elementary education in general. The secondary schools were all established by religious bodies and many - well into this century - refused to accept illegitimate children, the vast majority of black working-class children. Colour-prejudice was not always absent from the selection procedures. To the exclusiveness of the secondary system was added the peculiar West Indian system of the "Island Scholarship." Each year, three scholarships in each territory were available for University education overseas. Hundreds of students, each year, fought for one of the treasured scholarships and even those who lost by a narrow margin retained, for life, a claim to respect in middle-class communities. The anti-democratic nature of the "Island school" did nothing to weaken its position; in Guyana and Trinidad, at least, it still existed in 1966. The narrow gate of the "Island scholarship" led to financial independence, for a tiny minority, in law or medicine.

This highly selective system created the typically West Indian attitude to education which has not yet gone, for many, education became not so much a means of self-improvement as a savage battle in which the fittest survived and the rest faded away.

Nineteenth-century West Indian incompetence and consolidation of privilege led to the kind of materialism that makes Ganesh, in Naipaul's The Mystic Masseur, measure his books by the yard. Until the growth of West Indian nationalism (the start of which we may, somewhat arbitrarily, place at 1935) (1) there existed only the situation Lamming describes:

"This was the kind of atmosphere in which all of us grew up. On the one hand a mass of people who were either illiterate or if not, had no connection whatever to literature since they were too poor or too tired to read; and on the other hand a colonial middle class educated it seemed, for the specific purpose of sneering at anything which grew or was made on native soil." (2)

Bourgeois philistinism and working-class illiteracy existed even after 1935: the difference, in the later period was the crumbling of some - by no means many - of the barriers to education. In Lamming's childhood and early manhood the situation for literature must have looked bleak but a kind of assault on the causes of the malaise was just beginning. Yet the relative successes of West Indian popular education during the last forty years have occurred too late to prevent the exodus, during the decade after 1950, of West Indian writers from the Caribbean to England.

Almost all West Indian novels are published in England. The considerably lower West Indian standard of living means that working-class West Indians - the great majority of the people - have very little chance of buying the imported novels.

- (1) Because of the West Indian riots of the 1930's in response to acute economic depression.
- (2) The Pleasures of Exile, p.40

As Ramchand suggests, there is now no lack of interest in West Indian literature in the Caribbean (anyone who has tried to borrow West Indian novels from Georgetown's Public Library is aware of this.) The point has been reached at which the lack of a wide West Indian reading-public for the West Indian novel is no longer a necessary one. The artificial difficulties caused by importation of books from a rich country to poor ones may now be solved by writers themselves - they must forego some of "the pleasures of exile".

I Man-woman relationships in the West Indian Novel.

Chapter 3 : Ismith Khan's The Obeah Man

In the novel The Obeah Man by Ismith Khan, occurs this passage:

"She wished that she did not need this man who could make her do anything without being able to expect some return of affection from him. Was this what was called love ? Or was that something that only people in far-away places like they show in films know ? In these islands, people lived with one another so that they would have someone close by to strike or curse each day when the sun was too hot or the rainy season too long.....Who knew love ? " (1)

In Claude McKay's novel, Banana Bottom, the heroine Bitá, returns to Jamaica from England where she has been educated, and gradually rejects the values and life-style of her English guardians. She identifies herself completely with the black Jamaican peasants and marries her father's drayman, Jubban:

"They lived their life upon a level entirely different from her early romantic conception of love. Once she had thought of love as a kind of mystical force, incomprehensible and uncontrollable. But gradually she had lost all that feeling of the quality of love, for it was a borrowed thing, an exotic imposition, not a real intrinsic thing that had flowered out of the mind of her race." (2)

Like any English or American adolescent of her time (the novel is set in the early twentieth century) Bitá dreams of love as "a mystical force". Bitá, however, has been reared by English foster-parents and educated in England. Her dreams result from her European upbringing and are, therefore, "a borrowed thing, an exotic imposition".

(1) The Obeah Man, Ismith Khan, London, 1964, p.63.

(2) Banana Bottom, Claude McKay, London, 1970 (First published 1933) p. 313

The same idea is apparent in these two passages; it is suggested, in both cases, that romantic love is alien to the culture of the West Indies.

One of the legacies of the English novel, of European literature in general, to the West Indian writer is the concept of romantic love. When dealing with a large number of novelists, one obviously cannot exclude the possible influence of any part of the literature of the world. However, the well-known - and I think proven - proposition that romantic love arose specifically in European culture demonstrates the primacy, direct or indirect, of the European influence in this respect. It is with this proposition that I should now like to deal.

It is difficult to define the complex of ideas conveyed by the expression "being in love" because no definition of a purely subjective phenomenon can be satisfactory. Romantic love exists subjectively as an experience of anyone suitably conditioned by cultural influences which I shall specify. It is easiest to approach the problem of definition by indicating what is not meant by "romantic love". The term obviously does not refer to sexual attraction; love, in this sense is supposed to express itself in sexual activity but need not do so. Nor does it refer to the affection that may develop between a man and a woman who have lived together for many years. Such affection may develop after, for example, an arranged marriage but one would not describe the partners as a couple "in love."

Finally, it does not refer to any attraction between a man and a woman - in addition to sexual attraction - which could just as easily exist between heterosexual members of the same sex. Thus it does not include mere friendliness, companionship or admiration.

I shall argue that, in a society to which the notion of "being in love" is totally alien, all that can exist between a man and a woman is sexual attraction or one of the kinds of affection described above or a combination of affection and sexual desire. Romantic love is experienced only by people of opposite sexes (1) may be felt by people who have only recently met each other and is distinct from sexual desire. It normally finds, or tries to find, its expression in a sexual relationship and - according to the modern notion of "love" prevalent in European middle-class culture - in marriage. However, neither sex nor marriage is essential to the idea of romantic love, for one may be "in love" according to the normal usage of that phrase, without copulating or marrying. In what follows, the term "romantic love" refers to the concept of an attraction distinct from sexuality, powerful enough to overcome the will of the partners and usually causing the sensation that the loved one is in every conceivable way uniquely suited, even predestined, for oneself. This sensation distinguishes it from sexual attraction which necessarily admits the possibility of several partners. It also distinguishes romantic love from the affection that may develop within a long established relationship since such affection may presumably be developed by a given individual, with one of a number of partners.

(1) i.e. as opposed to heterosexual members of the same sex. I exclude the question of whether homosexuals can be "in love" as unproved and, in any case, not essential to the issue.

Finally it obviously distinguishes "love" from companionship or friendship.

The affection that evolves in the course of a man-woman relationship of long standing depends, in part, on a growing mutual understanding and appreciation. Therefore it results from a clear perception of the true nature of one's partner. One may "fall in love" after a very short acquaintance or none at all. Romantic love does not depend on clear perception and is, therefore, likely to prove illusory. This experience is most likely to occur in adolescence but it should not be supposed that the ideal of love is not more than a youthful error. If it were so, the enormous success of cheap romantic fiction, films and popular music in Europe and the United States would be impossible. It is a matter of common observation that the audiences which recently assured the great success of the film "Love Story", (source of the now-famous dictum that "Love is never having to say you're sorry") was not exclusively composed of adolescents. Germaine Greer notes that

"Dr. Peter Mann's researches at the University of Sheffield show that twenty-five to forty-five year old women are avid readers of romantic fiction, especially housewives and secretarial workers. Some buy as many as eighty books a year." (1)

This suggests that romantic love remains an ideal of the middle-class in English society even though it is presumably the case that adults are aware of its failure in their own lives. We may guess that Dr. Mann's subjects merely consider themselves unlucky and suppose that others fall in love and remain in that condition.

(1) The Female Eunuch, Germaine Greer, London, 1971, p.171. Her reference is to The Romantic Novel, A Survey of Reading Habits, Peter Mann, London, 1969.

My point is that, although the actual experience of falling in love is predominantly (not, by any means exclusively) an experience of adolescence, the ideal of happiness grounded on successful romantic love is an important part of the culture of Western bourgeois groups. Greer's humour in the following passage depends on our recognition of its truth as a statement of English middle-class concepts and of its absurdity:

"Loveless marriage is anathema to our culture, and a life without love is unthinkable. The woman who remains unmarried must have missed her chance, lost her boy in the war or hesitated and was lost; the man somehow never found the right girl. It is axiomatic that all married couples are in love with each other.But it was not always believed even if the normality of the idea persuades us that it must have been." (1)

It must be stressed, however, that the term "romantic love" is used in this study to indicate the concept of "falling or being in love" : the question of whether or not marriage ensues is irrelevant in this discussion. As de Rougemont says in the passage quoted below, literature has been largely concerned with "unhappy love" rather than successful love and marriage. I have pointed to the middle-class concept of romantic love as a basis for marriage only in order to show that the ideal of love still exists in the European middle-class and its place in that culture is assured by its connection with marriage, an important social institution.

The following examination of the romantic love-ideal falls into two broad categories - the sociological and psychological.

(1) Greer (op.cit) p.198

In either category, it is possible for investigators to develop either conservative or radical attitudes to morality but the romantic love-ideal is always a casualty of these arguments. What emerges is that romantic love is not a necessary aspect of human behaviour but a distortion of perspective or attitude with identifiable historical roots.

In L'Amour et l' Occident, Denis de Rougemont makes the point that:

"L'amour heureuse n'a Pas d'histoire. Il n'est de roman que de l'amour mortel, c'est à dire de l'amour menacé et condamné par la vie même. Ce qui exalte le lyrisme occidental, ce n'est pas le plaisir des sens, ni la paix féconde du couple. C'est moins l'amour comblé que la passion d'amour. Et passion signifie souffrance. Voilà le fait fondamental." (1)

De Rougemont's approach is primarily sociological and cultural but the point leads naturally to Freud's assertion that love is "aim-inhibited sexuality". This assertion has had the curious effect of leading different writers to attack the love-ideal for the purpose of taking up diametrically opposed positions.

J.A.C. Brown's Freud and the Post-Freudians (2) shows the development of psychologists' attitudes from this rather flat assertion to a more complex view of love. One of Brown's quotations, taken from Otto Weininger's book, Sex and Character (3) is so strikingly similar to de Rougemont's purely literary observations that it suggests the extent to which the literary concept of romantic love became confused with reality and necessity:

- (1) L' Amour et l'Occident, Denis de Rougemont, Librairie Plon, 1939, p.2
- (2) Freud and the Post-Freudians, J.A.C. Brown, Pelican, 1964.
- (3) Sex and Character, Otto Weininger, London, 1906.

"(How obtuse is the view) of those who persist, with unconscious cynicism, in maintaining the identity of love and sexual impulse. Sexual attraction increases with physical proximity: love is strongest in the absence of the loved one: it needs separation, a certain distance to preserve it....." (1)

It is precisely this "distance" that de Rougemont notes in the myth of "Tristan and Isolde" which he regards as the origin of the romantic love-situation in literature. At any rate, Brown moves forward in time to the views of Theodore Reik:

".....Freud believed (a) that love is sublimated sexuality and (b) that the original object of love is the self. Reik strongly disagrees with both of these theses since he considers that romantic love has little to do with sex, and that there is no such thing as primary narcissism. Sex is a biological need originating in the body, dependent upon internal glandular secretions, localized in the genitals and other erogenic zones, aiming ultimately at the removal of physical tension and originally objectless. In sexual desire, the sexual object is simply the means by which the tension is eased. Love on the other hand, possesses none of these characteristics. It certainly is not a biological need, because there are millions of people who do not feel it and many centuries and cultural patterns in which it is unknown. We cannot name any inner secretions or specific glands which are responsible for it. Sex is originally objectless. Love certainly is not." (1)

Reik refuses to believe that love is an innate quality, says Brown, he believes that it is learnt from the mother-child relationship:

".....The young child is the recipient of his mother's love and care, and learns to love himself from his mother's example, and in later years, he will be the mother's substitute in loving himself. It is a striking fact, says Reik, that falling in love often follows a mood of self-distaste. Faust before he meets Gretchen, Romeo before he meets Juliet, are both discontented. Love is not a crisis but the way out of a crisis which has arisen from a state of dissatisfaction with oneself. Having fallen short of his ego-ideal, the individual makes use of love as a means of finding it in someone else and in this way, achieving wholeness. The beloved person is a substitute for the ideal ego, and two people who fall in love with each other are inter-changing their ego-ideals. Love therefore, is not love of oneself but love of one's better self-or ego-ideal as seen in someone else." (2)

(1) Brown (op.cit.) p. 173

(2) Ibid, p.174

It is clear that, at this point, romantic love has become identified with a distortion of perspective, of one's perception and understanding of the "loved one", however beneficial Reik may have felt it to be. David Holbrook, in The Quest for Love, states Reik's view of love, referring to romantic love as an instance of a failure of "reality-sense", analyses The Winter's Tale in the light of this type of failure - the play obviously lends itself to such an analysis, and then mounts a vigorous attack on D. H. Lawrence for unhealthy auto-eroticism. This charge derives in part from a judicious re-organisation of the letters in "Mellors", "Morel", "Constance" and "Lawrence" which claims to show that the fictitious characters are all aspects of the author's personality. Holbrook criticises Lawrence for denying the reproductive role of sex and considers that this denial is immature and dangerous, relegating sex to mere auto-eroticism. One cannot, however escape the suspicion that the attack is motivated by Holbrook's basic conservatism about marriage and society which necessarily conflicts with Lawrence's critical approach to both. What is curious, even amusing, about Holbrook's attack is that the opposed views of Lawrence and Holbrook on the subject of man-woman relationships derive from much the same thing - the psychological account of romantic love which Reik's theory exemplifies. If love is indeed love of an ego-ideal projected on to someone else then its failure in practice derives from the attempt to possess what is, in reality, a distinct human being who cannot in fact be a possession.

The story ends as Hester, the girl, says:

"You know, Joe I don't mind what you do, if you love me really."

The relationships in The Rainbow and Sons and Lovers testify to Lawrence's belief that one can possess things but not persons - Anna in The Rainbow never comes to terms with Will's silences and occasional distance. Ursula flees from marriage to Skrebensky. Miriam in Sons and Lovers cannot maintain her relationship with Paul because she struggles to possess him utterly. Thus if one accepts Reik's view, however opposed Lawrence and Holbrook are, for both writers the arch-villain is the romantic love-ideal. For Lawrence, the ideal is a dangerous misconception. However, the concluding sentence of In Love which was quoted above is representative of something de Rougemont notes:

"Comme a la rose de Guillaume de Lorris repond la rose de Jean de Meung, comme a la rhetorique cristalline de Petrarque s'oppose la fantasmagorie sensuelle de Boccace, le romantisme a provoqu e de nos jours une revolte qui se veut primitive. Ce n'est plus le sentiment qu'on idealise, c'est l'instinct.
Je songe aux romanciers anglo-americains, un Lawrence, un Caldwell, un Faulkner " (1)

To de Rougemont these modern Anglo-American novelists are guilty of "idealism in reverse". Their "glorification of the instincts" (the phrase is admittedly a slight distortion at least in the case of Lawrence) is in the strictest sense a revolt, it is the obverse side of the idealism of romantic love and the existence of one depends on the existence of the other. I shall have cause to return to this point.

(1) L'Amour et l'Occident, 232

Freud's views were re-stated to support a radical political thesis by Herbert Marcuse in Eros and Civilisation (1). This Marxist critic condemns many post-Freudian developments in what he calls "meta-psychology" as "revisionism". He argues that, although Freud may have been correct in his theory that the suppression of the erotic instincts was necessary for the development of civilisation, in much of the highly developed Western world this suppression has become superfluous. He sees romantic love as an aspect of this repression:

"It is not an accident that the great literature of Western civilisation celebrates only the "unhappy love", that the Tristan myth has become its representative expression. The morbid romanticism of the myth is in a strict sense 'realistic'. In contrast to the destructiveness of the liberated Eros, the relaxed sexual morality within the firmly entrenched system of monopolistic controls itself serves the systemthe individuals who relax in this uniformly controlled reality recall, not the dream but the day, not the fairy tale, but its denunciation."

Such a view postulates a motive for the rise or the existence of the ideal of romantic love in Europe which would be the same in any developing civilisation; it does not follow, however, that the response to the problem of necessary instinctual repression would be the same in all societies. Reik's theory, on the other hand, since it describes a psychological mechanism without regard to culture ^e or [?] environment, would tend to suggest that the phenomenon is universal. De Rougemont makes a comment which bears on this difficulty.

(1) Marcuse, London 1969 p.86 (Sphere Books edition)

"Si la littérature peut se vanter d'avoir agi sur les mœurs d'Europe, c'est à coup sûr à notre mythe qu'elle le doit. D'une manière plus précise: c'est à la rhétorique du mythe, héritage de l'amour provençal. Il n'est pas nécessaire de supposer ici quelque pouvoir magique des sons et du langage sur nos actes. L'adoption d'un certain langage conventionnel entraîne et favorise naturellement l'essor des sentiments latents qui se trouvent les plus aptes à s'exprimer de la sorte. C'est dans ce sens que l'on peut dire après La Rochefoucauld: peu d'hommes seraient amoureux s'ils n'avaient jamais entendu parler d'amour." (1)

From the projection of an ego-ideal it is a long step and not a necessary one to "love". Moreover, the projection is more likely to occur where "a certain conventional language" favours it.

De Rougemont traces the rise of "l'amour-passion" back to the twelfth century, demonstrating its origins in purely religious ideas. The "langage conventionnel" in Europe, says de Rougemont, was provided by medieval troubadours who were in fact celebrating a persecuted religious heresy- that of the Cathari. The characteristic traits of their rhetoric, the references to death, the desire for union with the loved one - in more than the physical sense of "union" - were an expression of their religious ideals, ultimately derived from the Persian mystic Mani, but favoured by ideas already existing among the Celtic peoples. The persecution of the heretics by Rome increased the popularity of their cult and led them to seek indirect ways of expressing their ideas.

(1) De Rougemont (op.cit.) p.235. Less has changed since these words were written than one might suppose as the success of Erich Segal's Love Story shows: the myth has retained its force.

Since their religion sought the ultimate union of God and man after death, they welcomed death and regarded the earthly life as of no value (in opposition to Christianity which regards God and man as distinct) and this accounts for the celebration of "unhappy love" and death in the "love poetry" which persecution led them to write. De Rougemont sums it up without qualification:

"De l'ensemble de ces convergences, Il est temps de tirer la conclusion: l'amour passion glorifié par le mythe fut réclément au douzième siècle, date de son apparition, une religion dans toute la force de ce terme et spécialement UNE HÉRÉSIE CHRÉTIENNE HISTORIQUEMENT DÉTERMINÉE.

D'èu l'on pourra déduire:

1° que la passion, vulgarisée de nos jours par les romans et par le film, n'est rien d'autre que le reflux et l'invasion anarchique dans nos vies d'une hérésie spiritualiste dont nous avons perdu la clef." (1)

De Rougemont's argument is complex and tortuous - I have vastly simplified it - yet, once understood, it seems glib, making a great deal of history hang on a single mistake - a misunderstanding of religious metaphors. At any rate, C.S. Lewis's well-known study The Allegory of Love also notes the absence of romantic love in European Literature before a certain time:

" 'Love' in our sense of the word is as absent from the literature of the Dark Ages as from that of classical antiquity..... (p.9)

.....an unmistakable continuity connects the Provencal love song with the love poetry of the later Middle Ages and.....with that of the present day. If the thing at first escapes our notice this is because we are so familiar with the erotic tradition of modern Europe that we mistake it for something natural and universal and therefore do not inquire into its origins." (2)

(1) De Rougemont (op.cit) p.119

(2) The Allegory of Love, C.S. Lewis, Oxford, 1936. p.3 (1959 ed.)

"There can be no mistake about the novelty of romantic love: our only difficulty is to imagine, in all its bareness, the mental world that existed before its coming - to wipe out of our minds for a moment nearly all that makes the food both of modern sentimentality and modern cynicism. We must conceive of a world emptied of that ideal of happiness - a happiness grounded on successful romantic love - which still supplies the motive of our popular fiction." (1)

Within the period of the existence of the ideal of romantic love, its hold on the populations of Europe varied, of course, with social class and with occupation. Romantic love for the nobility of the sixteenth century was exclusively adulterous; for the peasants of the same century or later centuries it was largely irrelevant in everyday life. De Rougemont blames the most vigorous spread of the ideal on the attacks made by the Romantics on the last vestiges of ritual which restrained its "death instinct" and true vigour. He places this spread at the end of the eighteenth century and in the "bourgeois nineteenth century". Indeed, its rise coincides with the rise of the urban middle-class. Not at all coincidentally, this point in time marks the rise of the literary form with which we are concerned - the novel.

Romantic love, then, in the sense of a force distinct from sexual desire which binds two people together and is independent of the will of either, is a phenomenon which has arisen since medieval times. It is a phenomenon of which the origins and development are both specifically European. Finally, it has found its greatest acceptance, in association with marriage, in the values of the European middle-class.

(1) Ibid p. 4

It must be remembered that the novel is also of relatively recent origin as a literary art-form, it is also European in origin and it has become the vehicle par excellence of the values of the European middle-class - at least the value of romantic love. I am speaking here of the form of the novel. The suppliers of cheap romantic fiction for a mass-market in Europe and America have chosen the form of the novel, rather than drama or poetry, to satisfy a popular craving for escapist "romance". In England, considering that the rise of the novel-form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coincides with the growth and the rise to power of a large middle-class, the choice is hardly surprising. The market for novels of this kind is far larger than that commanded by "serious" literature. As a result, in the popular mind, there is a widespread association of the novel-form with romantic love.

Various writers have commented on the importance of the novel-form to the survival of romantic love. For example, Greer in a section of The Female Eunuch entitled "The Middle-Class Myth of Love and Marriage", comments:

"Playwrights succeeded better than poets at establishing marriage as the non plus ultra of romantic love but the real source of the marrying-and-living-happily-ever-after myth is that art-form invented to while away the vacant hours of idle wives, the love novel. Richardson's Pamela was the source of it all, but it had various founts to draw on.....(1)

De Rougemont lays the blame for the survival, in "the West" of the ideal of romantic love at the same door:

"L'envahissement de nos litteratures, tant bourgeoises que prolitariennes par le roman, et le roman d'amour s'entend, traduit exactement l'enyahissement de notre conscience par le contenu totalement profané du mythe." (2)

- (1) Greer (op.cit) p.213
(2) De Rougemont (op.cit.) p.228

Earlier, he says :

"L'enthousiasme que nous montrons pour le roman et pour le film né du roman....tout en nous et autour de nous glorifié à tel point la passion que nous en sommes venus à voir en elle une promesse de vie plus vivante." (1)

Rene Wellék and Austin Warren find, in Theory of Literature (2)

that criticism of the novel as art has suffered from the association of the novel-form with the most vulgar expression of the love-ideal:

"Literary theory and criticism concerned with the novel are much inferior in both quantity and quality to theory and criticism of poetry.

The cause customarily assigned for this would be the antiquity of poetry, the comparative recency of the novel. But the explanation scarcely seems adequate. The novel as an art form is, as one can say in German, a form of Dichtung; is, indeed in its high form the modern descendant of epic The reasons are rather, one thinks, the widespread association of the novel with entertainment, amusement, and escape rather than serious art - the confounding of the great novels, that is, with manufactures made with a narrow aim at the market. The lingering American popular view, disseminated by pedagogues, that the reading of non-fiction, harmful or at best self-indulgent, was not without implicit backing in the attitude towards the novel of representative critics like Lowell and Arnold." (3)

This association of the novel-form with romantic love may account for the fact, which I shall demonstrate, that many West Indian novelists have sought to apply the love-ideal to the relationships of West Indian characters. The novel, as a literary form, has been imported from Europe to the culture of the West Indies and has taken inescapable "romantic" connotations with it.

(1) Ibid, p.2

(2) See "The Nature and Modes of Narrative Fiction" in Theory of Literature, Rene Wellék and Austin Warren, London, 1963. (first published in U.S.A. 1949)

(3) Ibid, p.212

Of course these connotations have been created mainly by popular escapist fiction rather than the serious novel that aspires to be art; the association, nevertheless, is present in the approach of many people - including, as Wellek¹ and Warren point out, "serious" critics - to novels in general. It is present in the expectations of the almost exclusively middle-class West Indian readership - a fact which obviously may induce certain authors to satisfy their expectations - and is, apparently, not absent from the minds of West Indian novelists. This explanation of the persistent attempts of West Indian authors to portray romantic love-relationships in the peasant classes of the West Indies (the passing flashes of insight by McKay and Khan notwithstanding) obviously cannot be proved but I suggest that it fits the results of my examinations of the West Indian novels.

It is necessary to distinguish between fiction that aspires to be art and that which sets itself no higher aim than a suitable financial return for author and publisher. Yet it is also necessary to distinguish between the simple-minded treatment of "love" in the escapist novel and the more subtle sophisticated and complex treatment which may be found in the most "serious" of European novels - especially the nineteenth-century English novel. For it is the case that people reared and educated in middle-class environments, either in Europe or in societies influenced by Europe do, in fact fall in love. The experience, even if it proves mistaken,⁽¹⁾ is real in the sense that it is actually felt by such people and may have great importance in the life of an individual.

(1) i.e. a false assessment of reality.

There is, therefore, no good reason why, in novels set in such middle-classes, romantic love as an experience of middle-class characters should not be a proper subject for fiction of whatever kind. The great English novels do, of course, treat human relationships in a vastly more profound and complex way than the popular escapist ones do. Yet complexity does not preclude treatment of the experience of "love"; indeed it extends in many European novels of the highest artistic merit, to credible and important revelations of the consequences and the very real pain and pleasure of "being in love" - here the passion felt by Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights is an obvious example.

In the English novel - at the level of art - the entire range of possibilities of the man-woman relationship appears. Whenever the novel has dealt with middle-class life and characters one of those possibilities has been romantic love. Since the greater part of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century body of fiction does concern the middle-class, romantic love is found playing a large part in the novels of that period. The difference, in this respect, between the novels of the nineteenth century and those of the twentieth century is that the latter show a deliberate revolt against the entire idea of "being in love", especially as a part of the middle-class ideal of love and marriage. Although the English novel has always been able to show romantic love as one form of relationship, authorial attitudes have changed, in this century, to emphasise the falsity of the love-ideal.

The best representative of the modern approach is D.H. Lawrence. To many educated readers today, Lawrence's attacks on "the bourgeois" in general and their love-ideal in particular now seem shrill. This is only because educated opinion now accepts much of what, in his day, must have seemed heretical.

The importance of romantic love to the nineteenth-century English novel is easily seen. Defoe's Moll Flanders bequeathed less in this respect than the work of Richardson or even Fielding; Tom Jones, after all, his vigorous adventures in sex notwithstanding, does distinguish between lust and love and preserves the latter for Miss Western. Jane Austen, it is true, did tend to distinguish between good sense and irrationality in this regard - that which draws Fanny to Edmund in Mansfield Park is clearly not of the same order, neither as dangerous nor as irrational, as that which constitutes the attractiveness of the Crawfords and leads to the falling from grace of the unfortunate Julia. Similarly, Emma distinguishes between Emma's own somehow inevitable movement towards Mr. Knightley and the unreasonable passion of Harriet. Nevertheless, the novelist's apparent disapproval does not prevent a recognisable version of romantic love from appearing as a normal form of behaviour. By the time one moves on to the passion and suffering of Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights one can see that romantic love has ceased to be merely a dangerous aberration. Nor is it so in the beautiful dreams of Amy in Dickens's Little Dorrit.

The case of George Eliot is more complex. A subtle suggestion of sensuality and sexual repression can be seen in Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss and has been noted by commentators (1) and the same could be said of Gwendolin Harleth married to the cold and evil Grandcourt, even more of Dorothea Casaubon married to the elderly, funereal Mr. Casaubon. The suggestion is so carefully under-stated that it is difficult to isolate any specific textual evidence. The impression probably derives from the situations of the heroines - unsatisfactory marriages in the last two instances and Maggie's attempts at cultivated Stoicism. This sensuality is a complicating factor since we are concerned here with the distinction between lust and love. One may also admit that the cool good sense of Dinah in Adam Bede with regard to Adam does not suggest that she is the object of a force external to her own will. In short, the term "romantic love" is incomplete as a description of any of these relationships. At the same time, it is impossible to say that Gwendolin's distant adoration of Daniel Deronda or Philip's feelings for Maggie Tulliver belong to a completely different mould from the feelings of Heathcliff.

It seems strange, when one thinks of it today, that only twelve years ago, D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover was the subject of a prosecution for obscenity - strange because Lawrence's descriptions of a sexual relationship now seem, many of them, comic in their humourless and occasionally prudish solemnity.

(1) See for instance Robert Speight's George Eliot, Arthur Barker Ltd., p.54

The solemnity is symptomatic - the malady is as de Rougemont describes it, "idealism in reverse". One is struck, considering Lawrence's essays in conjunction with his novels, by the extent to which the novels demonstrate in art the philosophy of the essays. In the case of Lady Chatterley's Lover in which the sexual therapy administered by Mellors seems to cause a mysterious process of self realisation in Lady Chatterley, the relevant essay is probably Sex versus Loveliness ("sex appeal is only a dirty name for a bit of the life-flame"). On the basis of this novel, Germaine Greer's categorisation of Lawrence among the "sexual romantics" is justified. A rather different idealism applies to The Rainbow and Sons and Lovers which more nearly concerns my present subject.

In both novels, the author's concern with the issue of possession as opposed to independence in the man-woman relationship is apparent. Lawrence's essays, poems and short stories all indicate not only that he had strongly-held views on this subject, but, as I have shown, that these theories are quite deliberately opposed to the romantic love-myth. In Miriam's almost predatory approach to Paul Morel and in Anna and Will Skrebensky's delicate balance of opposing forces, Will's need for solitude and Anna's need for affection, we see theory in action - the point is clear, "love..... when it is whole, is dual". That this wholeness, this duality, is as much an ideal as "happiness grounded on successful romantic love" need not be stressed but my point is that Lawrence's ideal is a conscious reversal of the ideal of romantic love.

Just as the logical extreme of the novel of romantic love is Georgette Heyer and the "ladies' novelists", the logical extreme of its mirror-image, the novel of idealised sexuality and instinct, is probably Mickey Spillane, Harold Robbins being close to the extreme. Either facet has its vulgar extreme. The shock caused by the novels of Henry Miller and, to a lesser extent, Norman Mailer lay precisely in their affront to the middle class notion (or narrow range of notions) of an ideal man-woman relationship. Moreover one would be hard put to evaluate Tropic of Cancer without reference to the author's consistent assault on bourgeois morality.

This is not to suggest that a polarisation between romantic love and its antithesis accounts for the entire body of English and American novels. It has recently become possible for the novel to ignore any kind of ideal as does Stan Barstow's A Kind of Loving, a novel which acquires considerable power and pathos from simple truth. One might also think of Kingsley Amis's Fat Englishman cynically developing purely sexual and self-interested liaisons in America.

The West Indian novel is twentieth-century literature. I shall show that the West Indian response to the European concept of romantic love has not been revolt, as has been the case in England and America, but rather the retention of the ideal as a criterion. Social and nationalistic pressures to which I have referred turn the attention of the West Indian novelist to the West Indian working class. A look at the nature of relationships in that working class soon suggests the resulting difficulties.

In Personality and Conflict in Jamaica (1) Madeline Kerr, a Social Psychologist, says (with reference to methods of weaning male infants by painting the mother's nipples with a bitter liquid) :

"It is probable that this will result in strongly ambivalent feelings towards the mother and possibly to women in general. This seems to be what happens. There is a strong permanent tie to the mother with a promiscuous attitude to wife or girl-friend. In the Kingston cinemas, romantic love always seems to cause catcalls and exclamations of "Why he fuss so over one woman, there plenty others." (2)

The audience's reaction may also be heard in Guyana. The basis of that reaction is not surprise; still less can it be ignorance which a deeper acquaintance with the love-ideal as a convention would dispel since, in territories which, until very recently had no television stations, the film is the major source of entertainment. It is rather a sense of shame at the sight of a threat to the dignity of manhood. An incident from my own experience may illustrate this further. Some years ago, a calypso was popular in the West Indies which told of a jilted suitor who turns up at the wedding of his beloved and burst into tears crying "I love you Stella, ow, Stella, I Love you ! " The voice of the "calypsonian", at this point breaks and the word "love" is drawn into a sobbing wail for maximum comic effect. In a bar in Georgetown, the calypso, in my presence, could be heard on the radio to the usual amusement of male listeners in the bar. At the end of the song, an elderly patron recovered sufficiently to say "But is true, you know, they got some men does really behave like that and carry on that kind of slackness." (3)

- (1) Madeline Kerr, Personality and Conflict in Jamaica: Collins, 1963.
- (2) p. 45 We may reserve judgement about the effects of bitter nipples on babies for this theory does not affect my argument.
- (3) "slackness" in general refers to any behaviour of which the speaker disapproves.

There followed a thoughtful silence; such behaviour, he seemed to say was "letting the side down". This reaction which senses a threat to masculine esprit de corps is necessarily suspicious of romantic love as "soft" - Madeline Kerr further examines it:

"In every-day life, the male in peasant communities is forced into an acceptance of female dominance..... But as one set of concepts consists of ideas resembling the English Victorian ones, in so far as they express the superiority of the male, and the need for protection of the female relative, he is in somewhat of a quandary.

This is illustrated by the cat-calls which occur in any cinema when a romantic film is shown..... But simultaneously with this attitude there exists the feeling that a man should protect and show chivalry towards women. It is not easy to square this latter belief with reality where it is generally the female who protects the male in the sense that she often has to keep him....." (1)

West Indian peasant society does indeed seek to establish the superiority of the male but the strength of this aspiration is probably greater than "the English Victorian ideas" - attitudes expressed in the calypsoes I shall discuss certainly suggest it is so. At the same time social reality undermines the male self-image leading, in a vicious circle, to an even more "promiscuous attitude" and to a mixture of resentment, fear and distrust. This is the basis of the well-documented refusal of the male to stay for very long with any woman and family.(2)

A Jamaican folk-tale, cited by Madeline Kerr, illustrates the male attitude. It is called significantly, "Why Women are Bad."

(1) Kerr (op.cit.) p.91

(2) See Kerr, but also Austin Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns, Ian Carew's The Wild Coast, George Lamming's In the Castle of my Skin, all concerned with families headed by the mother. The Sunday Times Magazine, March 18th, 1972, describes the identical situation among West Indian immigrants in England.

In brief, the tale is of a man who has the power to understand the language of animals. One day, he is out riding on a stallion, followed by his wife on a pregnant mare. The man hears the stallion tell the mare to catch up with him. The mare points out that "you and your master make two, but my mistress and me and the one in my belly make three." Hearing her husband laugh, the woman insists that he tell her the joke, although he says that, if he tells it, he will surely die. At last he promises to tell her but calls for preparations for his funeral. He calls for his chickens so that he may feed them for the last time. The rooster beats the hens away from the corn and calls to the man "You damn fool, I have so many wives and I can control them. You have one wife and you are going to make her cause your death." The man then gives his wife "a sound beating" and becomes master of the house.

Folk tales have their origin in working-class life, that part of West Indian society which, because of lack of education and personal contact with European colonists, has been least affected, in its outlook, by European values. What is significant about the tale is that the woman is not being consciously evil; she is being inquisitive, even to the point of causing a man's death, simply because she is a woman and such is her nature. This is an important element in the male West Indian view of women which can be seen in calypso and re-appears in the novel.

Conscious malice on her part is seldom present; there is rather a sense that she is a natural force which, if it is inimical to men cannot help but be so. This view carries its own guarantee of universal applicability which any idea of deliberate malice would destroy.

In The Growth of the Modern West Indies(1) Gordon Lewis finds in the West Indies "a variety, a vitality and..... a capacity for unselfconscious exhibition 'making style' that mark it off from the Anglo-Saxon Protestant bourgeois societies."

He says:

"This can be seen everywhere.....It is there in the general 'promiscuity' of sex relations, for in a society where faithful concubinage, rather than marriage, is the most common form of family existence and where, too, legitimacy is the exceptional status and not illegitimacy, the traditional Judaeo-Christian view of sexual life is a minority view, and always on the defensive. The repercussions of West Indian sexuality are, indeed, far-reaching. So, in politics, it would be difficult to imagine a West Indian Profumo case....."

In fact, the concubinage is less likely to be faithful than Lewis supposes, as Judith Blake's Family Structure in Jamaica (2) makes clear (except, of course, when the man concerned becomes old enough to need to "settle down"). It would indeed be difficult to imagine "a West Indian Profumo case", simply because a large number of sexual conquests is socially a tremendous asset with "the masses" (3). The West Indian concern with virility is probably as strong as the "Latin-American concept of "machismo" although it is less self-conscious.

- (1) The Growth of the Modern West Indies, Gordon Lewis, London, 1968, p.23
- (2) Family Structure in Jamaica, Judith Blake, London, 1965,
- (3) See John Hearne's The Land of the Living, pp 201,202; electoral victory of a father of 200 illegitimate children,

We may turn to the calypso for evidence of the attitudes of the West Indian peasants and working-classes to man-woman relationships. Calypso is composed by and for the lower social levels in the society; it is folk-art. It is a medium of social and political satire and comment on every imaginable local issue. It competes with American popular music, which until recently was mawkishly sentimental, for public attention. Yet there has never been any attempt by a calypsonian to refer to a man-woman relationship of romantic love unless to satirize it. This cannot be purely a matter of convention - there are few limitations of tradition and formal convention in calypso. As Louis James says:

"The subjects of calypsos are still as various as the items in the newspapers, or the imagination of the calypsonian.He can use any subject without a false note, for calypso has no pretensions to 'high art', and is rooted in the speech rhythms and idiom of the people." (1)

Given this variety and lack of restraint as to subject matter and given, also the presence of romantic love as the main subject of American popular songs and films, the total absence of any such theme in calypso can only be explained by its inapplicability to the everyday experience of the ordinary folk.

A calypso by "The Mighty Sparrow" (Slinger Francisco: a Grenadian who lives in Trinidad and is the generally acknowledged "king" of calypso) illustrates the difference between "the traditional Judaeo-Christian view of sexual life" and the West Indian one. A man comes home from a meeting to find his wife, wearing nothing but her wedding ring, and in bed with another man.

(1) James (op.cit.) p.13

He tells her

"Take your bundle, lady,
Leave and go
Don't stay here no mo'
You' mind must be tell you
I'm a real coo noo-moo noo
I g:w:ine prove to you
That ain't true."

However

"He stand up in front she,
She bend down she head
To take up something below the bed;
He scramble to the bed post bawlin'
'Doux-doux, is joke I makin' with you' "

Sparrow adds

"Well, the husband is not who I'm blaming
If was me, I might have done the same thing
If a woman should bend down in front me
Lawd ! I in gaol already
I say me heart does beat; me does feel sweet
And when I scramble
The only thing to move me is a constable."

The point I am making is that even though one may be "a real coo noo-moo noo" for permitting oneself to be cheated, self-esteem resides in the extent of one's sexual desire rather than in the faithfulness of one's wife. Marital faithfulness is not sufficiently valued to add a really deep sense of personal injury to sexual jealousy and sexual jealousy is less strong than sexual desire in this case. Sparrow's intentions are, of course, comic but the calypso would be merely absurd without an element of truth. Its truth lies in its affirmation of the paramount importance of sexuality, expressed often enough, outside the framework of European middle-class social norms, in the male West Indian self-image.

In The Islands in Between⁽¹⁾, Louis James, in his introduction says: "Calypso is essentially a Caribbean folk art." Its appeal was to the poor people of the West Indies, for until nationalism discovered it and made it "respectable", the West Indian middle-class could never consider it more than common and vulgar. Gordon Lewis says:

"Originally the lyrical satirist openly chastizing the economic system, he (the calypsonian) has now himself become part of the system; and, inevitably, the gift for successful satire falters. The original folk-calypsonian, like 'Kitch' (2) passes away. The melodic delicate wit of a great artist like 'The Mighty Spoiler' gives way to the aggressive exploitation of the sex theme - the public controversy surrounding 'Sparrow's' Mae-Mae is suggestive. In part, this is the Americanizing influence..." (3)

Lewis is quite correct in saying that commercialisation of the calypso has taken place - this is inevitable - and correct in comparing the art of "Lord Kitchener" with that of his successors to the disadvantage of the latter. However, he over-states his case; as my earlier quotation shows, Lewis himself is aware of the importance of sex in West Indian attitudes so that he seems to me to be trying to have his cake as well as eat it. I would suggest that the explanation of the increased appearance of the sex theme is probably that, in colonial times, middle-class susceptibilities could more effectively determine the kind of material that came to public attention.

- (1) The Islands in Between, London (O.U.P.) 1968, ed. Louis James, p.12
- (2) "Lord Kitchener" a calypsonian of an earlier generation considered by many in the West Indies to be the best of them all.
- (3) p.34

Louis James says:

"..... basic to calypso is sex. Phallic symbols abound - 'the big bamboo', 'the steering wheel', 'B.G. plantain that till up the pot'. The prominence of sex has been blamed, incredibly, on the slave owners who were said to have encouraged it in order to ensure an annual parturition for their female slaves. This underestimates the natural fertility of the Caribbean and over-estimates the oppressor." (1)

I am not at all sure what the phrase "the natural fertility of the Caribbean" means but the (very popular) explanation which ascribes everything to the slave-owners does appear historically inaccurate, since it was cheaper to import slaves than to rear them, losing working hours from pregnant slaves. However, in an art-form which is indisputably West Indian and working-class we may expect the most accurate picture of the social life of that class and the picture certainly is as James describes it.

The calypso to which Lewis refers, "Mae-Mae" will illustrate this claim. A few passages will serve:

"Darlin' don't bite me
Don't do that, honey,
I never had a man
Who ever do that to me !

Ay ay ay, doux-doux, darlin'
You make me pores raise up,
You makin' me feel so weak,
Stop, Sparrow, Stop.

(we) like two snakes roll-up
She so deceitful, she bawlin 'stop'
But she like it, I know that,
I could tell from the way she start to scratch
No, Sparrow no no no
Sandfly bite me down there."

It should be apparent that one need not look for anything so restrained as the "phallic symbols" mentioned by Louis James.

(1) p. 13 "B.G." is British Guiana.

One might also cite to show the importance of sex in calypso,
Sparrow's song "Benwood Dick" :

"Tell you sister to come down here
I got something for she
Tell she is Mr. Benwood Dick
The man from Sangre Grande
She know me well
'Cause I give she already (1)
Oh she must remember me
Go on, go on, tell she Mr. Benwood come."

Middle-class reaction may be judged from the fact that neither of the above songs could be broadcast in Guyana, which did not however, decrease the singer's popularity. For 'Sparrow' as for his predecessors, the audience was in the slums and the rural areas; if as Gordon Lewis would suggest, it was also in the United States this was but the icing on the cake. In any case, many years before independence and nationalist fervour with its accompanying Americanisation of the local culture, a song popular in the West Indies was "Mister, don't touch me tomato" ; the song listed the "vegetables" that could be touched, insisting on the exclusion of the tomato (2). There are West Indian folk-songs which have an obvious sexual theme and are certainly older than "Kitchener's" songs. One of these is "Satira Gal".

"One day, me been a' Bamboo Dam
And me see Satira lay down dere
And me ask Satira wha' she doin'
Satira lif' up she clothes
And wind like a Buxton boar (3)
Chorus Oh Satira, more man dere (4)
Oh Satira, more man dere."

- (1) West Indian speech often used the word "already" where, in Standard English, one would say "before".
- (2) The singer's voice made the sexual innuendo obvious and, in my experience, the "tomato" was understood to symbolise some soft, delicious and forbidden part of the body.
- (3) Buxton is a working-class negro district in Guyana. The meaning of "boar" is in dispute but not essential here. "wind" means "dance".
- (4) i.e. there are more men (available)

One of Sparrow's calypsoes expresses, humorously as usual, the element of fear, to which I referred earlier, in the male West Indian attitude. It is called "Pussy-cat". The calypsonian declares that he is afraid of pussy-cats because he has been told that some of them have sharp teeth: "Ah 'fraid, ah 'fraid, ah 'fraid pussy bite me." However he is trying to overcome this fear and will "look after" them if necessary. One way of dealing with this fear is expressed in another song:

"Every now and then, cuff them down
They love you long and they love you strong,
Black up they eye, ben' up they knee
Then they love you eternally."

Here is Sparrow singing of the male refusal to be "tied down".

"..... carryin' me name to obeah-man (1)
All you do, can't get through
I still won't get married to you."

Another calypsonian, Nat Hepburn listed the various obeah "recipes" used by women to trap men and declared himself immune to their tricks because he himself has a protective obeah charm which he describes. Much of the humour of these songs for the West Indian audience probably derives from hearing their own recognisable attitudes set to music; until recently, after all, popular music from overseas fairly dripped sentimentality.

At the same time, one would be hard put to it to find anything resembling romantic love in the man-woman relationship described by the calypsoes.

(1) Obeah is what remains in the West Indies of African magical beliefs and rites. An obeah-man is a witch-doctor. Belief in obeah is still quite widespread. By established obeah practice, a woman may mix her menstrual blood with a man's food to prevent his leaving her.

Sparrow has produced his own version of the love-song "Three Coins in the Fountain": in his version, the important thing is the downfall of a "smart Barbadian" who built the fountain to take money from the superstitious Trinidadians: a warbling falsetto satirises the romantic passages in the original (sung in a passable imitation of a Barbadian accent by a singer who has a Trinidadian accent - a fact which makes them more absurd in the West Indies). Romantic love is recognisable in one calypso:

"Rose, darlin' come back home
Darlin' come back home
Please tell me you're my own. Oh Lawd ! "

This tender passage is somewhat altered by the line

"Rose you lookin' for blows ! "

The social situation of the West Indies as far as the distribution of the notion of romantic love is concerned, is not unique, either geographically or historically. This fact, however, need not concern us here since I am not concerned with claiming uniqueness for the social context of the West Indian novel. I am rather examining the results of the application of an alien ideal to a society, or to a certain level of a society, which has a cultural life hostile to that ideal. European peasant society in the past had many of the aspects of West Indian peasant life to which I have referred.

However, the West Indian novelist, as I have argued, is driven by nationalist pressures to concern himself with peasant life because it is farthest in its life-style from that of the former metropolitan power: no pressure in the same direction to the same extent has existed in England within the relatively short life-span of the English novel.

There are, nevertheless, twentieth-century English novels in which the man-woman relationship, or the presentation of it, is not affected by the concept of romantic love. This, also, is not my present concern and does not affect my argument. I shall, rather, distinguish between the interaction of West Indian reality and European ideal in West Indian literature on the one hand and the treatment of romantic love in the English novel on the other. Therefore we are concerned with those English novels (1) to which romantic love is relevant, however much this may exclude. What it does include, in my view, is the twentieth-century English novel which consciously assaults the romantic ideal in pursuit, perhaps, of another idealism; by "consciously", I mean that the whole course of the narrative tends in that direction, as Lawrence's novels do.

In the foregoing outline of West Indian peasant attitudes to man-woman relationships, therefore, I have not intended to distinguish them from any European attitudes in any age, but merely to point to the difficulties facing the novelist who applies the love-ideal to the West Indian social context. For my argument is that West Indian novelists have not in general, attacked the love ideal;

(1) i.e. those of artistic rather than purely escapist intent.

they have rather accepted it as a criterion by which both the normal tensions of a sexual relationship and tensions resulting from West Indian attitudes are judged as negative and become exaggerated. Alternatively, they have been forced away from West Indian peasant society with interesting results from a literary point of view. I am unable to say why their approach should be as it is: West Indian authors are by no means exclusively middle-class in origin although they become so by virtue of their education. I can only point to the novels themselves as evidence of what has occurred.

Nor am I claiming that West Indian peasants live in a world completely sealed off from any idea of romantic love. The continuing influence of American popular films and music precludes any such situation. Madeline Kerr does, in fact, say that there are several quite romantic love stories in her records. She then quotes a love-letter which demonstrates by its use of the language of American popular music ("You are the heart of every plan, you are the heart of love divine") that the association with the norms of a culture other than his own is at least apparent to the writer. I am speaking here of a general pattern of behaviour in the society rather than of a law which excludes any possibility of exceptions.

That pattern of behaviour on the part of the male consists of a concern with virility, with male dignity, a markedly promiscuous attitude towards women and an image of them which consists of a complex mixture of fear and distrust -

- distrust which nevertheless tends to see them as natural forces rather than as agents of conscious ill-will.

No attempt has been made in what follows to discuss the novels chronologically. Variations in the treatment of man-woman relationships depend rather on the different abilities of the novelists and on the differing methods they employ than on the time of writing - the time-span, in the case of the West Indian novel is, in any case, a matter of about fifty years during which the great majority have been published. I have rather considered three very different (from the standpoint of technique) West Indian novelists, broadly representative of the range of West Indian writing and then dealt with some of the novels of Roger Mois and John Hearne, both of whom are particularly important to my present discussion, and then with the novels of white West Indian and East Indian (i.e. descendants of Indian immigrants) novelists.

The novel from which I took my opening quotation, Ismith Khan's The Obeah Man, is a possible starting point. The scene of the novel is Trinidad and the Obeah man of the title is called Zampi. A really comprehensive discussion of obeah would require considerably more space than is permissible here. There appears to be some slight variation from one West Indian territory to another perhaps reflecting differing degrees of alienation of the various (peasant) populations from their African origins. (1)

(1) As far as obeah's hold on the population is concerned, in 1970 a doctor in Guyana told me that a patient of his had recently died of "sheer fright" because a spell had been cast on him.

A good obeah-man should be able to help a client keep his or her sexual partner or, if the sexual partner has been "stolen", to bring the erring individual back, to put the "evil eye" (Bad-eye" in Guyanese speech) on anyone as requested, to protect a client from the "evil eye" and finally to negotiate with the spirits as may be necessary. The contraption which protects a house and its occupants from "bad eye", a bottle painted with obscure markings and hung from a short bamboo pole, may be found even in a relatively sophisticated West Indian capital. Khan never ascribes any supernatural power to obeah. Zampi is clearly aware of the power of suggestion and its limitations.

Zampi is impelled by his desire for his girl-friend Zolda to leave his retreat in search of her. It is the time of Carnival and Zolda is very much a part of it. A physically attractive woman, she is given an innocent but powerful sexuality and a desire for the companionship and sensual life and vigour of Port of Spain at Carnival time. Zampi, however, is by nature, and as a result of his profession, an introvert. He is a highly perceptive man who can see through the superficial gaiety of the time to a deep malaise, even despair, in the dancing people around him. He himself is "a sounding board.....like a conch-shell that people could put to their ears to find out what they have to do". He is "a sieve that the whole world pass through and leave nothing behind. Is not a bad thing." He sees that "the island dead", "We is nobody and we ain't have nowhere to go". It would be a simplification but a useful one to say that the contrast and tension are of extreme introversion as against extreme extroversion.

The difference is further complicated by Zolda's inadequate understanding of Zampi, whereas the Obeah man does understand, without approving of them, the drives that lead Zolda to Port of Spain. Zampi finds Zolda and takes her back with him to his retreat. There, after some conflict and argument, they make love. Zolda leaves Zampi again, for the stick-man Massahood, a boyhood friend of Zampi's, who aware of his dependence on the obeah man's magic in his stick-fighting, at once suspicious of that magic and awed by it, is trying to prove the theory that once a man gains an obeah man's woman, he renders the magician powerless. Zolda's flirtation with Massahood leads to an attempted rape by the stick-man; this in turn leads to an attack on the stick-man by a cripple whom Zolda has befriended; Massahood kills the cripple and is stoned to death by an angry crowd. Zolda, contrite, turns to Zampi and the novel ends with their re-union.

In the world around the two main characters we find expressed attitudes to relationships between men and women. There is, for example, a tale told by a bus driver of a man called Bullin who "used to like woman.....all kinds of woman". The driver goes on "I tried to tell him, 'Boy, is woman you like, is woman who go do for you' but he have hard ears.... he ain't listen to me". The unfortunate Bullin meets a pretty girl near a waterfall and "when he went to take she clothes off he bawl out like some old cattle.....The woman had one human leg and one horse leg..... She was a 'La Diabliesse' ". (1)

(1) Khan (op.cit) p.26

There is, throughout the novel a sense of distance between the brooding obeah man and the colour and life around him; it is the distance between a mind aware of the distinction between belief and truth and of the power of belief occasionally to become truth (in this case belief in the "supernatural") on the one hand, and on the other, a community which clings to its beliefs in the face of a reality which is presented as somehow inadequate at its core. The bus-driver is telling this story to Zampi whose involvement in obeah permits him no such simple acceptance of its miraculous powers. The effect is to enhance and emphasise this distance between the obeah man's critical awareness and the community's simple belief which, since it is a flight from reality, carries a degree of pathos.

Apart from the significance of the story of Bullin within the wider context of the novel, however, it is remarkable for the way it expresses the concept of woman as a potentially destructive natural force. It does so by placing the suspicion of women within the context of the terror of the unknown on which obeah depends (1) thus emphasising the degree of that suspicion. The idea of a natural force which is in no sense responsible for its actions recurs in Khan's characterisation of Zolda.

Zolda never appears to possess any drive or will independent of her instincts. One result is that the personality of Zolda which, if analysed, is little more than a complex of desires for external stimuli, appears inadequately realised by the novelist compared with the considerably more credible personality of the obeah man.

(1) See Roger Mais's Brother Man: Jesmina's reaction on discovering her sister practising obeah expresses this terror. p.96.
See also Jean Rhys's The Wide Sargasso Sea, p.97

Another result is that for the greater part of the novel, the relationships into which Zolda enters - often described as "love" - are no more complex in spite of Khan's occasional attempts to indicate otherwise, than what might result from simple sexual desire. Her relationship with Massahood proceeds on a most simplistic level of exaggerated sexual tension ending in disaster.

Massahood the stick-man, is the masculine equivalent of the pure physical power and sensuality of Zolda. Between them there is the attraction of elemental maleness for elemental femaleness. The relationship is expressed in terms of a physical need and in which Zolda's mind never really acquiesces and, more important, a powerful drive in Massahood's mind to subdue Zolda completely - a drive which makes no concessions to placating or pleasing her but seems to imply some resentment of any reaction on her part which may compromise his egoistic masculinity. When, for example, they are dancing before Zampi in the *Brittania*, Massahood slips his hand into the waist of her trousers, she bites him, and then rebukes him:

"The stick-man tensed the muscles of his breasts and quivered them in reply. His body seemed indeed to be carved from stone - amber brown. He knew the delight it had given women to stare at him, to touch him, 'That is the way woman like me and that is the way God make me. Is only you who 'fraid me but one day you go come beggin' with your tongue hanging down... And I going make you beg and beg... I going make you crawl on your hands and knees and beg me - wait, wait and see'." (1)

There is not in fact any evidence that Zolda is afraid of Massahood but the stick-man's pride in his manhood is menaced by Zolda's rejection.

(1) Khan (op.cit) p.55

Massahood proceeds to make Zolda even more angry and she has to make the conventional protest:

"You think is man I want....You think is man I hard up for ?" (1)

Massahood's reply is to the point:

"Doux-doux, I know you ain't had a man for a long time ... I could smell it in your mouth when you get so vex-up and heated."

The stick-man's crude jeering is based on the assumption that the attraction he feels to Zolda is part of some natural order which no individual resistance on her part can thwart:

"You could wait and I could wait longer...You know it does take fire to fight fire."

Massahood's assumption is not unlike the cliché of the American film-world, "this thing is bigger than both of us, baby, why fight it ?" The difference is that in Massahood's reasoning, 'this thing' is not love which is a many-splendoured thing. It is the physical need of a superbly masculine physique for a superbly feminine physique.

"If anyone spoke of tenderness to him he would laugh quietly all to himself. He knew the very fibre of a woman's nerve centre, he knew that it could not distinguish between pain and pleasure...all was one...all was love. Love was a sharp thorn gnawing in his thigh-bone. Woman was the only thing that could loosen the tightness in his loins." (2)

We begin to see that what Massahood means by 'love' cannot possibly be what Zolda associates with 'people in far-away places' in the quotation with which I began.

- (1) Ibid, p.56
- (2) Khan (op.cit) p.57

Khan attempts to complicate this simple relationship of hunter and hunted thus:

"The desire he felt for her was not singular, it had in it a complexity of motives. And then, which man could turn away from this creature whose every movement was calculated to house and harness all the desire a man could possess. There had always been a strange kind of antagonism, of friction, between himself and Zolda, yet together they elicited a kind of response from onlookers as they danced or fought or cursed each other." (1)

As it turns out, however, the simple 'desire' is complicated merely by a wish to use her for his struggle against Zampi's magic and by the challenge she represents to his egoistic (and, for that very reason, precarious) claim to be the very essence of virility. 'Love' at this point means very little more than sex:

"The stick man had known love. His experience was collected like the cream skimmed off the surface of a rich broth... It was clear to him from the very beginning that Zolda would come begging one day." (2)

The stick man is very much a part of the Carnival scene and his dancing and quarrels with Zolda belong to the sensual ethos of the Carnival. It is no accident therefore that the relationship leads to disaster for the novel opposes the purely sensual pleasures of the Carnival to the superior insight of the obeah man ("this island dead") making thereby an adverse comment on the festival.

(1) Khan (op.cit) p.165
(2) Ibid

Zampi, however, stands outside of this revelry and it is in Zolda's relationship with Zampi that Khan suggests something more than sexual attraction and tension. As the novel opens, Zampi has not danced or taken part in the Carnival for four years (p.10). During that last Carnival, he met Zolda. On the Ash Wednesday after the Carnival, he left her to become an obeah man (pp.30, 31). The emotional link between them during the novel thus depends on nostalgia for a short, idyllic relationship in the past. (1) Of that Ash Wednesday, we are told:

"It was the Ash Wednesday after Carnival, and after the fete and bacchanal, after the wallowing in rum, sin, and women, Zampi was seized by a mood. He felt that all about him was flat and colourless; even the thought of the body of the woman he loved left him cold." (2)

In this passage, the word "love" obviously means more than sexual attraction. That it is applied to a relationship no older than a single Carnival season suggests that it does not refer to the kind of affection developed during some process of growing acquaintance. The impression is soon strengthened by these words:

"A woman in love is in love twenty-four hours a day each day of the week, each day of the year. No dark of night, no fall of rain nor thunder-clap, injects the evanescence of the universe into her brain." (3)

In the above passage, the narrative reflects Zampi's thoughts as he wonders why, during their early relationship, "jealousy of the world's beauty" and thoughts of his own eventual death could drive all thought of "love" from his mind but never seemed to affect Zolda.

- (1) Carnival takes place over the Easter season and ends on Ash Wednesday. Zampi and Zolda have been apart for four years (p.126)
- (2) Khan (op.cit) p.30
- (3) Khan (op.cit) p.31

Their relationship, then, began before the chronological opening of the novel as a relationship of romantic love; Zampi and Zolda met and "fell in love". The bulk of the novel is concerned with their attempts to regain lost happiness.

Since Zolda's pride is hurt by Zampi's desertion and since she resents the obeahman's refusal to join her once again in the revelry of Carnival, her often expressed hatred of him is at once reinforced and undermined by the memory of their past happiness. She hates him rather more than she would if she were not trying to overcome a treacherous affection for him. At the same time, her display of independence is undermined by the fact that it is put on for his benefit. For example, she dances with Massahood in the Scorpion Tail while Zampi watches them:

"Each time Zolda's eyes caught Zampi's the obeahman tried to show no emotion . 'Dance your dance, sing your songWhen all over and done we go see what you really want'. And she hated him for this. She hated him for the look he threw at her and massahood bunching them together as true flesh of the Scorpion tail. But all of these were merely excuses for the one, the real reason why she hated him. And that was because the obeahman had made a woman of her. No man she ever knew could inspire the desire, the lust and love that sent her nerves cascading in a torrent of screams and passionate oblivion to all the world. With her eyes and her body she was telling him now that Massahood could, that she knew it in her body as only a woman does when she has met a man who could make her do anything. . . .Yet as she danced, she knew that she was dancing for Zampi. For if he had got up and left the Scorpion Tail at that moment, all of her actions would have been pointless." (1)

Zolda is plagued by contradictory impulses; on the one hand, a drive, created by hurt pride, to prove her independence of Zampi, and on the other, a longing for an earlier happiness with him and a feeling that "she belongs to him" (p.74).

(1) Khan (op.cit) pp.146, 147

Khan is most successful in expressing the conflict in Zolda's mind in dialogue. The tone of her speech, after Zampi drags her out of the Britannia and back to his hut, indicates her confusion and frustration:

" 'You comin' or you ain't comin' ?' he turned and asked her gruffly.

She hung back a few paces behind him, slashing at the bushes along the path with a switch she had picked up below. She stopped abruptly, her hand on her hip. 'Is so a man does get quarrelsome after living in the bush ?'

Zampi walked down to her. He wondered if something had not indeed happened to him since he came here and to hear someone else remark upon it troubled him even more.

'Yes! Is so a man does get quarrelsome... You want to go back ? Go! Next bus leaving in an hour.' He turned and began walking up the hill again.

'I didn't ask to come here, you know. You drag me...'
She was talking in that childish way she had which Zampi smile. Most people thought that she was filled with fire and a wild rage. No one would think that she could sound helpless.

'If I had any sense in my head I would never.....'
she mumbled, following him up to the hut." (1)

There is also a conflict in Zampi's mind. He has withdrawn from society because he senses, as he tells Zolda, that:

"It ain't have no place for we. The islands drowning and we going down with them - down, down, down We is nobody and we ain't have nowhere to go. Everything leave me with a cold, cold feeling in my insides and I ain't have no uses for you or nobody or nothing.... "(2)

On the other hand, he knows that "everybody need people, it ain't have nobody who ain't need somebody" (3). The withdrawal from society involves a withdrawal from Carnival, for he now sees the dancers as fools (p.10) who are engaged in a wild and futile search for refuge from the meaninglessness of their lives.

- (1) Khan (op.cit) pp, 59, 60
- (2) Ibid, pp. 66,67
- (3) Ibid, p.127

Since Zolda is very much a part of the Carnival scene, withdrawal from the festival's self-destructive sensuality entails an attitude of distrust towards her. When at his hut, she tells him that she thinks he is afraid of something inside himself, he replies:

"I frighten, all right, I frighten like hell. I 'fraid to dead. I 'fraid to come into the world and go out of it like Hop-and-Drop and Massahood and you." (1)

"Yes, Zolda, I 'fraid, people like you. You livin' from day to day like if you goin' to dead tomorrow. You want to squeeze everything out of every minute of the day." (2)

However, he too has a memory of past happiness and so he can neither accept her as she is nor let her go free to someone else. She complains:

' "It look as if you come to hate me for all the things you liked me for in the beginning. You like the way I dance, the way I sing, the way my voice sound when I laugh, you like the way my body move, and now"

Zampi pushed the cinders of the dying fire as he listened to her....

"And then, after you have me, after you know that I belong to you, you begin to wonder all kinds of things; who I do this for, who I do that with. The same thing that you love me for, as soon as I give it to you, it look as if it turn you sour. The same foolishness that I used to listen, make you laugh, make you happy, and then later on you say that I foolish and slack. What a woman have to do to please a man in this world at all?" '

What she said had some truth, Zampi reflected as he stared into the fire, puzzled. After she was his he did not care ever to do that kind of frantic dance with her, nor did he want her to dance that way with anyone else. (3)

- (1) Khan (op.cit) p.67
- (2) Ibid, p.68
- (3) Khan (op.cit) p.74

Because the characters are driven by contradictory impulses towards and away from each other, Khan is able to express their emotions in terms of the antagonism and attraction of their sexuality. The relationship of Zampi and Zolda, for the greater part of the novel, has all the strife and tension of Zolda's relationship with Massahood and is similarly expressed in terms of a vigorous sexuality. The difference is that, in the case of Zampi and Zolda, the plot gives the sexual tension a deeper significance. The tension is meant to reflect an underlying emotional dilemma between desired independence and a continuing attraction based on the memory of a shared idyllic experience.

When Zampi takes Zolda back to his hut, in the early part of the novel, and they make love after a violent struggle, one is aware that the physical conflict expresses these underlying emotional dilemmas on both sides. Zolda says:

" 'If you ask me, it look like you ain't a man no more
....that is the whole thing that wrong with you.'
The obeah man stood up now, he jumped from the stone he sat on.

'You think I is not a man... that what you think?'
He threw one arm round her bosom, gripping her breast with a kind of savage love. With the other hand he ripped the front flap of her trousers and the four buttons that held it snapped and rolled away in the grass. She hammered upon his shoulders with slow, deliberate blows. With each blow of her clenched fist Zampi felt his arms weaken, but he held on to her breast so firmly he could feel the hard meshwork of muscle fibre between his fingers. He knew that he would have to throw her on the ground before her deadening blows could numb his arm.

'I hate you.....I hate you so bad ! ' she screamed at him, her legs firm on the ground, digging into the earth as she fought.

In a flash Zampi's hand had shot into the flap of her trousers. He felt her knees buckle suddenly as her defences shifted from one part of her body to another. He pushed with all his weight against her and they were both on the ground. Their thighs locked in love beside the fire on the cool earth that was beginning to dampen with the heavy fall of dew. He felt his face wet against the side of hers, he felt her fire die, he heard her say, 'Love me Zampi.....love me.....just make love to me.' " (1)

The incident as described is entirely credible and it is important to note Khan's control of his style. The description of the sexual relationship falls neither into cheap eroticism nor coy idealising. The credibility of the description of sexual conflict and tension ensures that the underlying ambivalent attitudes of the characters are presented in a convincing way. However, later in the novel, there is a reconciliation between Zolda and Zampi. Beyond this point, the author faces the task of describing the re-established love-relationship. . As the emotional ambivalence ends, the antagonism and attraction of pure sexual desire is no longer an available expression of the characters' experience. It is significant, in view of my earlier remarks about the relevance of romantic love to novels set in the West Indian working-class, that the description of the re-established love-relationship is the point at which the narrative ceases to be convincing and Khan's style degenerates to the level of cheap love-story writing.

We are told that:

"In her own way (Zolda) saw now what Zampi must have felt, she could understand why he had taken himself away from the Britannia and the Scorpion Tail and the La Basse. There was only one reason why Zampi came to the city, and Zolda knew it. The reason was love, and that was all there was, after all." (1)

The cavalier Beat-Generation diction of "that was all there was" has a certain ring of falsity which is an omen of what is to come. For the moment, the author continues to use sexual desire as an expression of other emotions:

(1) Khan (op.cit) p.186

"In his presence now, she felt that he had communion, power over the earth, and she felt pleasure in her bosom, in her thighs, in the nipples of her breasts, she felt a strange pleasure in the thought that this man was hers, had always wanted her, had come out of the bush hungry with desire to claim her. In this moment.....when she wept and cried, she wished to throw herself in his arms, to have him possess her with thrusts like lightning bolts that would scorch her loins." (1)

In spite of the continued sensuality an important change has occurred. In the sex act portrayed earlier in the novel, there was the strife and co-operation of equals - of equally powerful animals. Even in Zolda's cry, "Bite my breasts, Zampi" (p.69) there was none of the passivity which is now apparent. Along with a new submissiveness on the part of the woman, a new idealisation of sex, a marked tendency to over-write has crept in - the scorching "thrusts like lightning bolts" are an obvious example. Although the violence and sensuality remain, a wholly new atmosphere is being constructed. At the end of the novel, the change is complete. Some particularly bad writing suggests that Khan is not at home with the new dispensation or, at any rate, not sufficiently in control of his material to avoid the tone of one of the less sophisticated love-story writers:

"Let a firefly glow in the evening...let a bullfrog call, let the crickets scratch their thighs to screeching, let love live like a lonely lost thing locked up in the heart."

The embarrassing falsity of the passage is significant. The love-ideal is about to make its appearance at precisely the point at which the author's ability to distinguish between emotion and mawkishness is leaving something to be desired.

(1) Khan (op.cit) p.192

As the relationship changes, a radical change takes place in the personality of Zolda. She takes on a girlish submissiveness, her desires become totally subordinate to the will of Zampi. Their earlier relationship of strife was for the most part, a relationship between two adult individuals. Within the new relationship Zampi has a kind of parental authority which Zolda accepts absolutely. The atmosphere of romance which Khan is constructing does not permit even the possibility of disagreement and so Zolda's status as an independent personality is sacrificed to provide the required harmony.

Zampi asks Zolda whether there is anything in her hut that she needs. She chooses the old paraffin lamp that, long ago, she had said she would light only during his visits:

" 'It have anything in this hut that you really want..... that you can't do without? ' Zampi asked. She looked from one corner of the room to another, then she looked at Zampi and nodded. 'Come on and let we go, then' he said as he watched her hesitating, pleading with her eyes. Yes, there was something she wanted to take with her. Zampi nodded to her, then she went and took the red hurricane lamp filled with paraffin. She held it close to her bosom with a childish look of embarrassment." (1)

Zampi has tamed his woman; she dares not even plead with more than her eyes. The plot provides motivation for the change in Zolda's attitudes; Massahood has just been stoned to death after killing the cripple and Zolda experiences a kind of awakening:

"All the recklessness that drove her left her now and she felt as though she were to be haunted by the emptiness, the hollowness, the sight of two dead men. In her own way, she now saw what Zampi must have felt." (2)

(1) Khan (op.cit) p.192
(2) Ibid, p.186

Nevertheless, the difference between Zolda before the murder and after it is a more profound one than either the probable trauma of the event or the psychology of the character can account for. I suggest that this is because the relationship has moved from one mode to another. What we see before the murder is a relationship which we meet repeatedly in the West Indian novel and which seems to grow from the society and its art. What we see after the murder is a relationship which, at first, retains its elements of violent sensuality then becomes "romantic love" in the conventional sense. There is a corresponding change in the personality of Zolda from frustrated self-seeking to shy submission. The movement from a failure of understanding to a revelation within Zolda's mind, that movement which should account for the change in her attitudes is simply not presented in sufficient detail nor with sufficient clarity to provide that naturalistic basis of motivation which would indicate an evolution rather than a transformation of character. Thus the events in the hut assume an almost transcendental importance - tran^spending, that is, their objective significance; Massahood has, not surprisingly, tried to rape Zolda and the cripple has wounded him, and inevitably been killed. Of course these events are more significant within the terms of the entire novel since they result from what are presented as the false values of Carnival and the "dead island" where time has stopped. However, in the absence of any but a very external approach to Zolda by the author, this significance does not constitute effective character motivation. We are left with the appearance, at the end of the novel of a new Zolda, capable of a "childish look of embarrassment".

Love has ceased to mean, as it did for Massahood, "a sharp thorn
growing in the thigh-bone". Love is now "a lonely lost thing
locked up in the heart", a vision of perfect harmony which, in
this West Indian novel, can be sustained only at the expense of
credible and consistent characterisation.

The appearance of romantic love in The Obeah man has,
therefore, three important results. Firstly, it leads to a
dislocation in the novel as far as the portrayal of Zolda's
character is concerned. It is accompanied by a failure of the
novelists' technique which suggests that the link between the
ideal and ^{the} world Khan has created is not a comfortable one.
Finally and most importantly, it sets up a contrast by which
the purely sexual relationship of Zolda and Massahood which the
plot shows as leading to disaster, partakes of the negative,
even destructive nature that Khan ascribes to the Carnival.-

Sylvia and The Games were Coming

The negative nature of the antagonism and tension of purely sexual relationships very easily becomes associated with some malaise seen in the society as a whole. In other words, a critical attitude to society can become focussed in an exaggeratedly critical attitude to a type of human relationship.

So in Edgar Mittelholzer's novel Sylvia (1) the problems of a colonial society in difficult economic times are reflected in the central character's suffering and frustration, which is seen as a failure of human relationships. Sylvia is the daughter of an Englishman, Grantley Russell, and a working-class Guyanese woman, Charlotte. She grows up with a strong attachment to her English father and an increasing dislike (which becomes revulsion) of her working-class mother. After his marriage, Russell continues to be sexually active with a variety of women and is eventually murdered. Russell's estate is administered by his associate, Knight, who robs the widow and daughter of most of their money. War breaks out, making their poverty greater and Knight makes it clear that any financial help to Sylvia and her mother depends on her willingness to reciprocate with sexual favours. She refuses to submit and, partly to earn extra money and partly to escape her mother she takes a job. She has to choose between being sexually exploited by her employer, Dikran, and losing her much needed income - she chooses the latter.

(1) Sylvia E. Mittelholzer, London 1953 (page references are to the Four Square edition, published, 1965)

A middle-class boy whom she had met at a party, Benson Riego, returns home on leave. She tries unsuccessfully to find solace in a relationship with him but his excessively inhibited behaviour leads her only to frustration. At the end of the novel, weakened by malnutrition, she dies of an illness which she has deliberately contracted. There is a superficial resemblance (poverty, painfully earned financial independence, collapsing personal relationships) between the events of Sylvia's life and those of Ursula's in The Rainbow. The difference is that Ursula strives to retain her independence in the face of relationships which tend to make her lose it, whereas Sylvia has no such intention and is, if anything, trying to do the opposite, that is, to lose her burdensome independence.

This is a novel in which many different characters in widely differing situations find their individual wills thwarted by hostile circumstances. Love appears as the hidden criterion by which relationships begun under compulsion are judged; a process which brings in its train a critical comment on the social situation which has destroyed individual freedom of action. For instance, Russell, the adored father, tells Sylvia to "marry for love", a statement which points inevitably to his own unfortunate marriage to Charlotte which he entered into because she was pregnant. His own moral defencelessness in the confrontation with Charlotte and her relative before the marriage derives from the uncomfortable (for him) inequality of their social status, financial means and education which tend to make him appear as exploiter - this may be deduced from the fact that, as I have indicated, it is not at all usual in Charlotte's social milieu for pregnancy to be regarded as sufficient reason for marriage, a fact Mittelholzer must have known.

There is an intricate and subtle range of associations between forms of Guyanese dialect and social levels; Mittelholzer's sensitivity to these connections never failed him, so that every statement by Charlotte (in particular, her habit of exclaiming "Ow!") emphasises the vast disparity in social status between herself and her husband and daughter. Their marriage thus presents in microcosm the gap in education and means between two social levels that may as well be different worlds. The marriage derives both its unworkable nature and its very *raison d'etre* from that social situation. Russell is a victim as Charlotte is a victim but he is the articulate one and he alone can suggest the alternative to Sylvia - "marry for love".

Sylvia later finds that she "does not love" her friend Milton but would have liked to have him make love to her. The distinction is relevant to the relationship she does have with Benson Riego, which is more than friendship, and in which Sylvia's predatory sexuality in conflict with Benson's middle-class inhibition leads directly to the final disaster.

Sylvia's first experience of external compulsion over-riding individual will and desire is her friend Naomi's despair at having to marry Gregory; the particularly unfortunate aspect of that affair being that she does not love him. The word "love" re-appears as the alternative which is not actually presented in the action or plot and by reference to which the reality appears inadequate. What actually is presented as a love-relationship is much the same as what Khan presents - sexual tension, aggression and attraction.

Naomi is in love with Jerry, as she tells Sylvia and we have her word for it that Jerry loves her. The nature of this love is made clear in a particularly vivid scene:

"Naomi whimpered and Jerry grasped her by both shoulders and pulled her up at one heave. Sylvia could hear Naomi's breath coming in laboured rasps. Jerry flung her down upon the bed, pummelled her with his fists in silent savagery. Sylvia cried out. Neither Jerry nor Naomi heeded her. She might have been ten miles off. Naomi uttered low moans. Jerry continued to smash into her. Sylvia, of a sudden, took note of the expression on Naomi's face. Naomi's lips were slightly parted and the light in her eyes revealed pleasure. A deep luxurious pleasure. Her body seemed to writhe and quake in spasm after spasm of delight at every blow Jerry struck. 'But...' The word came out, before Sylvia could check it. Then her throat went dry. Trembling, she turned and hurried away." (1)

Sylvia's reaction is not that of a "normal" person witnessing an "abnormal" situation but, so the novel seems to indicate, that of a naive child seeing the adult world for the first time. A good deal of stress is laid on the importance of not being naive. Naomi is forever regarding Sylvia's enquiries with amused condescension and Sylvia's contempt for Benson's clumsy kisses is made clear. In this particular case, when Sylvia tells her father about the incident, Russell's reaction is amusement. Thus we may dismiss any suspicion that this is merely, in Louis James's phrase, "psychb-analysts' material without the controlling vision of the psychoanalyst." It is, in the terms of the novel, a normal situation. The relationship in its desired aggression is but a realisation in an extreme form of the potentialities for strife, and violence in the man-woman relationship as found in West Indian peasant society and West Indian art.

(1) Mittelholzer (op.cit) p.82.

Russell tells Sylvia to marry for love; immediately after this he tells her that he is about to set off for Dixie to meet Daphne, his latest mistress. Sylvia asks why he continues to take women to Dixie if, as he says, he finds them monotonous;

"He guffawed in that way that always seemed obscure. It repelled and fascinated her, made her heart beat fast in anticipation of unknown delights 'A man has to have a woman once or twice a week, Goo' " (1)

The theoretical force of the ideal of love immediately gives way to the physical need regarded as natural and irresistible. Russell with his unrestrained crudity embodies this physical force at least for Sylvia and we remember that she is strongly attracted physically to her father. This attraction, when his laughter brings the mysterious sensuality to a focus is presumably what repelled and fascinated her. Earlier her father becomes impatient with her and

"She felt as though he'd struck her on the mouth but she did not mind. A cringing delight moved within her. She stiffened, her lips parting in dismay."

A good deal of this relationship is the result of Mittelholzer's dabbling in psychoanalysis (Russell is usually ready with a glib explanation; he says Naomi is a masochist and all women are masochists, Sylvia has an Oedipus complex and everyone else does and so on.) My point is, however, that this stress on violence and on self-imposed strictures on ultimately uncontrollable need fits easily into the novel for reasons not confined to Mittelholzer's particular preoccupations. The author seems to say here, as "Sparrow" did, "every now and then cuff them down; they love you long and they love you strong."

(1) Mittelholzer (op.cit) p.112

Sylvia's reaction is dismay because her bourgeois sensibility cannot come to terms with her own sexuality. This dilemma is the basis of her whole struggle in life, so that a social factor, the uneasy co-existence of "a Victorian ideal of conduct" (1) with the reality of a proletarian society as seen in Jerry and Naomi, expresses itself in a range of frustrating relationships.

Sylvia's struggle is against a repressed sexuality. The product of bourgeois values operating in a jungle situation caused by the war - in which such values are out of their natural context. Sylvia has been called a middle-class heroine. This description can be misleading. Her mother is decidedly not middle-class and the psychological stresses in her mind are intensified by the precariousness of her social situation. The normal middle-class struggle against "slipping back" is even more desperate because of the proximity of the values of the marketplace in the form of Charlotte. Sylvia is middle-class at a time and in a place that make the term treacherous. In any case, the initial resistance to Mittelholzer's work in Guyana - necessarily middle-class resistance since it was that of an articulate reading public - though ostensibly based on an unacceptable explicitness about sex was at least partly discomfort caused by his refusal to accept the middle-class image of itself. Mittelholzer saw the vast gap between the Victorian ideal which the middle-class pretended to live, the reality, the precariousness of status in a colonial situation and the essential similarity in actual life-style between the various levels. For reasons of his own, which may be guessed at in the light of his own life-story, he projected a good deal of "working-class attitudes" into the behaviour of "middle-class" characters.

(1) The phrase is Madeline Kerr's (op.cit) p.34

At the time of which he was writing the blurred divisions were even more important, the vigorously maintained claims of status even more rigid than they would be for a novelist writing today. This is why beneath the superficial differences, Sylvia and Zolda have such similar reflexes in face of difficulty. Louis James's introduction to "The Islands in Between" contains an apparent contradiction which is revealing.

".....she (Sylvia) is trapped by Georgetown society. Olive-skinned, she is the child of a white father and a mother who is a mixture of Negro and Arawak Indian. When her father dies she can fit into no class..... Sylvia retains a major claim on our attention because the key is minor, the key of West-Indian middle-class tragedies that Mittelholzer knew as his own." (1)

Thus the term "middle-class" has to be regarded with suspicion here; in Sylvia's case it refers to her values but not to her life-style and social connections which "fit into no class".

Out of the emphasised tensions and destructiveness of man-woman relationships in the West Indian novel and also out of attitudes to women inherent in West Indian society and art (calypso, folk songs), a type of heroine has evolved. Zolda as we see her for the greater part of The Obeah Man conforms to this type. In her relationship with Massahood and, most of the time, her relationship with Zampi, she shows essential characteristics. These are that she is driven by circumstances to oppose what she deeply wants, to enter into relationships with men in which she develops an antagonism to them, an antagonism which expresses itself, usually in sex; she cannot help acting as she does, she is a type of natural force.

(1) The Islands in Between, p.40

Zolda acquires a sense that she is "in some way responsible" for what happens but "Zampi was right when he said it was not her fault. She loved him..for the feeling he gave her of not being directly at fault." This natural forde is usually dangerous, often, as in The Obeah Man, bringing about the tragic situation, which endangers the male characters. (Madeline Kerr's remarks about male fear of a dominating female are apposite) The relationships into which the typical character enters are characterised by tension, distrust and a desperate search on her part for something which eludes her. A vigorous sensuality is the sole expression of attraction and sometimes of strife. Particular characters, of course, deviate from this pattern in one direction or another. The association of a powerful sexuality with the West Indian woman occurs in the literature of the entire region and not just in that of the "English-speaking" status. Coulthard in Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature refers in "The Coloured Woman in Caribbean poetry" to the sometimes unintentionally comic comparisons of women with vegetables in contrast to the usual European tendency to refer to flowers and says:

"There is a significant change of emphasis in the attitude of the woman for while flowers are appreciated for their beauty of shape and colour, fruits and vegetables are eaten so that the use of fruit-analogies would seem to reflect a different attitude, an attitude of frank sensuality which - as is clear from the literary output of the Caribbean - is perhaps the predominant note in the West Indian attitude to life."

Sylvia and Zolda belong to a common mould in that they are both like missiles operating on an erratic course. Both possess a quality which can be dangerous (physical attractiveness in both cases) and both are driven by circumstances and by their own natures, without any malevolent aims, to injure themselves and others.

Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature: G.R. Coulthard: London, 1962. This book is primarily concerned with French and Spanish West Indian Literature.

Kenneth Ramchand refers to the fictional image of the mulatto woman as "socially insecure and sexually overcharged" and sees Sylvia as a part of this pattern. However he admits that "Sylvia's angst-ridden sensibility is portrayed as having to do with the spirit of her time not with the fact of her mixed blood." (1)

Ramchand also sees Rachel in John Hearne's The Faces of Love as an example. However he remarks in passing that Stefan Mahler in The Land of the Living "puts his life together again in the warmth of Bernice's generous and exemplary love" (2) ignoring the fact that Bernice Heneky is also a mulatto. Ramchand's view of the mulatto has some truth, especially in Alvin Bennett's God the Stonebreaker but is without textual evidence in other cases. The extreme vulnerability and sexual excess which he sees in the mulatto heroines can be seen in heroines not specifically presented as mulatto - such as Zolda - and in heroines almost certainly not mulatto, such as Stella in Austin Clarke's Survivors of the Crossing. It is my contention that these qualities belong to a West Indian view of women in general. A certain type of heroine has evolved in the novel partly out of fidelity to a point of view existing in the society, and partly because the frequent emphasis on relationships of extreme sexual aggression favours the portrayal of women as dangerous in their insecurity.

The situation in which Sylvia finds herself is brought about by a collision of bourgeois values with the exigencies of an enforced working-class existence. Sylvia is one of Mittelholzer's many portrayals of the tortured psyche, not so much an abnormality as a sympathetically depicted realisation of dark and unpleasant potentialities in any mind.

(1) Ramchand (op.cit) p.44
(2) Ibid, p.48

Here I would point out Louis James's remarks in The Islands in Between which connect Mittelholzer and other Guyanese writers with "an overwhelming awareness of the mass of South America which they feel as a potent presence beckoning beyond experience into the unknown". (1) Certainly the novels of the Kaywana series all place a violent past in the Guyanese interior. The connection between Mittelholzer's nationality and novels such as Of Trees and the Sea, Thunder Returning and Eltons brody which search a mental landscape to find the same violence and torture in "the unknown" does not seem fanciful. The novels of Mittelholzer, like those of Harris, seem ^sso clearly a product of a particular landscape that one may be excused for promoting speculation almost to the status of proof.

Making due allowance, however, for Mittelholzer's concern with the limits of psychological normality, we may now see how Sylvia fits the image of the West Indian heroine which I am tracing. The repressed sexuality is easily seen. Because of her middle-class ideals, Sylvia can yield neither to Knight nor to Dikran, there is also the fact that her father has told her to resist Knight because "He's foul". On the other hand, no such prohibition applies to Dikran and he is also unsuccessful. Louis James says of Knight that Sylvia cannot take this, her one chance, since Knight is "repulsive to her not only physically but because he has cheated first her father and then her of all they have." Surely this over-simplifies the situation and ignores the nuances of Mittelholzer's portrayal of the frustrated personality. For Sylvia, revulsion is never very far from fascination.

(1) James (op.cit.) p.42.

"She cupped her breasts. They were still upright. Still jutted far out. "Oh I'm attractive, I know I'm attractive."
 A car tooted distantly.
 Mr. Knight..... Did he have hair on his paunch ?
 Oh heavens ! Oh heavens ! Please, Sylvia, calm !
 The bed creaked again.
 A fat paunch rubbing slowly....." (1)

Sylvia is engaged in admiring herself when she thinks of Knight. The effect is to relate her thoughts about his paunch and intercourse with him not to economic problems but to the sexual need of which her narcissism is only one manifestation. The phrase "A fat paunch rubbing slowly" is, as a result of this context, charged with subtle suggestions of desire as well as disgust,

The process is even clearer in the case of Dikran. The following extract is a "dialogue" between Sylvia and the Brown Jumbie-man.

" 'That dirty beast! '
 'But he's going to get you before long! How are you going to fight him ? It's either that or lose you ze job ?'
 'Then I'll lose it ! I prefer to die than have him with me in a car.'
 'Hee hee! You're a poor girl now, though. Don't forget. And how about Dave ? Pocket money. No use ! New policy or no new policy, he'll get you. Ze dr-rive ! Straight to Dixie-Daddy's old haunt. Down with the panties ! Present arms ! Legs !
 'Oh, leave me in peace ! Leave me in peace ! ' " (2)

The Brown Jumbie-men are, of course, a part of Sylvia's own mind. The relish they show for the process of "giving in" to Mr. Dikran^{is} part of her own attitude. The fact that Dixie is "Daddy's old haunt" has its significance in view of her Oedipus complex.

- (1) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.239
 (2) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.154

The exchange is between Sylvia, the respectable colonial middle-class woman and Sylvia, the woman whose sexuality has been denied until it expresses itself in desperation in her encounter with Benson Riego. Once the two sides of the dialogue are seen as aspects of her personality, the theme of fascinated revulsion becomes clearest in this passage.

It is this confusion of "ingrowing virginity", sexual need and values which conflict with her financial situation that places Sylvia at the mercy of circumstances. In addition, she is rather a weak personality as is shown by her attempts to put Janie and Sarah out of her house - Milton does, in fact, say that she inherited a weak character from her mother. Sylvia, like Zolda, is lacking in will.

The effect of this weakness is to endanger, first of all, herself - her own pride is threatened by the courses she has to take and her survival is placed in doubt. Her suppressed sexuality contrasts with David's school-boy innocence; when her sexuality turns in his direction, it has a certain threatening aspect, in spite of herself, in the face of his youth. It is Benson Riego, however, who is most affected by her uncontrolled ⁱⁿ complex of forces.

Sylvia is almost predatory in her approach to Benson (whom she "does not love") because Benson's rather staid notions of good behaviour are interpreted as naivete and a lack of virility in Sylvia's mind. When they are about to take a swim and she has undressed, the "Brown Jumbie-men" tell her to run out naked before him. At another point, she has a strong desire to force his hand between her breasts. Benson himself appears naive or even stupid but Sylvia's attitude to their relationship is more self-centred and betrays a more forceful antagonism to him than the frustrations of the situation seem to warrant.

"She knew that he attracted her only physically. Her body responded to him but her spirit regarded him with a sneer." (1)

Sylvia's need for Benson is, then, purely sexual. When eventually she supposes she is about to lose her virginity to him, in a perhaps unintentionally comic scene in which she recites the *Nunc Dimittis* to herself while waiting, her mind is consumed by anticipation and Benson seems curiously instrumental, almost incidental to the event. He is not the sort of character who, in this type of relationship, appears to be getting his just deserts. Characterisation, in his case is not much more than outline but the character is a sympathetic one. Sylvia's use of him as mere available genitalia is thus all the more a question of the predatory female (not, I repeat, by malice but by nature and circumstance) versus the inadequately protected male. Like Zolda, she knows that none of what happens is her "fault". She simply has "a weak character." This weakness, at least as far as her relationship with Benson is concerned but also in her encounters with Knight and Dikran, may easily be related to the glib psycho-analytical terms which appear in the novel. Yet when one considers that Sylvia is masochist, a Narcissist and a sufferer from an Oedipus complex, the sheer weight of simplistic psychological categories staggers the imagination and reduces their effectiveness and their validity.

It is also possible to see this weakness as part of a dramatisation of the issue of heredity against environment which Gregory and Milton discuss near the end of the novel;

(1) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.286

it is yet another of the psychoanalytical concerns that appear in the book. Her intense sexuality, one may argue, is, in the terms of this rather simplified psychological system, an inheritance from Russell as weakness of character is an inheritance from Charlotte, and the tragedy of Sylvia is the fact that hostile circumstances (poverty and the war) combine with hereditary weakness. It is clear from the Kaywana novels, from Thunder Returning and from Of Trees and the Sea that heredity was a special concern of Mittelholzer's. In Sylvia, however, the issue, although suggested in details elsewhere in the novel is very much concentrated in the debate between Milton and Gregory. It does not grow naturally out of the narrative; that is, the fact of their holding such a discussion at all is sufficiently lacking in verisimilitude to make their discussion stand out of the story and bear almost the same relation to the rest of the novel as a Chorus does to a Greek play. This comparison is a slight exaggeration, but the debate has ritual overtones suggestive of convention rather than a continuation of the same level of realism. The issue of heredity does not express itself naturally within the narrative. It is, therefore not unreasonable, when other West Indian novels are taken into account, to postulate a place for Sylvia's personality within a wider pattern that goes beyond this particular novel.

Romantic love appears in The Obeah man and is not actually presented in Sylvia. The effect, however is the same. In both novels the word "love" is made to impart an ideal of happiness, explicit in the case of Khan's novel, implicit in Mittelholzer's, by reference to which the sexual tensions of the man-woman relationships in the novels appear as negative and destructive, bringing to a focus inadequacies portrayed in the social situations with which the authors deal.

Even when it is explicit, as in The Obeah Man, Khan is unable to make a convincing portrayal of it in the context of the West Indian working-class situation.

Michael Anthony's novel The Games were coming (1) sets a relationship between two young people, Sylvia and Leon, against a background of cycling competitions and Carnival in Trinidad. Leon is dedicated to his athletic task which excludes sexual relations with Sylvia. Sylvia becomes increasingly frustrated by this situation and eventually gives in to her employer, Mr. Mohansingh. She becomes pregnant and forms a plan to marry Leon and to convince him that the child is his. Leon agrees to marry her after the games but, unknown to Sylvia, the marriage depends on his winning at the games. The novel ends with the race on which all hangs and it remains uncertain whether or not Leon wins, although it seems likely that he does.

To reduce the plot to its bare bones in this way is to see at once that the situation has a good deal in common with that of Sylvia. A very minor incident in the novel is revealing. One of the young cyclists, "Iron-man" Hamille meets Sylvia's friend May while both of them are looking at preparations for Jour Ouvert:

"At first she had taken him for a shark but he was nothing of the sort.... in truth, he was only a shy man." (2)

Hamille soon sees a chance to meet her at a dance.

"His head was filled with her. Now he saw an opening and he tried hard to appear calm. 'Is that a promise May?' His voice trembled a little." (3)

(1) The Games were coming, M. Anthony, London, 1963.
(2) and (3) " " " " pp. 106, 107

To all appearances, this is the beginning of a stereotyped adolescent idyll. It continues in this vein, with May teasing Hamille about a secret liking for Sylvia and letting some jealousy show.

" he said in a low voice 'Girl, if you know who I really like.'

'Who?'

Then there was a silence. Then he laughed. Then she burst out laughing." (1)

One is deceived into accepting May's view of the situation and of Hamille - that he is "only a shy man". However, Hamille's head is "busy with plans" and he tries forthwith to put one into execution by taking her home with him. She refuses.

" 'Oh God May', he whispered, 'you is such a nice girl'.

'Yes', she said, 'but you don't want a nice girl.

You want a whore ! '

And afterwards, there was silence." (2)

The conclusion is not a necessary one, nor for that matter, is the inclusion of the episode in the novel essential. A carefully constructed atmosphere of youthful romance is introduced only to fade into exploitative sexuality. The incident is the reverse of the plot of The Obeah Man which turns exploitative sexuality, or, at least, antagonistic sexuality, into romance. The difference is also one of credibility for Antony's narrative is closer to the reality of the society in which his novel is set. This is not to say that there is anything unusual in an adolescent attempt to gain sexual experience; the significance of the incident lies in Antony's presentation of it. By keeping the reader ignorant, until the very end, of Hamille's actual intentions Antony is able to suggest emotions other than those of simple sexuality (the trembling voice, his head full of her); the distinction is the familiar one of love as opposed to lust, of emotional and physical as opposed to purely physical attraction and motivation. At the end, he chooses to destroy this illusion;

(1) Antony (op.cit.) pp.109 (2) p.112

the trembling voice appears as no more than an expression of the excitement of the hunt, pursuit of sexual conquest. The incident serves to re-inforce the self-centredness, the sensuality and the antagonism of the more central relationship of Leon and Sylvia and it does so by aiding in the presentation of the implied alternative -romantic love - which as in Sylvia and The Obeah Man appears as a criterion. Sylvia has her own solution to the problem of love:

"Was she in love with him? She asked herself the question firmly now....She did not know. She had to be frank and admit she did not know. She stood up.... thinking very deeply on this. Time was when she never had to ask herself such a question. She had only known it was so. Now she asked herself where had all this love gone to. She didn't know the answer. You love the man she told herself. And she replied, Maybe Maybe was always a good answer. She leaned against the counter again and this time she said aloud 'Girl, you is a real cool girl, you know that?' The thought brightened her." (1)

The significant^{ie} sentence is "Time was when she never had to ask herself such a question. Antony presents this relationship as the aftermath of a romantic situation but does not depict the romantic situation itself. What we do see is a development in the personality of the heroine from uncaring simple-mindedness to callousness - a development brought about by circumstances which she is wholly incapable of controlling. The circumstances are those that result from the conflict of her sexual desire with Leon's athletic aspirations.

"She had often asked herself why it was she had had a boyfriend at all. Of course he used to be all right - he used to be fine, but it was a different Leon now. But she had carried on, cool and easy as usual. But she knew it was just a matter of form to tell anybody she had a boy friend. Not that she despised him. On the contrary, she was very fond of him."

(1) (2) Anthony (op.cit. pp.67 68.

Anthony's technique often depicts the rise of hidden truth or half-truth in Sylvia's mind followed by their immediate repression. Subsequent events indicate that "despise" is too strong a word for Sylvia's feelings. Nevertheless, she is driven to doubt the nature of his sexuality; at one point she thinks "bicycle is his woman" (1) and she knew a deep satisfaction for having said this. Later she refuses to massage his legs shouting "let your bike do it. That's your bleddy wife ! " In a West Indian ethos which places a high premium on virility the charge has more force than it may seem to do (Naipaul has his Mystic Masseur, Ganesh Ramsumair, cure a Trinidad character called "Lover Boy, a racing cyclist, of "falling in love with his cycle and making love to it in a curious way." It may be that the accusation against cyclists is a well known one in these circles; this would detract only slightly from the force of the charge.) Contempt, however, does not exclude powerful sexual attraction.

"Inside her there was welling up a strange excitement, more powerful than the excitement of Carnival, and she understood that her feelings for Leon had not fled and that he alone could pile up that sort of emotion in her." (2)

The situation, - Sylvia massaging Leon's legs, and the motivation, Sylvia's re-awakened sexual need combine to make Leon's superior value, expressed at this point amount to superior physical desirability in Sylvia's eyes just as the language of The Obeah Man for the greater part of the novel makes Zampi's value to Zolda an issue of superior sexuality.

(1) Ibid, p.119

(2) Anthony (op.cit,) p.151

If Sylvia does not despise Leon, she is very close to contempt. Not surprisingly, therefore, their relationship alternates between physical need and strife: one example is Sylvia's massaging of his legs; she feels "a strange kind of excitement" that only he could summon; she kisses him and tells him she is his girl. She then finds that he still places his athletic victory before her physical need and refuses to massage his legs and:

".... he had sprung up into a sitting position. His arm was flung back to slap her 'Shut your blasted mouth', he said, 'Rub the blasted legs for me.' " (1)

Their love, selfish and strife-ridden, leads inevitably to the final betrayal, kept in being only by the powerful physical attraction between them. Antony's Sylvia, like Mittelholzer's is "a weak character" she is driven by circumstances. In the two Sylvias and in Zolda this susceptibility to the force of circumstances derives from a certain simple-mindedness. They have so little controlling awareness that they become the agents through whom a variety of malign factors in the environment endanger or injure male characters. Thus when one comes to the planned deception of Leon by Sylvia it has become possible to say of Sylvia as Khan says of Zolda that what happened was not entirely her fault, it was in her nature that the fault lay.

"She was not embarrassed about... the times she had spend with (Mohansingh) after the shop was shut. She thought now of what had gone on and she was almost completely unashamed.... she knew she would do it again. There was something in this that she genuinely feared; - this web of fascination that the store-owner had woven round her." (2)

- (1) Anthony (op.cit.) pp.154, 155
(2) Anthony (op.cit.) p.147

With the words "this web of fascination", Anthony excludes moral choice from Sylvia's actions and establishes her as an agent of forces other than her own will. Lest we should think that the cause lay in ~~Mohansingh's~~ ^{Mohansingh's} physical attributes the author makes it clear that Sylvia cannot be sure whether or not the same thing would have happened with any other man and that she does not know whether this fascination was caused by her employer or "whipped up in her own mind." (1) In fact the cause is the familiar combination of weak personality and hostile circumstances. By comparison, Leon is the strong personality who will not sacrifice his athletic victory to his sexual need.

"If this girl had any sense she would see that they were both in the same position. Only he was stronger and could fight himself." (2)

As usual, the superior moral strength of the male is no refuge in the face of this combination of factors. Anthony conveys Sylvia's simplicity by narrative which echoes her thoughts ("Maybe was always a good answer") He creates the character with a faintly satirical amusement and the sympathy of complete insight. Her mind moves from self deception through the failure of all comfortable lies to a condition which is a simple battle for survival. At that point the betrayal of Leon's trust is incidental.

"If he married her a month after the games, she wouldn't be the first girl to have a premature baby and everything would have been nice and respectable, as he liked it." (3)

As a novelist, Michael Anthony's range seldom extends to anything easily recognisable as social comment (4) As is the case for the hero of Green Days by the River the situation in which the heroine of The Games were coming finds herself is not the product of specific social conditions.

(1) Anthony (op.cit.) p.147

(2) Ibid p.94

(3) Anthony (op.cit.) p.154

(4) See, however p99 for critical comments on Carnival which rather suggest a connection between Sylvia's superficiality and a superficiality

in the society's attitude to the spree.

However, Anthony, like Khan and Mittelholzer, presents the man-women relationship as one of tension and distrust leading to an unfortunate even a tragic situation. Romantic love is a factor which is absent from the action of the novels (except The Obeah Man) but which serves as an ill-defined reference point, what Sylvia and Leon once knew, what Zolda can never be sure of without radical transformation of her personality and what Mittelholzer's Sylvia can never find and can relate only to the savagery of Jerry and Naomi. As far as a coherently expressed notion of romantic love exists in English literature it can at least be said that it has always been possible to make some distinction of varying degrees of clarity, between lust and love. West Indian novelists for the most part face considerable difficulties in making that distinction in naturalistic novels set in this region. As a result, the word "love" occasionally becomes a synonym for sexual attraction, as indeed it has done outside the West Indies in recent times. In the West Indian novel, however, although the action can be made only with difficulty within the action of the novel, it continues to be made outside of the plot itself. As a result the novels present sexual relationships from a critical standpoint. In these relationships, it is always the woman who is driven by circumstances and whose weakness compromises the stability of the situation.

The tendency of the novels, short stories, and essays of D.H. Lawrence is to re-affirm the importance of the self in contrast to romantic love which envisages or has tended to envisage a loss of selfhood in an all consuming union. The direction of these West Indian novels is directly contrary; the antagonism which characterises the relationships derives from an inability to overcome self interest and the antagonism is seldom accepted in the West Indian novel with the good-humoured, although gently chiding, attitude of calypso.

CHAPTER 5

The Three novels of Roger Mais

The element of the self, its agonised search for independence in a world of imperfect human relationships and its inherent inability to achieve such total self-sufficiency is the special concern of the three novels of Roger Mais. Mais's first novel The Hills were Joyful Together (1) is set in a Jamaican slum-yard. A multiplicity of characters and sub-plots enables Mais to suggest the teeming life and the activity of this milieu. It is impossible to say that any one of the plots is the central.

The prostitute, Zephyr, acts as friend and confidante, often commenting on events. She is a friend of Euphemia, who lives with Shag and who, as the novel opens is being unfaithful to Shag with Bajun-man. Shag eventually discovers her infidelity and, after smoking some ganja (marijuana) given to him by the cultist figure, Ras, Shag becomes insane and kills her. In the yard, there are two adolescent boys, Manny and Wilfie. Manny is attracted to Euphemia with little hope of a return of affection. Wilfie is infatuated with an over-sexed young girl, Ditty. The most striking of the sub-plots is probably that of Surjue and Rema. Rema is a woman utterly committed to her man and Surjue returns her love while insisting on his masculine independence. Shortage of money and a passing need to prove his independence to his friend Flitters, whom Rema distrusts, lead him to take part in a robbery during which he is caught; he is killed attempting to escape from prison. Rema goes insane during Surjue's imprisonment and dies in a fire which she accidentally starts.

(1) The Hills were Joyful Together: R. Mais, London, 1953.

Brother Man (1) is also set in a Jamaican slum background.

In addition to the story of its hero, Bra Man, there is the subplot of the relationship between Papacita and Girlie, a couple in the slums whose life together alternates between sadistic violence and tenderness. Bra' Man lives with a young girl, Minette, a former prostitute whom he met and took to his home because she had nowhere to sleep; the resulting relationship is not, at first, sexual, to the increasing frustration of Minette who eventually begins to go out with Papacita. There are two sisters in the slums, Jesmina and Cordelia (Cordy). Cordy's husband has been arrested and jailed for possession of Ganja. She has a very sick child and turns to Bra' Man for help which is given in the form of money and prayers. Bra' Man, however, becomes known as a worker of miracles, and Cordy, who goes insane, resents the fact that Bra' Man will not work a miracle to save her baby; she begins to cast obeah spells for revenge. Papacita acquires some counterfeit money and becomes relatively wealthy. Since he wishes to separate Minette from Bra' Man, he succeeds with Cordy's help in "planting" some counterfeit money in Bra' Man's house. He then supplies bail for Bra' Man's release in order to win Minette's approval. At this point, however, Bra' Man has broken out of his self-imposed sexual abstinence and a relationship sexual as well as emotional, has developed between them. Jesmina finds out Cordy's part in the false charge against Bra' Man and Cordy hangs herself. The people of the slums assume Bra' Man's guilt, however, and when a bearded black man kills a young man and rapes his girl-friend popular feeling turns against bearded men in general and Rastafarians (to which cult Bra' Man belongs) in particular.

(1) Brother Man: R. Mais, London, 1954.

Girlie stabs Papacita to death. A crowd surrounds Bra' Man and stones him. The novel ends as Bra' Man recovers and he and Minette watch the sunset and see new hope.

Black Lightning (1) is set in a rural background. As it opens, Estella, the wife of Jake, the blacksmith, is about to leave him for another man Steve. Glen, a young man employed by Jake is trying, with difficulty, to establish a relationship with Miriam, the daughter of an old woman Bess, who is Jake's house-keeper. In his spare time, Jake is a sculptor and is working on a statue of Samson. His constant companion is Amos, the hunch-back. Jake is very interested in the story of Samson, betrayed by a woman, deprived of his strength, and able, at last, to gain revenge, together with self-annihilation. One day, he takes Amos to see the statue of Samson. At this point the statue has acquired some symbolic significance for Jake which he attempts to convey to Amos. There is a flash of lightning which blinds Jake; against his will, he becomes dependent on Bess and Amos. In the meantime Miriam is seeking help in her relationship with Glen and she turns to Amos for re-assurance. For the first time in his life, Amos finds himself needed - a fact which means a great deal to him. Estella returns to the farm and meets first Glen and then Amos one day in the wood. It becomes clear that Estella left Jake because he resented his own dependence on her - he could neither be wholly independent nor could he willingly accept dependence on another human being. That day in the wood, Glen and Miriam are finally reconciled at the same moment that Jake kills himself with a shot-gun and Amos understands Estella's motives and is reconciled with her.

(1) Black Lightning: R. Mais; London, 1955.

Writing of Black Lightning, Kenneth Ramchand says:

"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 to a genuine tragic vision by separating the stimulus from its special social context." (1)

To Ramchand, the conclusion of Brother Man with Minotte in Bra' Man's arms is at best ambiguous, as they look towards the sunset and see some unexplained deeper reality; the healing power of human love is found and celebrated between Glen and Miriam in the final novel Black Lightning, because Mais has moved beyond "social protest" and "materialistic determinism" to the tragic in life transcending the "special social context."

I would suggest that the movement was necessary for Mais in a much more specific and demanding way than Ramchand indicates. We are here concerned with the search for positive values in human sexual love; Mais's declared intention was "to give the world a true picture of the real Jamaica and the dreadful condition of the working classes." (2) This was said after the publication of his first novel, The Hills were Joyful Together, which is firmly set in working-class life. It is my contention that the social context was not, as Ramchand implies, merely a limiting factor on the vision and creativity of the novelist but was flatly opposed to the search for positives (of the kind he sought) in sexual love.

He did, indeed, succeed in his search "to write the story of man, the eternal protagonist amid eternal process - man whom I met at the top of a hill in St. Andrew, Jamaica, dirty, hungry, and in rags." (3)

- (1) Ramchand (op.cit.) p.188
- (2) Kenneth Ramchand, p.179 quoting John O'London's Weekly.
- (3) Caribbean Writers - Critical Essays, Ivan Van Sertoma; (New Beacon Publications) London 1965, p.12

He saw the universal human problem of the conflict between desired ~~independence~~^{independence} and the necessary dependence of all human beings on each other - "What so weary in all the world as a man sitting in a corner alone, eating his heart out in darkness..." (Black Lightning p.192). He sought to depict the resolution of the dilemma in human love but West Indian working class society, in its nature, must have cast shadows on his enterprise. In Black Lightning, he turned to a rural setting of almost pastoral purity - the change could hardly have been otherwise.

Jean Creary, writing in The Islands in Between on the novels of Roger Mais says that "Surjue's relaxed, undemonstrative, yet utterly committed love for Rema and Rema's love for him is one of the few assertions of the positive value of the sexual relationship in Mais's work." (1) She sees that because Shag and Euphemia are held together by their common poverty and fear of the unknown, it leads almost inevitably to Euphemia's infidelity, her murder by Shag, and Shag's own violent death." (2) The second comment is true enough but the tragedy of Surjue and Rema follows just as inevitably from the nature of their relationship. Kenneth Ramchand says:

"To some extent the pessimism and pathos of The Hills were Joyful Together were modified by a number of unemphasised positives in the novel." (3)

He sees "the healing power of eros seen in the relationship between Surjue and Rema and recalled with idyllic force by Surjue at the time of greatest despair" (3) as one of these positives.

- (1) Creary (op.cit) p.55
- (2) Ibid, p.53
- (3) Ramchand (op,cit) p.182

Both these accounts of the relationship between Surjue and Rema are simplifications. In the mind of Surjue, the sine qua non of any man-woman relationship is the unquestioned superiority and independence of the man.

"It's me has the cojones in this here set-up anyway. She's scared to death I might walk out on her some day. Yes sir, An' I want it should be that way..... The other way about you'll be wearin' another man's jacket sure as God made little apples." (1)

When we see them together, Rema warns Surjue about his friend Flitters adding "I don's ever aim to meddle in your business honey but...." Surjue replies "You leave him to me, you said you didn't aim to meddle in my business an' that's the way I want it should be." It is apparent that Mais intends to present this relationship as one positive value in the world of despair in which his characters move. However, he could only depict it within the terms of Jamaican peasant life and, in those terms, the perfect man-woman relationship does consist of the masterful male and the submissive female - at least, from the male point of view.

Later in the novel, Mais is to provide one of the rare scenes of tenderness in his fiction as Surjue and Rema are in their bedroom talking:

"She felt suddenly nearer to him now than if they were in bed. It was such a strange and wonderful feeling that she would not look up at him, fearful of breaking the spell. She just sat in front of the mirror, holding the handbrush in her hand, scarcely conscious even of her own breathing. And as though the strange beautiful thing she was feeling was communicated to him, he just put his face down to her hair and said 'Oh God, Rema-honey' softly and it was the most wonderful thing she had ever heard in all her life." (2)

(1) Mais (op.cit.) p.24
(2) Mais (op.cot.) p.107

This is something rare, perfectly executed, and credible enough to be embarrassing. Nevertheless, Surjue arrives at this point by once again refusing to discuss Flitters with Rema because she shouldn't "mess in his business". It is this precarious, egoistic masculinity, which cannot lose its awareness of self even in such a relationship, that leads to Surjue's downfall. It was to Flitters that he made his boast about "having the cojones" in his relationship with Rema. At the time that he agrees to join Flitters in committing the crime that leads to his imprisonment and death and to Rema's madness, he is embroidering on his boast;

" 'There's crowds of women chasin' me now'
'Yeh'
'They get a hankerin' for me'
'I know. A chap like you.'
'I don't mess myself up with them though. Don't want no strings. Let them do the worryin' see ?'
'Yeh, I know'
'Could pick a dozen women, just walk down the street. They'd give me money to sleep with 'em if I wanted. I'm sickenin' of them, that's the truth.'
He looked down at the great muscles of his thighs....He looked across at Flitters and light flowed into his eyes.
'Say that over again. Gimme the lay-out.' " (1)

It is clear from this conversation that the effective impulse driving Surjue on to the robbery is the same issue "having the cojones" that makes his relationship with Rema decidedly not one of equals. Behind this, of course, is the simple economic necessity of getting a better home for Rema. He has, however, to prove to Flitters that he "ain't stuck down in nutt'n, not Surjue," he has to prove what he insists on in conversation with Rema, his masculine right, that excludes her wiser counsel and later finds torture and death.

(1) Mais (op.cit.) p.98

Mais does tell us later on, when Surjue is in prison:

"He had always bragged a little about the women he could have had. And all in all it was nothing. An empty boast to utter among men. For all the time there was never any woman in the world for him, beside her, and it would be like that, without question in his mind, until death." (1)

Surjue has found "the only woman for him". He loves her and that love is not purely sexual attraction. Mais, nevertheless, is true to the social setting he has chosen. This ideal love is ideal because it is a fictional representation of a (male) West Indian dream come true: it is a love between a very masculine man with an old knife-scar on his chest, experienced enough to intervene in a fight between Manny and Euphemia and to take a knife from Manny's hand without even thinking about it or being afraid and, on the other hand, a woman so submissive as to be at times almost bovine. It may be true that this is an utterly committed love but the connection between its nature and Surjue's final disaster is evident. Mais had depicted an ideal love based on the assumptions of the social context with which he was dealing, but his idealisation does not preclude an awareness of its potentialities for unfortunate results.

Mais's novels are connected in such obvious ways that it is difficult to regard any one of them without reference to the others; they are connected by the three personalities of Ras, Brother Man and Jake. A development towards the image of the strong man able to stand alone, an image which is finally expressed symbolically in the figure of Samson, can be seen in these three personalities.

(1) Mais (op.cit.) p.245

At the same time and connected philosophically with this, there is a development towards an ideal of commitment between a man and a woman in human love which is celebrated in the love of Glen and Miriam at the end of Black Lightning. The connection between the two trends is the need to resolve the dichotomy between the individual's need to be independent and humanity's necessary interdependence. There is thus a movement in Mais's novels towards the celebration of the man-woman relationship as something more than sexual attraction and repulsion.

In the peasant setting of The Hills were Joyful Together, man-woman relationships are shown as collapsing inevitably into misery; it is possible to see this misery as a result of their poverty - in Ramchand's words, "materialistic determinism" - but this is to under-estimate Mais's insight and the subtlety of his portrayal of character. As I have shown, Surjue's tragedy is not simply a function of his poverty but also of his assumptions - specifically with regard to his relationship with Rema. However, social protest is usually uppermost in The Hills were Joyful Together. In other relationships in the novel, romantic love appears as a force which is thwarted by the life - style and the poverty of the inhabitants of the slum-yard.

As the novel opens, we see through the eyes of Zephyr, the prostitute, the happiness that "love" has brought into the life of Euphemia in the form of her relationship with Bajun-Man. It seems perfectly true that "Shag and Euphemia are held together by their common poverty and fear of the unknown" so that, in the end, Shag's passage into insanity is his mind's inability to accept an even greater burden of misery.

Zephyr understand very well the contradictory assumptions of romantic love. She tells Euphemia:

" 'Send Bajun-Man packing.'
'You don't understand about that, he wouldn't lissen to me if I did.'
'He'd do what you ask him, if he loved you.'
'You think so ? I guess you should know.'
'Yes' said Zephyr, with a tight smile, looking straight at the other. 'I know what I'm talkin' about,' she said slowly.
'I couldn't do it,' said Euphemia.
'That's what I wanted to know, honey. You love him, that means.' " (1)

Illogically Zephyr thinks "love" should be a motive for selfless action on the part of Bajun-Man and at the same time an adequate explanation of selfishness on the part of Euphemia. Bajun-Man's precipitous departure, however, when he and Euphemia are discovered in bed by Shag, demonstrates within these terms that he does not "love" Euphemia.

Shag does love Euphemia. She tells Zephyr:

" 'And yet he's so gentle and kind and generous to me. He would give me anything I want.'
'I know. He loves you, that's what.' " (2)

The reason why Bajun-Man eventually leaves Euphemia is made clear in another conversation between Zephyr and Euphemia. Zephyr says:

" 'You sold or pawned everything you had. Didn't you ? You needn't lie to me. An' now he can't get nothin' more outa you, he's packed up an' quit.'
'Please don't say it like that.' " (3)

Shag's love for Euphemia is betrayed by the inadequacy of poverty as a binding force between them.

- (1) Mais (op.cot.) p.43
- (2) Ibid p.88
- (3) Mais (op.cit) p.144

Euphemia's love for Bajun-Man is betrayed by a combination of poverty and exploitation by Bajun-Man. Love is presented as having potentialities for good which are thwarted by the social situation. The result of this tangle of doomed relationships is the evolution of a new Euphemia whose hurt and disillusionment express themselves as sadism towards the adolescent Manny who also is held by "love", of an adolescent kind. Wilfie tells him:

" 'I guess you must be in love with Euphemia for true.'
'My God, you said it, I'd give her anything she asked me - just anything, you hear ?' " (1)

In Euphemia's mockery of Manny, her accidental kick in his groin seems symbolic of the attack on his manhood which leads him towards a similar cynicism and his rape of the girl Nadine. Mais's next attempt to depict the positive aspect of man-woman relationships is to be found in Brother Man. In this novel, also, there appears the second phase in the development of the idea of the strong, independent male. Ras, the cultist figure in The Hills were Joyful Together, is a minor character but he is the sole symbol of strength in a chaos of human frailty. With Bra' Man, Mais took the idea to such super-human proportions that the now customary criticism that the character's credibility is impaired seems valid enough. Bra' Man's isolation from sexual and emotional ties began, as he tells Minette, with his betrayal by a woman. His desired independence finally gives way to the appeal of Minette, whose adoration of him has so much of gratitude⁽²⁾ in it as to distinguish it from the voluntary sharing of Glen's and Miriam's final meeting.

(1) Ibid, p.147

(2) see p.33: "He had given her self respect and a purpose for living and now she wanted to fulfil that purpose, to bring it to a right fruition within herself."

Minette, like Khan's Zolda, and Anthony's Sylvia, is a force of pure sexuality which, when frustrated, turns with the mind's desire to hurt and the body's desire for satisfaction to the nearest available vehicle of revenge - Papacita.

Ranchand says of Bra' Man and Minette that their final "vision of certitude" is at best vague and that the only certainty is that they love each other. It is to be certain of an uncertainty; one is aware of a powerful rapport but that rapport has much admiration, hero-worship and gratitude on Minette's part. What is clear is that both Minette and Bra' Man are much concerned with ideas of the nature of love. In the early part of the novel, when Bra' Man refuses to permit his relationship with Minette to move beyond friendship and protection, Minette asks:

" 'What is love ? '

Brother Man said, 'Eh ? What you say child ?'

'Say what is love ? Bra' Man' she repeated.

She let the shoe rest on her lap and looked up into his face. He looked at her, earnestly, as though weighing his answer, and presently she let her eyes fall. She took up the shoe, from her lap and started polishing it again.

'Love is everything' he said simply. 'It is what created the world. It is what made you an' me child, brought us into this world.'

And somehow the words didn't sound banal, coming from him." (1)

In spite of this last assurance it becomes evident that the answer has little to do with Minette's question. Later on, Minette asks him whether it is wrong for a man and woman to live together.

(1) Mais (op.cit) p.23

"He said, taking his own time, as though he was weighing his answer well in his own mind: 'It is not sin for a man and woman to live together, but only there is that between them to make them one.'

'You believe that? And what is that thing, that makes them one? How do you know it, Bra' Man?'

He was silent for awhile, and then he stood up slowly and took the candle in his hand.

'I do not know', he said. 'The answer for every man is different, it mus' be so.'

He turned as though he would leave her. She felt frustrated, cheated. She suffered a loss of faith in him. She wanted to shout after his retreating back: 'Gwan! You're a fake!' " (1)

When, later, Bra' man gives in to Minette's silent appeal and makes love to her, and the novel ends with their vision of the sunset and of a certitude facing them, one supposes that Bra' Man has found what makes Minette and himself one - in Minette's terms "love". This "love" differs from that of Surjue and Rema to the degree that Minette is more independent, more clearly realised as an individual personality than Rema - Minette, after all, is capable of rebellion as the above extract shows and she is never as insipid as Rema. Mais has thus moved beyond the idealised peasant relationship of dominant male and totally submissive female. At the same time, in Brother Man, he has not yet reached the form of relationship we see between Glen and Miriam, which is the meeting of two fully realised, independent personalities, because Mais's theme of the strong, individual on whom others depend renders the personality of Bra' Man so Christ-like that he and Minette (especially at the end of the novel) often appear as Prophet and chosen disciple. The connection between Bra' Man and Christ is obvious and has been noted by Creary (p.57) and Ramchand (pp 183 - 185) but one may cite the crowds who touch him and are cured of various diseases (2) his address to the crowd from a grand-stand to which he is forced to go because of the size of the crowd^d (2) (Christ preaching from a boat is the obvious parallel)

and, at the end, the crowd of his former followers who stone him while one woman tries to save him. This identification of Bra' Man with Christ occasionally makes it doubtful whether one should even attempt to view the character on a naturalistic level rather than as a form of allegory. At any rate, these religious and idealistic overtones clearly prevent the relationship of Bra' Man and Minette from appearing unambiguously as a relationship between a man (and no more) and a woman.

In the context of the three novels, then, Bra' Man and Minette do not represent Mais's most successful presentation of potentialities for good in the man-woman relationship. In the narrower context of Brother Man however, Minette's questions and Bra' Man's answers in the passages quoted above indicate that the relationship is presented as love - that which exists between a man and woman to make them one. The novel presents two contrasting relationships; that of Bra' Man and Minette, and that of Papacita and Girlie. The insecure endangered male ego is the bane of many of the relationships in Mais's first two novels - Surjue and Rema in their own way, Bedosa nagging at Charlotte in The Hills were Joyful Together and the relationship of Papacita and Girlie is no exception. Papacita frequently comes up against reminders of his economic dependence on Girlie. Here Goody Johnson is speaking to Puss-Jook in The Hills were Joyful Together:

"Go-weh lef me. Ah wouldn't care. You go-weh lef me you come back quick-quick time like you done before. Is who goin' mind you, big man do nutt'n but scratch-himself-so-sleep all day ?" (1)

(1) Mais (op.cit) p.108

Here Girlie is speaking to Papacita:

"You walk out on me, honey, where you eat? Walk out on me, eh, why you don' get goin....." (1)

The relevance of Madeline Kerr's observations (see page 74, above) is obvious. The relationship of Papacita and Girlie, in its pattern of the economic dependence of the male and of the clash of his assumptions of his own superiority with the exigencies of his economic dependence, is typical of the social context of the novel. The relationship, in its precarious equilibrium of sadism and masochism appears as doomed from the start, both by reference to the relationship of Bra' Man and Minette and by reference to occasional moments of tenderness within the Papacita-Girlie relationship itself.

The most striking of these moments is that which takes place in the Rockney Club. Girlie leaves Papacito's table in the club:

"She was wearing a fuggy little fixed smile on her lips, as she rose slowly, steadily enough, to her feet.

She said: 'You wait here.'

..... she stood for an instant swaying slightly on her feet. And then the band swung into the chorus, and she started singing the words, low, soft, warm, and with tone and feeling:

No other love can warm my heart
Now that I've known the comfort of your arms;
No other love.....

a rich warm contralto voice of great purity although ed something in volume.

Bravo! and bravo!breaking from him in silent le waves, flung across the dance floor at her..... ody had caught something of the inner significance play, as though they were watching a movie, thrilling little human drama of a woman with the courage, in ce of everything, to get up and make a gesture like before them all, telling them all the kind of love she r her man." (2)

op.cit.) p.12
op.cit.) p.79, 80;

Their moment of tenderness is evanescent, however, for in the taxi on the way home Girlie bursts into tears and will not be comforted. The rest of the time Papacita and Girlie live a life of sexual violence; the sado-masochism of Jerry and Naomi, itself an extreme form of the "normal", is taken to a new extreme;

"Every time he had to force her, as he was forcing her now, as he had had to force her that first time, the first time he had taken her, before they had come to live together as man and wife. And every time they lived again the deep physical satisfaction that was like nothing on earth; that of his forcing her - and of her suffering being forced by him." (1)

Girlie tries to stab Papacita with a knife, he leaves her and comes back to her with a "sense of pity and loss." Their relationship is characterised by physical violence:

"Her fingernails clawed into his face again and again. He screamed at her: 'You bitch!' Suddenly letting go of her throat, he caught her by the hair and banged and banged her head against the wall. She tried to get in a knee-punch to his groin, but he was prepared for that one, knew it was coming.... He hit her with both fists in the belly, but she was too close to him for the blows, to have their full effect. She closed with him sobbing, her teeth buried in his throat." (2)

Papacita decides to kill Girlie and with this decision comes "a wonderful sense of release". Instead he leaves her. Girlie is to give Jesmina her own answer to the question "what is love?". Jesmina asks:

" 'What's it feel like to be in love? '
'Eh ?'
'You know - '
'What you want to know about that fo' honey, you stay clear away from it, you tek my advice.'

(1) ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Ibid p.28
(2) Mais (op.cit) p.118

....(Girlye) turned over on her side, swung her feet down to the floor, sat up, faced the other squarely.
'What's happened to me in here' pointing to her breast,
'go down on you' knees, pray God it never happen to you.
..... what it get you, honey, in de end? You want I tell you, what you get in de end it was better you' nother did tek aloes an' salt-physics an' you never was born' " (1)

In the end, Girlye finds Papacita and kills him with a clasp-knife; the novel ends shortly after with the "vision of certitude" of Bra' Man and Minette. An ideal of romantic love is implicit in the song Girlye sings in the Rockey Club (we must remember that she sings it "with feeling" and it thus expresses her attitude) in the "thing" Bra' Man finds that makes Minette and himself one and in the pain Girlye feels which is presented as the loss of "love" in the quotation above. This ideal is opposed by the novelist to the sadism and tension which characterise the relationship of Papacita and Girlye and which, at least for Papacita, derive from economic dependence and poverty, factors which undermine his masculine pride. The antithesis is not simply that of cruelty and tenderness for Jesmina, and Minette are aware that what they seek is "love", Girlye is aware, in the Rockey Club, that her tenderness is "love". Yet even in the incident in the Rockey Club, "Love" is expressed in the hackneyed terms of a popular song; Mais never depicts, in Brother Man, two peasant characters, credible human personalities, motivated by romantic love and engaged in a relationship which differs from the tension of pure sexuality. In the action of the novel, as opposed to the statements of the characters, we see the calypsonian's advice, "every now and then, cuff them down" acted upon. The ideal remains a matter of aspiration and statement.

(1) Mais (op.cit) pp 140, 141

Thus in both The Hills were Joyful Together and Brother Man "love" is made to serve Mais's social protest intention appearing as a criterion by which the results of poverty can be castigated. It is in Black Lightning, in the relationship of Glen and Miriam, the Mais depicts a love-relationship which is a matter of mutual affection.

Glen, unlike Surjue, is not engaged in proving that he "has the cojones" and Miriam has none of the passivity which makes Rema an insipid character. Though their relationship is, in Ramchand's words, "a wayward succession of approaches and retreats until Jake's suicide drives them to the final step of accepting the need to be dependent on each other"⁽¹⁾, yet the final reconciliation does not appear, in its tenderness, contrived in the way that the end of The Obeah Man does. It is surely not coincidental or merely an issue of universal concern as opposed to purely regional and social bias that Mais turned away to the "lush, quiet countryside (he) knew in his boyhood," ⁽²⁾ to find what his novels so eloquently seek to depict and celebrate. In this pastoral setting we can find Estella's selflessness towards Jake. When Glen meets Estella in the wood he asks her why she ran away from Jake:

"He said: 'I know I have no right to ask you that'.
She shrugged. 'What are rights to people like us -
you and me ?
He said coldly 'I don't know what you mean'.
'We don't have any rights, like that,' she said, 'we
only have symptoms of possessiveness, that's all.'
'I don't know what you are talking about.'
'And fits of petulance when we have lost.'
..... she said suddenly: 'I left him because I loved him,
if you want to know.' " ⁽³⁾

- (1) Ramchand (op.cit.) p.187
(2) Creary (op.cit.) p.59
(3) Mais (op.cit) p.161

Later, Glen says:

" 'You said just now, we didn't have any rights, only symptoms of possessiveness, what do you mean ?'
'If you were in love you would know.' " (1)

Mais's use of Jamaican dialect was not very convincing in the first two novels, but in Black Lightning, he alters the atmosphere of his work completely by using only English dialogue, at times dialogue faintly suggestive of West Indian speech. By so doing, he moves the scene of the action far from the slum setting of The Hills were Joyful Together and Brother Man.

Yet in the world of Black Lightning, something survives from the first two novels; Jake is the continuation of the pattern that began with Ras and became at once stronger and more diffuse in Bra' Man. In Jake, their struggle achieves tragic power. His dilemma is the daily situation of their world. Jake is betrayed by love; Estella loves and leaves him because he could not bear to be dependent on her. His enforced independence leaves him without power as an artist or as a man, for he is brought face to face with the inescapable need for emotional contact that his frail humanity imposes. The statue of Samson, betrayed by a woman and in the midst of his strength, struck blind by that betrayal, takes up this theme and gives it that power in stasis which the rural setting imparts to the entire novel, a setting suggestive of painting, particularly in Miriam's sight of George riding Beauty. It is true that "betrayal lies for Jake in the very fact of the human sexual relationship." (2) Thus his tragic situation, though stated in terms which transcend historical or regional context is the psychological basis of the insecure masculine assertiveness of Surjue, Papacita and Bedosa.

(1) Ibid. p 162
(2) Creary (op.cit) p.59

The optimism of the meeting of Glen and Miriam in the wood counterpoints Jake's suicide, as Ramchand points out, and so does George's ride on Beauty. Thus the final meeting of Glen and Miriam seems to express the optimism of Mais's dream of a new generation, as Jake's suicide expresses the end and the hopelessness of the past. The lesson of Jake's suicide for Glen and Miriam is that human interdependence is inescapable.

This interdependence is presented quite unambiguously in the terms of romantic love. Miriam intends to ask Jake a question which begins "If a girl should be in love.....?" ; she never succeeds in putting the question to him. She later asks Amos:

" 'If a girl should be in love with a young man should she - let him do things to her ?"
..... And then he said, looking at her earnestly,
'You love him enough, everything goes, I guess.' " (1)

On Glen's part, the emotion is the same. In a moment of anger he says to Miriam:

" 'I'm crazy enough to do most anything right this minute. I was crazy enough to tell you that I love you, wasn't I ? Well, I'm crazy like that again - only different.'
'So you think you were crazy to tell me that ?'
'Well, what do you think ?' " (2)

Later in the wood Estella says to Glen:

" 'You are in love, perhaps.'
He moved uncomfortably.
'That is different. A man is different....' " (3)

Glen is convinced that "a man is different" because he has not yet come to terms with his own sexuality but he makes a distinction between sexual attraction and his feelings for Miriam:

- (1) Mais (op.cit) pp 148, 149
(2) Ibid p.142
(3) Ibid, p.161

"There was Clara Dawson, yes, and others, if she only knew. Should he go and tell her? Make a clean breast of it? Hell, no, she wouldn't understand. Women - women like Miriam, that is - couldn't understand about things like that. God's truth, he wasn't good enough to lick her shoes..... He wasn't sorry for anything he had done. Anything he had done couldn't possibly hurt her, touch her, smirch her. He held her apart from all that." (1)

That there is obviously much of youthful naivete in Glen's opinions does not alter the fact that what binds Glen to Miriam is presented as more than sexual attraction; the distinction is emphasised. We are a long way from another adolescent, Manny, whose first approach to his beloved, Euphemia, is "Ah got something here fo' you..... would mek you fo'get dat Bajun-Man...." (2)

It is true that Surjue is a grown man and Glen is an adolescent but a comparison may nevertheless be made between Surjue's insecure masculine ego and Glen's relatively assured personality and attitudes. Glen never seeks to prove himself to demonstrate his virility. Miriam is not prepared to be the subservient female as Rema is. The relationship is far from the idealised peasant relationship of Surjue and Rema.

One is prepared to accept the applicability of the term "love" in the relationship between Glen and Miriam as one cannot accept it in the case of Bra' Man and Minette because there is no sense in which Mais attempts to make Glen more than human. The greatest fault of Mais as a novelist was his lack of control over sentiment and emotion, the repeated absence of an objectivity which would restrain indignation from becoming tedious or sympathy from becoming mawkishness.

(1) Mais (op.cit) p.144

(2) The Hills were Joyful Together, p.34

This fault never intrudes into Black Lightning, perhaps because the use of English rather than dialect permits the expression of more sophisticated points of view than can be found in the first two novels (Estella's remarks about "symptoms of possessiveness" are one instance). That overflow of the novelist's sympathy seriously flaws Brother Man by removing the character of Bra' Man beyond credibility. Glen and Miriam are perfectly credible young people in a developing awareness of their own natures.

Ramchand notes, with reference to Mais's descriptions of Bra' Man's miracles that no other West Indian writer would have described such a scene (the crowd touching Bra' Man and being cured without his knowledge) without a comic intention and that it "illustrates the obverse side of Mais's intensity." (1) The same might be said of the scene with which the sexual relationship of Bra' Man and Minette begins. Mais describes, with perfectly serious intent, the collapse of Bra' Man's denial of his sexuality which is, in a sense, a denial of his own humanity, for it is a limitation of that charity he practises towards others that he should live with a woman who desires him sexually as well as emotionally.

Agape, Mais intends to say (or so one presumes) is insufficient without a recognition of the true place and value of Eros. What actually happens is somewhat different. Ramchand's remark that "Mais will not allow intercourse by passion but intercourse by compassion is allowable for the Christ-like character" (2) seems justified. Minette has just taken Bra' Man's hands and placed them against her breasts:

(1) Ramchand (op.cit) p.183
(2) Ramchand (op.cit) p.184

"He looked down at her, started to shake her head.... their eyes met, held an instant. Something like an involuntary spasm shuddered through his flesh. His hands jerked away suddenly. He got to his feet so quickly that the stool went over behind him. He stumbled rather than walked away leaving her kneeling on the floor. He turned, looked at her, saw that she was sobbing, her hands pressed to her face; her shoulders were shaking with her sobs. Something like an animal cry went from him...." (1)

The suggestion that Bra' Man faced with a desirable young woman who, in the situation described, is making an unmistakably sexual appeal, is capable of acting at least as much from compassion as from sexual desire simply cannot be accepted. Some degree of compassion may be allowed since Mais seems to intend that the connection between sexual love and spiritual love or charity (not, in any case, an original proposition) should be clear. However the incident as described conveys Bra' Man's naivete and self-deception as much as the revelation within his mind. There is an obvious danger, which Mais does not avoid of spiritual innocence, what in Biblical terms, is called purity of heart, appearing, in artistic presentation as simple-mindedness and collapsing into bathos and unintentional humour. Thus as Bra' Man blunders towards benevolent copulation he appears as nothing more than comic.

By contrast, the incident that reconciles Glen and Miriam is perfectly credible, in no way flawed by Mais's uncontrolled intensity. Miriam falls from a boulder and bruises her leg which begins to bleed and:

(2) Mais (op.cit) p.136

"She looked up from staring mutely at the blood on her thigh, and saw him standing there beside her.

'Miriam! You hurt yourself?'

He was lifting her in his arms.

She laughed a little jerkily, his sudden movement had unnerved her. She laughed, with her head back against his shoulder. He kissed her on the mouth. She said, still laughing like that: 'I - I thought you were going to beat me!'

And he answered her quickly, earnestly:

'Don't ever say a thing like that! ' "

If Mais had placed the above incident in the slum setting of his first two novels he would have faced some difficulty in making Glen's final remark ring true - at best the remark would have had an ironic overtone in the light of the reader's awareness that prevailing attitudes would have made Miriam's suspicion well-founded. In his novels of social protest, The Hills were Joyful Together and Brother Man, Mais uses romantic love as an ideal distinct from the action of the novels, a criterion by which the sexual relationships of the characters appear as negative and their poverty as the primary evil of their world, frustrating their search for emotional security. The one relationship that differs is that of Surjue and Rema. To be naturalistic, it had to include, in the character of Surjue, that egoistic masculine insecurity which destroys its equilibrium. Mais could, in Black Lightning develop the conflict of ideal and reality to universal validity in the situation of Jake while demonstrating a new positive romantic alternative in Glen and Miriam in his pastoral paradise.

CHAPTER 6

The Novels of John Hearne

In The Pleasures of Exile, George Lamming complains that Hearne's novels:

"..... suggest that he has a dread of being identified with the land at peasant level.... (Hearne) has a key obsession with an agricultural middle-class in Jamaica". He adds "I don't want to suggest that this group of people are not a proper subject for fiction, but I've often wondered whether Hearne's theme, with the loaded concern he shows for a mythological colonial squirearchy is not responsible for the fact that his work is at present less energetic than the West Indian novels at their best." (1)

Kenneth Ramchand says that this charge

"does little justice to Hearne's examination of love as a positive that comes to be celebrated in The Land of the Living." (2)

The phrase "loaded concern" is, as I shall show, unfair; Hearne's novels do not entirely ignore the moral responsibilities and failures of the squirearchy. Moreover, as Ramchand indicates (2) one would never imagine considering Lamming's criticism, that he himself could write a novel of the social complexity and breadth of sympathy of Season of Adventure. Lamming is on dangerous ground in criticising Hearne's choice of social setting for making the novels "less energetic" than they should be since the underlying suggestion that vigour is exclusively a proletarian virtue is, though not original, at best debatable. ?

Nevertheless, it is true that Hearne's novels are, in Barrie Davies's phrase, "uncompromisingly middle class" (3) There is a direct connection between this fact and their "examination of love as a positive."

- (1) The Pleasures of Exile: George Lamming, London 1960 pp 45-46
- (2) Ramchand (op.cit.) p.6
- (3) The Islands in Between, p.109

Romantic love has been, in Europe, an ideal of the middle-class; it is no less cherished by the West Indian middle-class - as we shall see in Hearne's work - simply because the degree of European influence one finds in the West Indies increases in proportion to the social status of any group. Hearne, however, does not only seek to portray a group who accept the love-myth as an idea; his novels go beyond the obvious and proclaim the validity of the ideal, accepting it as a criterion by which specifically West Indian attitudes are regarded as superficial and, in at least one case, dangerous. The danger is most clearly seen in Hearne's third novel, The Faces of Love. (1)

Hearne's "colonial squirearchy", is of course, a perfectly proper subject for fiction; there is, however, a sense in which the applicability of the term "West Indian" to the resulting fiction requires qualification. For so long as the term, with regard to cultural matters, develops its meaning in deliberate opposition to the culture of Europe, novels set in those social classes which are most influenced in attitudes and values by the image of Europe received in the West Indies are likely to be less a product of the indigenous culture than novels set in the working classes. I say "the image of Europe" because it is not at all necessary that the image correspond precisely to the reality; the difference between the English ruling classes in Colonial India and anything that could be found in England itself is well known. A European ruling caste, in limited contact with Europe, faced with the constant necessity of "setting an example to the natives" and free from a controlling fear of ridicule, is likely to be a pompous and exaggerated caricature of its peers "back home"; (2) the natives, knowing no better, accept their rulers' estimate of themselves.

(1) The Faces of Love, J. Hearne; London 1957

(2) c.f. Rupert Longdene in Nichole's White Boy, set in British Guiana in 1936, standing to attention as the radio plays 'God Save the King' p.17 Nichole's novel (written by a white West Indian) illustrates the point well. (see especially p.131)

The occupants of Brandt's Pen and Fabricus Head on Hearne's fictional island of Cayuna may in their unlimited largesse and their social and sexual uninhibitedness seem quite foreign to modern Britain; the pattern to which they conform is much less foreign to the life of the gentry described in Adam Bede. The explanation is simple: the image of England in the West Indies is that of Victorian England - an image which is now dying. This is the reason Madeline Kerr found "ideas resembling the English Victorian ones" in Jamaica. Furthermore, their privileged position in the West Indies permitted Englishmen, for many years, to benefit from the false image, a fact which in turn, reinforced the illusion.

When Carl Brandt in Stranger at the Gate describes the life at Cayuna College (1) the ultimate source of the description is the image of the English public school. (Admittedly, it is only mildly exaggerated as an account of life at an elite West Indian school but those schools are all deliberate imitations of English public schools). It follows then, that the ultimate origin of the life-style of the "squirearchy" lies in the former metropolitan country. Their values are only to a limited extent a product of the West Indian geographical, social and cultural situation. In short, the Carl Brandts and Andrew Fabricuses of the West Indies, if they exist, are the product of the cultural interaction of England and the West Indies to a degree that a peasant, such as Surjue or Papacita, is not.

I have said that novels set in the higher levels of West Indian society are likely to be less "West Indian" than some other novels. It is not necessarily the case that the values of the characters may be ascribed to the novelist's view point as expressed in the novel; there are other possibilities such as satire or reasonably balanced sympathies.

In the area of human relationships though not in that of politics, the point of view of Hearne's bourgeoisie is the "recommended" point of view of the novels; that is to say, their approach to these relationships is presented as more complex, more subtle, and more just than that of the peasants. Romantic love is an extremely important part of Hearne's novels and Hearne is able to portray it in action precisely because the primary concern of his novels is with the lives of his bourgeois and therefore, European-influenced characters. Though the reason for the appropriateness of romantic love to a bourgeois setting in the West Indies - European influence - must necessarily be different from the reason for the ideal's similar appropriateness in England, it must be admitted that the effect is the same; even if Hearne were a European novelist, the use of the love-ideal in an equivalent social setting would also be available to him. What is interesting about Hearne's work is the implied criticism which I shall demonstrate, the life style of the peasant therefore less European-influenced characters in his novels.

Barrie Davies's critique in The Island in Between is particularly revealing. He considers that Hearne's work may:

....."broaden the scope of the Caribbean novel, particularly in the area of sex. Sex must be the most and least discussed subject in the West Indies - everyone talks about it, but it receives little serious examination. Beneath the pride in virility and the rejection of European inhibitions, Hearne sees a failure to give sex its real human significance. Caribbean sex for Hearne is too often merely appetitive, male centred and stereotyped." (1)

This picture of the novelist as a sort of sexual and moral evangelist is supported by a passage from The Land of the Living. (2)

(1) Davies (op.cit.) p.115

(2) The Land of the Living, J. Hearne; London 1961.

Stefan Mahler, the Jewish immigrant in Cayuna, sees the Cayunan woman, Bernice, and:

"In this moment of silent indignation, I saw her only as another victim of that crude and tedious limitation to the Caribbean scope; the sexual snobbery of the West Indian male. Pampered, flattered and indulged from birth by their women, the men of Cayuna, I had recognized early, are all sexual aristocrats, with that discreet, insipid respect for the accepted or proven which so often characterizes aristocratic taste. They cannot comprehend and have no reverence for the more subtle assumptions of Aphrodite: nose-tethered tighter than stud bulls to a hierarchic scale of desirability, they regard with vague astonishment any heresy of the imagination." (1)

It is clear that, as Barrie Davies says, "human commitment in unselfish love is of more importance to Hearne than political commitment." (2) This "unselfish love" is quite clearly romantic love as I have defined it and another passage from The Land of the Living leaves no doubt of the validity of this concept in Mahler's mind:

"A few months ago, at some reception, when Oliver made one of his rare surrenders to tipsiness, I overheard him disturbing one of those well-intentioned, determinedly liberal wholesome and indefinably irritating Americans who wear their genteel seriousness like an academic gown... 'Love!' Oliver was barking at this woman. 'Don't believe what you have been conditioned to accept. It's a venereal infection like syphilis. A side effect of capitalism and the mobile unit of society. It only came into existence when feudalism began to decay. A neurosis. A huge psychic hire purchase acquisition to keep up with the Joneses. I'm not talking about homosexual love,' he added with quick concession as if she had pounced on an admitted line in his argument. 'That's natural and healthy. Like the love of parents for children. But this business between men and women! We can't do without it now and it's more destructive than tobacco.' He continued the sort of talk that, remembering it in the morning, one winces apologetically." (3)

Mahler tells us that:

".... love enters unobtrusively, furtively, and lodges to trouble you with its suddenly announced presence: like an uninvited, ruthlessly demanding guest ringing a bell for attention in a room you cannot find." (4)

- (1) Hearne (op.cit) p.78
- (2) Davies (op.cit.) p.117
- (3) Hearne (op.cit.) pp.166, 167
- (4) Ibid p.166

He is clearly speaking of something distinct from sexual desire:

".....did I begin to love Joan when I found myself unexpectedly in bed with her that night I took her home to oblige Oliver? Or was it the next morning when I saw her in the raw, unarmoured sensitivity of my hangover? Or had it happened already from the time she staggered into my life at the Fabricus house? I don't know. I only know that one morning I awoke in the tranquil and appreciative condition with which I usually returned to the day, and that by next morning, at the same time, I had shuddered to a halt, was alerted by a novel need and hope which filled me with something like panic and for which I wanted no cure." (1)

Two things are apparent from the above quotations; one is that romantic love plays a considerable part in Hearne's novel, and the second is that Hearne is aware that the ideal of romantic love is related only with difficulty to the West Indian social setting.

In The Land of the Living, the German Jew, Stefan Mahler, is a lecturer at the local University. In a bar, he meets a Cayunan woman, Bernice Heneky; she falls in love with him and a sexual relationship develops between them. Stefan eventually meets Bernice's father Marcus Heneky who is a leader of the Sons of Sheba, apparently patterned on the Jamaican Rastafarians. (2) Marcus is a black man but his daughter is a mulatto. The circles in which Stefan moves are those of the coloured (3) Cayunan middle class. The relationship between Stefan and Bernice is characterised by sexual need on his part and by "love" on her part. There is a constant failure of communication which results from her lack of education.

(1) Hearne (op.cit.) p.167

(2) Poor, black worshippers of the Emperor of Ethiopia (originally Ras Tafari). Brother Man is also patterned on them. They equate the black man's enforced journey to the West Indies with that of the Jews to Babylon.

(3) Here, and elsewhere, used in the sense of having mixed blood, partly Negro.

Stefan eventually meets a coloured Cayunan woman, Joan, and falls in love with her. Joan is frequently drunk and is extremely promiscuous and at first she rejects his advances. Marcus Hencky holds a political meeting in an attempt to gain political power. He is arrested and put in gaol. Stefan ends his relationship with Bernice and succeeds in winning the affection of Joan. When Marcus is released from prison and attempts to cause armed rebellion among the poor, he is, surrounded by armed police. Bernice goes to the scene and tries to persuade him to surrender. She almost succeeds but one of Marcus's followers kills both Marcus and his daughter.

In spite of the presence of several working class characters, the centre of the novel is in the Cayunan middle-class. Although Stefan is critical of his middle-class friends, precisely because they are the only educated ones, the only communication Stefan has is with them. The novel takes place through Mahler's eyes and so the working class characters, though sympathetically - too sympathetically-depicted, remain peripheral. The really central events in Mahler's experience in Cayuna are his relationships with middle-class Cayunans. The Land of the Living, probably Hearne's best novel, is no less than the others "uncompromisingly middle-class".

It is true that the tenderness, the condition of mutual need fulfilled by mutual giving, that characterises the relationship of Mahler and Joan after their reconciliation is, as Davies says, credible, with a "rightness" of its own. Joan has many of the traits of the misguided, over-sexed female to be found in other West Indian novels. Her bitterness in her approach to life is that of a frustrated selflessness.

When she meets Mahler (who lacks the insecure male egoism which, in other West Indian novels, leads such female characters into antagonistic relationships) that selflessness can find fulfilment. It is therefore a condition of the success of the romantic love-theme that the hero should be a foreigner in the West Indies, a modern Wandering Jew, bearing with him the accumulated moral subtleties of Europe. It is so if one accepts Mahler's view of "the men of Cayana" judging, in other words within the given terms of this particular novel and if one accepts that the cultural background of his characters poses limits to a novelist's range of choices which are simply the limits of credibility.

Even Mahler, however, begins, by his own standards, as an apprentice at the court of love. He makes "a great journey into mature love" with a "peerless woman" (1), Bernice who, "even in the ordeal of jealous hurt..... was betrayed by her queenly instinct of solicitude and compassion.... deprived even of the invidious relief of bitchiness." (2) Bernice Heneky is a victim of her creator's tendency to idealise his working-class characters. She is not so much a human being as a force of pure mother-love. Theirs is an incestuous relationship which, at the point of Mahler's maturity, produces the inevitable betrayal. Bernice's hurt is limited by her overwhelming generosity; the "human commitment in unselfish love" is all on her side and the relationship is in no sense an adult man-woman relationship. It is a positive only from the point of view of Mahler.

Bernice remarks, "Love ! Love have teeth like a bulldog. The only thing you can do is wait until it let go..... or until it starve to death."

(1) Hearne (op.cit.) p.188
(2) Ibid p.209

The Land of the Living is, then, a novel of romantic love. Barrie Davies's remarks which suggest that Hearne's application of "sophisticated" forms of man-woman relationship is in deliberate opposition to the assumptions underlying "Caribbean sex" seem justified by Mahler's comments on Cayunan men and by the inclusion of Mahler's view of Oliver's comments. The latter passage seems intended to dispel any doubts one may have about romantic love by representing such doubts as mere academic theorising. Hearne portrays Bernice as motivated by romantic love but she is too idealised to be a credible representation of a West Indian peasant, too idealised, indeed, to be a human being. In Stranger at the Gate (1) Hearne gives us the occasional glimpse of the lives of the peasants of Cayuna.

The novel concerns a member of the Cayunan landed gentry, Carl Brandt; and his friend, the lawyer, Roy McKenzie. As the novel opens, a revolutionary from the island of St. Pierre, Henri Etienne, has escaped and Roy, who is involved in revolutionary political movements, persuades Carl to permit Henri to stay on his property until an escape can be arranged. This obliges Roy to cancel a demonstration of the unemployed which he had arranged, since the escape requires a minimum of political activity on the island. The demonstration was arranged with the help of Tiger Johnson, a dangerous leader of the working-class Cayunans.

Roy and Carl are friends of an English woman, Sheila, the wife of Lloyd Pearce, a middle-class coloured Cayunan. Carl is in love with Sheila and has tried unsuccessfully to make love to her - unsuccessfully because Sheila is in love with Roy.

(1) Stranger at the Gate: J. Hearne; London 1956.

It becomes necessary to find a boat to take Etienne off the island. Sheila, as it happens, owns a boat and is expert in handling it. Carl tells Roy that Sheila is in love with him and that he is therefore in the best position to persuade her to help them. Roy meets Sheila, makes love to her and the escape is arranged but fails, because Tiger Johnson is disgruntled by what he sees as betrayal by the brown men of Cayuna, finds out their plans and reports them to the local police. In the attempt to escape, Roy is killed.

Romantic love is as important a part of Stranger at the Gate as it is of The Land of the Living. Sheila frequently tells Roy that she loves him but that he does not need to tell her that he loves her. Some time before the escape he comes to the realisation that he does, in fact, love her. There are several descriptions of Carl's mental anguish when his love for Sheila is frustrated.

Hearne's novels are not primarily concerned with putting forward a political viewpoint although they are concerned with politics. The novelist's examination of political matters is never as searching as his examination of the complexities of human relationships. Cayunan society appears to be roughly three-tiered; at the top are the landed gentry, the occupants of Brandt's Pen and Fabricus Head and their friends such as Roy McKenzie and Hector Slade. The term "middle-class" seems something of a misnomer for this group but it would be even more misleading to describe them as aristocrats. In the middle are the professional people and those who have risen from the working classes; Joan in The Land of the Living, Rachel Ascom and Margaret in The Faces of Love. At the bottom are such characters as Jeffrey Summer, Tiger Johnson, Campbell, (1) Marcus Honeky, and Bernice.

(1) Stranger at the Gate

There is a certain ambivalence in Hearne's presentation of these groups; criticism and idealisation tend to go together, awareness of injustice co-exists with affection for the status quo - perhaps not surprisingly in "uncompromisingly middle-class" novels. Davies says:

"The fatalistic tragedy cuts short political and human aspiration alike. The one area of safety appears to be the spacious upper-class life of Brandt's Pen which, significantly, embodies values and beauty from a life that has really past, that of the old plantocracy.....

The account of this world is Hearne's sincere attempt.... to appreciate an institution that has caused so much bitterness in the West Indies, and which can so easily be a target for derision.....One cannot but feel that the tension between Hearne's own emotional attraction to it and his intellectual rejection unbalances these novels." (1)

On the one hand, Hearne lovingly describes the way of life of the "squirearchy", the food, the furnishings and the general air of wealth; on the other hand, the successful efforts of the upper and middle-classes to suppress the political rise of Heneky are presented as a tragic occurrence. The blindness of Andrew Fabricus's father is satirised by his son's usually effective sarcasm. There is a sense of inevitability about the appearance of revolutionaries such as Heneky and Etienne which makes Carl Brandt's criticisms of Etienne's methods insufficient to prevent Etienne's cause from appearing just. This is Oliver's analysis in Land of the Living, of a clash in the House of Representatives between the upper class Andrew Fabricus and the corrupt peasant politician, Littleford:

"I think Andrew uses Littleford as a sort of moral excuse for giving a lot of old prejudices an unconscious airing. You see a chap like Littleford, black, probably illegitimate, aggressive as hell. Everything poor old Andrew was brought up to despise and fear.

(1) Davies (op.cit.) p.117

Then Andrew gets decency like religion: social conscience, colour blindness, enthusiasm, the whole lot. And there is a Littleford on the other side representing everything Andrew has abandoned, all the greed, privilege, corruption and the like. He's almost worse than Andrew's lot used to be. So Andrew pays for everything he doesn't know he hasn't forgotten, deep down, by attacking, justifiably, the sort of man he never thought of except as a servant until he was nearly grown up." (1)

During the same conversation, Mahler describes Bernice to Oliver as:

" '....what Sybil would have been like if she hadn't found out she could paint and hadn't acquired all the tricks and graces of our sort of life.'

'You think those tricks and graces are bad ? '

'What d'you think I am ? A flat earther ? No, they're necessary. They're what helped turn a dirty little village on the Seine into Paris. And they're what made Shakespeare claim a coat of arms.' " (2)

It would be unreasonable to criticise Hearne, for attempting to take account of the complexities of any assessment in moral terms of a political situation. However, an attempt to be unwaveringly fair to both sides of a question presents its own dangers - most obviously the danger of moral confusion. It does not, for instance, occur to Oliver to wonder whether "greed, privilege, corruption and the like" does not constitute a high price - paid by such as Hencky - for "tricks and graces" - enjoyed by Fabricus and others. The upper reaches of Cayunan society are thus presented in a shifting perspective of criticism and appreciation. The moral issues are, in their case, political.

In the case of the lower levels of the society, the ambivalence concerns the other, and more important, aspect of Hearne's novels, the examination of human relationships. The general idealisation of the working-class Bernice is evident in Mahler's description (Mahler, we must remember is not in love with her) : "...her passions take to charity and goodness the way some men's muscles take to games." (3)

{1} Hearne (op.cit) p.172
{2} Ibid. p.174
{3} Hearne (op.cit.) p.174

Apart from Bernice, there is, in Hearn's novels, a sort of cult of the vigorous proletariat, dangerously close to the "noble savage" variety of well-meaning insult. Physical characteristics are used to make black lower-class men such as Tiger, Scissors, Trouble, Heneky, the drugged cultist who ruins Mahler's specimens in the Land of the Living, or even such servant-figures as Summer, merge into a black mass, all partaking of a certain physical grandeur and strength, all, except for Summer, consumed by rage and restrained by a natural self-possession. Heneky, for instance, has "the most beautiful voice I (Mahler) have ever heard (the most beautiful I am ever likely to hear)" (1) and is "impressive" with a "great square grey head, wide, hungry nostrils and long obstinate chin." (1) Heneky's frown instantly suggests the possibility of anger "... as different from the facile petulance of the choleric as the pent turbulence of a volcano is from the heat of a stove." (2) Tiger Johnson in Stranger at the Gate to take another instance, has a

".....wild, black head: the great bush of hair sweeping back from the high forehead, and the harsh lines and sharp planes of the small face in its frame of tufted wirey beard, looked as if it had been passionately cast from rough black iron." (3)

He also has "dead, black eyes" which stare "with the emotionless concentration of a wary carnivore" (4) Hearn's use of physical description to idealise black vigour and strength reaches the absurd in his description of Summer who "had the deep cleft that Roy had seen in the chins of most stubborn, brave men." (5)

- (1) Hearn (op.cit.) p.111
- (2) Ibid p.113
- (3) Hearn (op.cit.) p.77
- (4) Ibid, p.76
- (5) Ibid, p.160

Disapproval is conveyed when these characters are involved in man-woman relationships. We have seen Mahler's opinions of the "sexual aristocrats" of Cayuna; this sexual aristocracy is most clearly defined in the lives of the peasants. In Stranger at the Gate, Campbell's desertion of his pregnant woman, though admitted to be a normal occurrence, is viewed by Roy and his middle-class associates as a horrifying moral failure by one whom they had taught to know better; they uncritically accept their own moral scheme as a priori universally valid:

"(Ray) thought about Campbell, the ex-sugar worker, ex-garden boy, ex-postman, ex-wharf labourer, who had been a good worker for the party, and who was now an ex-husband (he thought of him as that although he knew that Campbell and his woman had never been formally married) and who with this sudden, frightened denial of all the people who had needed him and trusted him was now an ex-every thing." (1)

It is true that Linda, Roy's secretary, later punctures the complacency of Roy and his associate Bob Daniels, when they loudly advocate "discipline" for the lower orders, by suggesting that Campbell's woman and the working-class Cayunan women who bring up many children without help can teach their rulers a good deal about "discipline". Her words, however, amount to praise of the women and no more. There is no sense that the morality of Campbell's action may not be as simple an issue as they suppose. Hearne is not always as "aware of the ambiguity of moral attitudes," (2) as Davies would suggest and the context of his failure of awareness is instructive.

(1) Hearne (op.cit.) p.118
(2) Davies (op.cit.) p.112

His novels - especially The Autumn Equinox - do seek to "assert that the woman, too, has a point of view." (1) The denial of that point of view is seen as occurring most clearly among the lower-classes, becoming less dogmatic in the middle-classes and almost completely absent in the "squirearchy", Carl Brandt, Roy McKenzie, and Andrew Fabricus. Just as politically, there is a contrast between the leisured ease of Brandt's Pen and the home of Tiger Johnson in Stranger at the Gate so in the sphere of human relationships there is a contrast between the relationships of the cultured Cayunans and those of the lower-classes. Politically the contrast is, in general, to the disadvantage of the upper-classes while in human relationships it is to their advantage. Neither contrast is as sharp as it might be, because the novelist's concern with presenting all the facets and complexities of moral problems with scrupulous fairness often appears as unjustifiable ambiguity or as unresolved and conflicting sympathies.

It is, of course, with the second of these contrasts - in the area of human relationships - that we are concerned here. However, the political antithesis sometimes affects Hearne's view of man-woman relationships and is, in any case, closely associated with it. That the "subtle assumptions of Aphrodite", the assumptions of the expatriates Stefan, in The Land of the Living and Sheila in Stranger at the Gate and of the Cayunan gentry, are quite clearly the assumptions of romantic love is so evident that it requires little demonstration.

(1) Davies (op.cit.) p.115

Mahler's opinions on the subject of love have already been dealt with. One may also cite the last occasion on which Roy and Sheila make love in Stranger at the Gate before the death of Roy:

"He held her close against him and said against her ear:

'I love you too, Sheila'

She leaned up on her elbow, pulling away from his arm, and looked steadily at him.

'You don't have to say that, you know? I told you on Sunday that I never want you to pretend about it. This is enough for me.'

'I'm not pretending' he told her. 'I felt it this morning when I thought of seeing you again today. And when I saw you this afternoon I was sure.'

For the first time since this had begun between them she looked really shy. She said nothing but buried her face in his neck and slowly tightened her arms about his shoulders.

'I'm almost afraid to believe it's happened' she whispered.

'Roy. My dearest, I never thought it would happen like this.'

'It's happened, though.'

'I know.' " (1)

Although, out of context, the above passage sounds like the worst kind of cheap love-novel, it is less cloying in Stranger at the Gate because most of the novel is just as unabashedly sentimental.

The idealisation of black physical attributes combines with political sympathy in one instance where Hearne portrays a minor lower-class relationship without direct or implied disapproval. This is the relationship of Tiger Johnson and his woman in Stranger at the Gate:

"Johnson sat at the head of the table: his dead black eyes stared at them with the emotionless concentration of a wary carnivore. The eyes were reddened across the whites, and Roy could smell the faint, dead-flower scent of ganja. A slender, beautiful, half-coolie girl in a clean, print dress lounged against the doorway to the other way, with one perfect, thin foot resting on the knee of her straight leg: The face was half-hidden in the long wild curls of her hair and all they could properly see was the steady quick glitter of her eyes which followed every movement they made." (2)

(1) Hearne (op.cit.) p.269

(2) Hearne (op.cit.) p.76

The woman never speaks. As the extract suggests, she is represented as a beautiful savage whom Tiger clearly regards as one of his possessions:

" 'I got food and a house and her,' Tiger's eyes twitched towards the girl. 'You get them for me?' "

It is in the nature of Hearne's political theme that any criticism of Tiger Johnson, leader of the poor and justifiably angry workers would be inappropriate. The absence of any disapproval here is also the result of the idealisation of the working class which at this point reaches an extreme - an extreme of vulgarity - as Roy's mixture of fear and fascination is expressed in the inevitable cliché, black sexual prowess; Roy has a "sudden, detailed vision of Tiger Johnson and his woman in bed." He finds this vision "formidable and disturbing."

It is in The Faces of Love, in the story of Jojo Rygin, that we see most clearly the novelist's critical attitude to the assumptions of the male peasant West Indian. As the novel opens, Jojo Rygin is in gaol for bribing a politician. His woman, Rachel Ascom, is on the senior staff of a Cayunan newspaper, the Newsletter. The novel is projected through the eyes of Andrew Fabricus who works with the Newsletter. An Englishman, Michael Lovelace, arrives in Cayuna to be the new editor of the newspaper. Rachel, who was once Andrew's lover, gradually attracts Lovelace into a sexual relationship which continues after Jojo is released from prison.

Jojo forms a plan to buy land under which he believes oil will be found but makes the mistake of giving the information to Rachel.

She betrays him by selling the news to the corrupt politician, Littleford, whom Jojo had bribed. When Jojo seeks out Rachel for revenge, she is with Lovelace. He tries to kill Lovelace and in the attempt kills Rachel instead.

Jojo Rygin has risen from the rural peasant-class by force of sheer ambition. The result of his conviction for bribery is, as Andrew Fabricus's father puts it that "He was not exactly suitable before, but now....." (1) We are assured that Jojo is very much in love with Rachel. Andrew says:

"I was wondering if Margaret ever deceived me the way Rachel deceived Jojo, would I be as blind to it, and make as many excuses in my mind as he did. I wondered if a man really had to love a woman as completely as he loved Rachel to be as vulnerable as that." (2)

This love is characterised by possessiveness. Rachel later says:

"Jojo is beginning to act as if I've already been sold to him. I don't like him when he acts that way. I hate him to touch me when he gets that possessive look on his face." (3)

Jojo's assumptions become clearer in a later conversation with Andrew, Jojo says:

" 'You think Rachel is a woman like Margaret or Sybil, or that big girl your cousin Brandt has ? If you want her, you have to back it up. She'll love you for ever, then?'
'She didn't love Price for ever.'
'Cho ! Price ! What was Price ? A small-time, Cayuna white man who thought he's made a killing when he bought out a politician. He was all right for her to start on. But how he could think that she could love him ?'
I didn't reply. It seemed to me an odd way to look at love. That he should need to buy her faithfulness with the news of what he was going to do." (4)

- (1) Hearne (op.cit.) p.102
- (2) Ibid p.85
- (3) Ibid p.222
- (4) Hearne (op.cit.) pp.240, 241

Jojo's opinions are "odd" in the eyes of the patrician Fabricus; "love" takes on a meaning in the above passage which is quite distinct from the force recognised by Sheila, Roy and Carl in Stranger at the Gate or from the meaning Fabricus would ascribe to the word. The most obvious difference is the assumption that self-interest is the necessary motive of "Love". This is so clearly opposed to the "human commitment in unselfish love" of the squirearchy that one can see that Jojo's social status (1), closer to that of Tiger than that of Andrew, corresponds exactly to his views which are nearer to the possessiveness and materialism of Tiger than to the point of view of Fabricus.

After Jojo kills Rachel, he goes to Andrew, who asks:

- " 'When did you decide to kill her ?'
'I wasn't ever going to kill her. She was my woman and she did me dirtiness, but I wasn't going to kill her. Beat her, yes. But not kill her.'
'Not even when you found out about Lovelace?'
'No. I would have beat her worse. Marked her. But not killed her.' " (2)

For the greater part of the novel, Rachel Ascom is vilified by the narrator, Andrew Fabricus and by Sybil, one of the middle-class Cayunan characters, as a predatory woman with a drive to possess her men and to destroy them. Kenneth Ramchand says "In place of her own extreme vulnerability, Rachel uses love as a compensatory exercise of power. This makes her the arch-heretic in Hearne's fictional world." Yet Hearne provides several clues which should prevent us from accepting the points of view of Fabricus and Sybil.

- (1) For a detailed view of Jojo's rural origins, see p.87; he belongs to the "class of big peasant(s) " See p.101 The Islands in Between for the social status of rural Jamaicans vis a vis the cities.
(2) Hearne(8p. cit.) p.49

One of these is the fact that Fabricus was Rachel's lover and in spite of his many attempts to assure himself that he is now emotionally free of her, the suggestion of sexual jealousy cannot be disregarded. In any case, Fabricus's perceptiveness is made to appear limited in his relationship with his fiancée, Margaret. Margaret tells him that she wishes she had studied science instead of literature because she might have been "of some use". He assures her that she is of great value to the Newsletter. She replies:

" 'That!Cho! That! '
'I know' I said. 'But all the same, you do the good part of that paper. And you do it damn well.'
She didn't say anything. Her thin face was still and set as it looked down into the glass.....
'You're more use to people than most' I told her. 'And when we have our place you're going to have a lot to do. You weren't brought up on a property, so you don't know what a lot there is for a woman who really wants to help run it. Haying children is only part of it.'
She looked up from the glass..... She began to laugh; softly at first, then very strongly.
'You bloody man' she said. 'You bloody man. You're sweet, you know, darling? You're sweet.'
She almost never swore, except, very rarely, when we were making love. Whenever she did, except at those times, I always had a feeling that there was something in what we were saying that I had missed." (1)

In Mahler's words, Fabricus is here confronted with a "heresy of the imagination" the possibility that a woman may aspire to a significance in life which derives wholly from her own achievements, and the heresy is so alien to him that he is not even aware of its existence. To some extent, Fabricus too is guilty of being instrumental in the denial of "the woman's point of view."

(1) Hearne (op.cit.) p.63

The difference between Fabricus and the peasants is that his ideal is not conscious and, we suspect, would not continue if he were aware of it.

In another conversation (pp.149 - 155) he shows himself equally incapable of understanding the reasons that lie behind Margaret's reactions. Fabricus is presented in this relationship as very much conditioned by his upbringing and social background and able to escape from it to a very limited extent. His perceptiveness, shown as faulty with the woman he loves, cannot be trusted with regard to a former lover. Hearne develops the personality of the narrator to a degree which makes our view of early events in the novel a refracted one, too complex for easy acceptance of Andrew's opinions. Margaret observes that Sybil is sexually attracted to Jojo. This opinion is supported by the tone of Sybil's remarks to Jojo which is distinctly teasing and provides sufficient motive (jealousy combined with solicitude for the "endangered" Jojo) for Sybil's vilification of Rachel.

When we make due allowance for the motives and limitations of these two observers, we see that Rachel, far from being "the arch-heretic of Hearne's fictional world" is yet another victim of, in Mahler's words "that crude and tedious limitation to the Caribbean scope, the sexual snobbery of the West Indian male". Jojo discovers that Rachel did indeed love Michael Lovelace. He tells Fabricus:

" 'I went up to his car and was raising the gun, and then she was on me. She was strong you know ! Look!' He showed his thick, black-haired forearm. It was scored with fading finger marks and four long nail scratches.
'Yes' I said. 'She was very strong.'
'I pushed her down, man. And I fired once at him. Then she gave one scream, you see, and flung herself before the gun. Almost on the barrel. And you know what she said?'
'No'
'Kill me, Jojo! Kill me. Don't kill him!' " (1)

(1) Hearne (op.cit.) p.262

Fabricus finally comes to realise the true nature of Rachel's predicament. In a passage which is the key to the novel, he reflects:

"We had gone after love and attached our need to various people, and then tried to attach those people to ourselves. To use them instead of giving whatever we had to them. Which of us hadn't? Not me, certainly. I had failed with Rachel and I might have failed with Margaret....Not Jojo. He had wanted too much. He was ready to give a lot too, but not of the things he would miss.... And Rachel? She had waited a long time to find the love she wanted. Maybe she had known a lot about it and had been contemptuous and terrified of what had been offered her in its place by Price, and me, and Jojo.... All I could see, as I went from my room, was her face, and the big handsome body being flung between death and the man she had chosen."

The tragedy of Rachel Ascom thus lies not in her own insecure reflex reaction to her surroundings but in the attitudes of the men she meets, attitudes composed of possessiveness, unimaginativeness, and the desire to dominate. Though by his own admission Andrew is guilty, it is to him that the revelation comes. Andrew is, in these terms, ill but curable; Jojo, on the other hand, never sees his "mistake" and takes the sin of possessiveness to an extreme.

It is obvious that the revelation Andrew related in the passage last quoted has a great deal in common with the ideal of separate, self-realising personalities in a love which implies communication with out possession, that ideal which D.H. Lawrence consistently expressed and which has since become commonplace. The difference between Hearne and Lawrence is that Hearne does not reject what has been called "the falling-in-love-and-living-happily-ever-after-myth." On the contrary, as we have seen in Stranger at the Gate Hearne uses the well-worn terms of romantic love to such an extent that one can find passages which sound like fifth-rate love story material. So far from accepting the proposition that "falling in love" is a dangerous delusion, Hearne goes out of his way to ridicule the idea in the passage in which Mahler muses over Oliver's tipsiness.

Moreover, there is never any sense that the happiness of Oliver and Sybil, Andrew and Margaret, Mahler and Joan, and others of that social level, is limited in time as it usually is for lovers in Lawrence's novels. If Lawrence was, at least for the middle-class ethic of his time, a radical about man-woman relationships Hearne preserves a kind of enlightened conservatism, a philosophical balancing-act. In the world of his novels, men and women "fall in love", experience the exaggerated ecstasies and agonies which custom has associated with that expression, then manfully resist, with the strength of their purely intellectual awareness of danger, the temptation to "possess" the loved one. The love-ideal remains an essential part of the structures of the novels.

Within those structures, the function of the "message", that lovers must not seek to possess each other, is simply to increase the contrast between "love" as the expatriates and the upper-class understand it, and "love" as the working class, with the exception of Bernice, understand it. "Love" has little to do with Tiger Johnson's calculations; "love" enters into Jojo Rygin's calculations in a way Fabricus can only describe as "odd". In The Faces of Love as the last quotation suggests, Hearne is much more deliberate, one may say heavy-handed, about putting forward a point of view on man-woman relationships than he is in the following novel, The Land of the Living. It is therefore in The Faces of Love that we can see how the issue of "possessiveness", the cardinal sin, is related to a social division. Rachel is the victim and at the end she has won all our sympathy; the villain, of course, is the body of "false" assumptions which motivate Jojo.

The expatriate, Lovelace, is more sophisticated. The patrician, Fabricus, is redeemed by insight and good-will in the weighty opinion of his fiancée. Mahler's criticisms of Cayunan male attitudes in The Land of the Living are thus the culmination of a process which begins with the idealisation of Tiger and the muted criticism of Campbell in Stranger at the Gate and proceeds through the clear condemnation of the sins of Jojo Rygin, the peasant boy who "made it" in society in The Faces of Love.

Apart from the sin of possessiveness there is, in the novels, the sin of unimaginativeness - the main theme of Mahler's criticism. The "more subtle assumptions of Aphrodite" are, on examination, little more than romantic love. What Mahler perceives in his "raw, unarmoured sensitivity" and what Carl feels as he leaves the house where his friend and his beloved are making love is consistently portrayed in the terms of romantic love. Heresy and punishment are reserved for Jojo.

Salkey's The late Emancipation of Jerry Stover

It is difficult to think of a calypso which suggests that the tribulations and the risks of purely sexual relationships are anything other than a normal and evitable fact of everyday life - amusing, perhaps, but certainly not a fit subject for censure. West Indian novelists in general however, have taken a curiously disapproving attitude to man-woman relationships in their native environment. Hearne is by no means unusual in his attitude. What does distinguish him is that while the proposition that "Caribbean sex..... is too often merely appetitive, male-centred and stereotyped" is clearly an important assumption of his work, his novels do not connect that assumption directly with social protest. Hearne does not, in other words represent this alleged lack of subtlety and discrimination as the result of ignorance and poverty, a connection which is quite evident in Mais's first two novels.

The relationships of tension and antagonism which we find in The Hills were Joyful Together and Brother Man reappear in a large number of West Indian novels. It is not, in itself, remarkable since most of the novels are set in the peasant and working classes. What is worthy of note is the total absence of the kind of amused, straight forward acceptance that we find in calypsoes. There is a recurring sense that the difficulties of these sexual relationships are somehow unacceptable and the result of social conditions which are being criticised. There is a sense that something is missing, and more often than not, that something proves to be "love".

The persistent sense that Caribbean man-woman relationships are inadequate and working class male attitudes are blameworthy appears as a marked tendency to exaggerate the conflict in these relationships. Little attention is given to positives which may result in relationships which cannot be described as romantic love.

It would be tedious to review at any length the Caribbean heroines³ who belong to the same mould as Mittelholzer's Sylvia and the many relationships which stop just short of the pure violence of Papacita and Girlie. Austin Clarke's The Survivors of the Crossing (1) provides one example in the betrayal of Rufus by Stella who demonstrates precisely the failure of will and the unintentional power to hurt so typical of these heroines. Clarke says of Stella and Rufus that it seemed as if they lived together to tear each other apart. Another of Clarke's novels Amongst Thistles and Thorns (2) reproduces conflict and mutual competition in the relationship of Ma and Nathan, essentially a question of betraying one's partner before one is, oneself, a victim. That Clarke's novels are much concerned with social protest would be evident from even a cursory examination of them, simply because Clarke's political concern is usually uncomfortably integrated into the structure of the novels; it tends to be so obvious and so direct as to be jarring. In Amongst Thistles and Thorns, the narrator, a schoolboy, is struck by his mother's insecurity and vulnerability towards his head-master. Her social vulnerability results from her desertion by the boy's father, Nathan, and that insecurity is the means by which Clarke's sometimes heavy handed wit attacks the injustices of colonial Barbadian society.

(1) The Survivors of the Crossing, Austin C. Clarke; London, 1964.
(2) Amongst Thistles and Thorns, Austin C. Clarke; London, 1965.

Ian Carew's Black Midas (1) presents another such heroine, Belle, who loves the hero, Shark, but is driven from him by the irresistible force of her own nature. In Carew's The Wild Coast (2) Elsa finds an inability to "love" Tengar because his father, Doorne, raped her when she was young and, she says "blight me young and juicy days and knead me heart dry of all the things that does flower in a woman heart." The motivation is provided but the character is typical. Betty Lou in Lauchmonen's Old Thom's Harvest (3) is raped by a Government minister and becomes the perfect type of the callous, embittered woman. Garth St. Omer frequently uses betrayal in love not as a major theme but to reinforce the alienated angst of his young, educated heroes on their return to the West Indies. For example, in Nor Any Country (4) the hero, Peter, returns to the West Indies from post-graduate studies in England, and becomes the victim of his own new awareness of the island's lack of tradition and direction. The sense of aimlessness is expressed in the total failure of communication with his wife, Phyllis, gradually becoming resentment of her and resentment of his own inability to appreciate her sacrifices for him. The emptiness of his married relationship contrasts with the fulfilment he found in love with a black girl in England. The personal human relationship becomes a means of exposing the inadequacies of island society.

In The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover (5) Andrew Salkey deals with the theme that figures so largely in St. Omer's Nor Any Country, Shades of Grey (6) and A Room on the Hill (7) - that of the predicament of the educated, young West Indian on his return from study overseas.

- (1) Black Midas, Ian Carew: London 1958
- (2) The Wild Coast, Ian Carew: London 1958
- (3) Old Thom's Harvest, Lauchmonen: London 1965
- (4) Nor Any Country, Garth St. Omer: London 1969
- (5) The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover, A. Salkey: London 1968
- (6) Shades of Grey, Garth St. Omer: London 1968
- (7) A Room on the Hill, Garth St. Omer: London 1967

Jerry, the black son of a very bourgeois family, has a group of friends, like himself, young and educated. Salkey avoids giving the island a name but the presence of the Rastafarians, the name of the local beer and a good deal of the political structure all unmistakably indicate that the setting is Jamaica (the novelist's birthplace). Jerry is a Civil Servant but rebels against the Civil Service organisation and the political structure of his native land, which consists of a specious division between two like-minded and finally irrelevant political organisations. Jerry has a sexual relationship with the family's servant, Miriam who is black. The resulting conflict that arises in Miriam's mind is between the racial similarity, which since theirs is an oppressed race, suggests ground for common cause, and the social difference, the master-servant relationship which leads to exploitation. Jerry's friends eventually form a group called the Termites. The nucleus of the group, apart from Jerry, consists of a near-white West Indian, Mason Donne, Jones and his English wife, Jenny, Silba Lane, black and single, Paula Watt, an Englishwoman, and her boy-friend Albert Ley, Berto, the photographer, and Sally Dawes, a black woman who dislikes "niggers." The group indulges in nihilistic orgies of promiscuity and drunkenness. The only fixed quantity on which they feel they can depend is the apparently stable relationship of Mason and Jenny. This fixed element is taken from them in a night of violence and drinking at a night-club, the Jam-Pot when Sally finds Berto making love to Jenny and bursts into tears.

Jerry meets a Syrian girl, Carmen Dabdood and there is a sexual relationship between them, and on her part, love. Miriam becomes pregnant and leaves for America where she hopes Jerry will join her.

Jerry, however, becomes involved with the Rastafarians and goes to live with them in an attempt to teach them elementary skills and literacy. He whole-heartedly supports their moves for political power and some amelioration of their poverty. The Termites gradually join him at the Dung'll the home of the Rastafarians and the poor. The local politicians have no interest in helping the poor and do their best to undermine his efforts. Jerry is depressed by the inability of the Termites to commit themselves in any significant way to the cause at hand; "even their generosity of spirit and pocket seemed stale, rehearsed, burdensome." (1) All the Termites, except Jerry, are killed in a land-slide as they return from a Christmas-party. At this point Jerry receives a letter from Carmen ending their relationship.

In many ways, this is one of the most important of the more recent West Indian novels. Where St. Omer communicates a powerful sense of the aimlessness of a society unable to be proud of achievements or traditions and Naipaul's wit reveals detailed absurdities, Salkey concerns himself rather less with the symptoms than with the disease. The depth of that concern is evident in a passage near the end of the novel, as the Termites come to recognise the emptiness of their lives:

"The recognition of the crack in their confused lives had come to them at last. They all recognised it in Van, they all knew it in themselves. Some of them were willing to continue as they had been, deluding themselves, contradicting their hopes: the others were frightened and panic-stricken. Both sides were without a palliative: they knew that Black Seal was never intended to be effective: both sides were without a plan for their spiritual reclamation. Jerry and Mason had claimed that Dung'll in desperation but had not worked out a personal programme in terms of their claim; they had not willed themselves to a balanced and precise attack on the weaknesses and cruel excesses;

(1) Salkey (op.cit.) p.191

they secretly feared a concerted voice, a possible remedy; they had no private philosophy, no binding discipline, no real faith in anything. All they had was their freedom, an emancipation that had come too late. They had not had the time and the kind of society in which to use it intelligently, to benefit from it, to build on it. It had come, all at once, in a frightening lump. It had a tired, colonial shape. There had not been the time to divide it up, to live with it, to transmute it, to put it to work for themselves and their island's destiny." (1)

It is ⁱⁿ contrast with the accuracy and the perceptiveness of the above analysis that a technique such as Naipaul's work ^{seems} merely destructive. The path to this revelation leads the Termites through despair, nihilism and frustration until the enormity and irrationality of the event which destroys them appears with a paradoxical inevitability. The absurdity of the manner of their death is a fitting end to their blind, self-destructive groping after truths which they only dimly comprehend and which understood too late, afford no comfort. Man-woman relationships reflect the social and political dilemmas which confront them.

The collapse of standards and values which were once represented in the society by Jerry's mother and those of her social level, is the wider context. A part of the general dissolution of all trusted and apparently trustworthy moral and social fixed quantities, of everything the young might hope to take for granted, is the failure of new ones to establish themselves on any but the most superficial level. The part expresses and represents the whole in microcosm.

Mrs. Stover states the problem to Jerry's Brother Lee, in this way:

"I never felt your anguish and discontent when I was young. Our expectations fitted in neatly at the bottom of the back pocket. It seemed spacious then; all our dreams fitted into it in my day. Now suddenly, your generation's expectations are disproportionately high. You've rapidly outgrown your little island." (2)

- (1) Salkey (op.cit) p.232
- (2) Salkey (op.cit.) p.217

"Anguish and discontent" result from the loss of a reassuring and accepted social framework - a loss because the old one is irrelevant to the new generation.

Immediately after the remarks just quoted, the scene changes to the Dung'll where Mason is facing the bitterness and frustration of trying to communicate with Jenny, who resents his every effort. The juxtaposition is not accidental. Earlier in the novel, the Termites are dancing at P.D's home:

"Jerry stood behind the table and held a tall drink. He spotted Mason and Jenny and waved with his glass. He admired them. In all the chaos of Termite life, Mason and Jenny had managed to remain faithful to each other. The Termites took their mutual fidelity for granted." (1)

Jerry then dances with Sally; they walk away from the dancers and as they pass their station wagon a voice calls out - Berto's. Sally runs to the station wagon and turns away in shock. Jerry, unaware of the significance of the event, since he does not know who is with Berto, tries to calm Sally by talking to her:

" 'Well, why did he call out ? '
'That's what I don't understand, Jerry.'
He waited.
'Why?' she asked herself, her voice faltering slightly.
'Why did he bother ? '
'Does it matter ? '
'Of course it matters, Jerry. He must've known I'd see her.' " (2)

One sees later that Berto's reasons were a matter of sharing his triumph - that of ensuring that no one is exempt from "the chaos of Termite life."

" 'One of the girls from the village?' Jerry tried to keep her talking.
'I don't know what to believe any more.' She rubbed her eyes and blinked.
'Right. Who did Berto have with him, Sally ? '
He gripped her shoulders firmly and held her at arm's length.
'No ! '
'Dome on, now.'
'Don't ask me, please'. She started to cry and between sobs, she said, 'Jenny'." (3)

(1) Salkey (op.cit.) p.58
(2) Ibid p.59
(3) Salkey (op.cit.) p.60

It is clear from the amount of suspense that is built up before the final revelation that the collapse of the Donne-Jones' fidelity is to be seen as an event of major importance. That importance can only lie in its power to represent the wider collapse in the society of what is reassuring and accepted. It does not occur to the Termites that the middle-class virtues of absolute sexual fidelity may possibly not be necessary or precious.

Beyond this point Mason and Jenny indulge in bitter and sadistic quarrels when they meet at the Dung'll and the relationship Jenny has with a Syrian on the island, Neddy Leazar is soon characterised by conflict of a peculiarly vicious kind.

The society's artificial divisions between people whose real and urgent interests co-incide are reflected in the relationship of Jerry and the servant Miriam.

"She was silent, co-operative, grateful. She had proved herself, it seemed to him. She's got what she's come for. Only once had it occurred to her that she did not properly belong in his bed; only once, just after they had begun to caress each other, had she doubted herself. It was, in a split second, when she gazed up at him and had noticed the blackness of his skin, the tense spread of his chest, the strained tendons of his neck, the bluging small veins of his shoulder muscles, that she had wanted to say to him, 'We the same black people together, Missa Jerry. We really the said same, only you's different when we get up an' go outside.' " (1)

The issue, outside of the man-woman relationship, is amusingly suggested by a confrontation between Bashra, leader of the Rastafarians, and Glissada Maycroft, the black secretary of one of the island's politicians. Jerry and Mason take Bashra to see Dr. Rybik, the politician, to plead for better conditions for the poor. Glissada recognises Mason and Jerry but ignores Bashra who mutters:

"I tell you: black people can 'ard bad, sir, special when them 'ave to deal with them own." (2)

(1) Salkey (op.cit) p.113

(2) Ibid p.165

Later, he adds:

"Black as she is, she wouldn't really know or want to know all like me so. Don't suit her career at all." (1)

Bashra's acid asides so infuriate Glissada that she seizes him by the throat and threatens to throw him out.

Jerry's relationship with Miriam is throughout, a problem to which he responds with a lack of courage. He has neither the courage to resist her nor the strength of will to acknowledge what he sees as his responsibility when she becomes pregnant. Afterwards:

"He thought of Miriam and the suffering he had caused her. He imagined her humiliation. He recalled her planned disappearance, his part in it, and his cowardly relief." (2)

The failure of the young to respond courageously to the difficulties presented by island society is a crucial part of their confusion:

" 'Ever thought of fighting for a larger freedom, as the big books say ?' Mason asked.....
'Do we know how ?' Berto challenged. 'Takes more than guts, which we haven't got, boy, We've always had things given to us, in the way we've had things taken away from us. Colonial finks, Brother Man.'
Mason smiled. He had forgotten Berto's capacity for lush overstatement. He said encourageingly,
'Jeremiah me, man !'
Berto guffawed and declared, 'We're the original gimme types, Mason. Hands out, palms up. Courage ? Where do we find that sort of shit in a hurry ? Not in these lovely English-speaking islands, Daddy-0' " (3)

As far as these relationships are expressive of and associated with social ills which it is the primary concern of the novel to criticise, it obviously follows, conversely, that social criticism requires the novelist to present these purely sexual relationships in a critical light.

(1) Salkey (op.cit.) p.165

(2) Ibid, p.243

(3) Salkey (op.cit.) p.219

We are told that Jerry thinks of "the suffering" and humiliation" of Miriam but, except for the "split second" of self-doubt, nothing in the text suggests that Miriam is either suffering or humiliated up to the time of her disappearance. On the contrary, her attitude is robust and entirely pragmatic.(2) Salkey presents the attitude of the servant in a way that is true to the actual attitudes of her class: the over-riding social concern of the novel then requires that the relationship appear as one of Jerry's failures but the novelist fails to relate Jerry's retrospective guilt to anything we actually see in Miriam's behaviour or statements.

In the same way, the promiscuity of the Termites is represented, as we see in the case of Jenny's initiation into infidelity by Berto, as a part of the general dissolution of standards and morality. There is, however, no sense in which such promiscuity is necessarily or inevitably reprehensible unless Salkey is inviting the reader to participate in some of the attitudes of that middle-class his novel otherwise attacks - for instance, he presents the bourgeois politicians as rogues and Mason's typically bourgeois upbringing as finally irrelevant. Unless the proposition, that the incident, in the station-wagon is somehow to be deplored, depends on an appeal to an understood criterion of the value of absolute sexual fidelity, one has cause to expect some more detailed explanation of why that incident and the general promiscuity of the Termites are in themselves unfortunate or even remarkable. This would require the presentation of characters in far greater depth than Salkey allows himself, so that we may see some adverse relationship between their sexual behaviour and their psychological or emotional well-being. An appeal to an understood criterion of fidelity is on the other hand a curious device for Salkey to adopt given the necessarily bourgeois associations of such a criterion and the anti-bourgeois political direction of the novel.

(2) see pp.117, 118

In the absence of any such explanation, it appears that, as with Miriam, the novelist's social and political concerns dictate a certain moral attitude. The means by which that moral attitude is expressed are familiar ones. All man-woman relationships in the novel, with one exception, are negative and injurious to the participants. The exception is the relationship of Jerry and the "little rich girl", Carmen Dabdood. Though this relationship fails and its failure is seen as part of the general failure of will and the aimlessness which Jerry shares with the rest of the Termites, it is, up to the time of Carmen's departure for America, a relationship of mutual affection. Just before she leaves:

"Carmen was thinking about him and America. She was glad that she had not gone without meeting him, without having had the chance of falling in love with him, without experiencing his love for her."

The word "love" is an over-statement in relation to Jerry but the text suggests that the narrative is echoing Carmen's thoughts; the idea that what Jerry feels is "love" is therefore Carmen's point of view. In fact, social factors enter into the relationship to limit Jerry's involvement. Carmen, however, is, as she says, "in love" : the following extract follows a reference by Jerry to the exclusive school at which Carmen was a pupil:

" 'Well, you know there's nothing special about the school.

It's different with girls. Isn't it ?'

'Little rich ones ?'

She had never seen this side of him before. She wanted an explanation. 'What's wrong with going to a school if your parents can afford it ?'

'Sorry'. He suddenly felt like a drink, with the Termites.

He had come full circle. He had made a fool of himself and

he had been found out. He got up. 'Tomorrow afternoon.

A quarter to four ?'

'Fine'

He walked to the door and she followed him.

'Kiss me goodbye ?' she asked.

He kissed her and started down the steps.

'Getting tired already, Jerry ?' she called out to him.

He waited for her to catch up with him. He kissed her forehead and then her lips. She smiled. She watched him walking up Retirement Road towards Cross Roads, and then she went back inside and sat in the corner of the sofa where he had been sitting and followed him in her mind's eye all the way up the road." (1)

That she has "fallen in love" is all the more apparent when one considers that the above episode contrasts sharply with the scenes in which the attitudes of the female Termites are apparent. In a novel of conflict and occasional violence, Salkey does not need to stress Carmen's gentleness and the depth of her feelings for Jerry, because the contrast makes such restrained descriptions as the end of the passage sufficient. The letter she writes at the end of the novel is easily recognisable as part of a genre - the final letter when love has gone wrong. This is not to suggest either that the letter appears insincere or that Carmen's expressing herself in these terms appears improbable:

"Dear Jerry,

I can only think that you're no longer interested. I've had a long time to think things over. We're wasting each others time.

I can't go on hoping any more. It hurts too much. You needn't reply.

Carmen."

No man-woman relationship in the novel is presented in very great depth and this one is no exception. Thus, if the above evidence for claiming that the relationship of Jerry and Carmen is presented as romantic love appears limited, it must be remembered that the context of Salkey's portrayal of character and relationships is itself extremely narrow. Within these limits, every action and statement of Carmen goes to support the explicitly stated view that she has "fallen in love" with Jerry.

(1) Salkey (op.cit.) p.73

Though this love does eventually fail for reasons not very different from those which account for most of the failures of Jerry's life (emotional anaesthesia combined with an inability to give direction and purpose to his actions) the relationship provides the one refuge to which Jerry can fly from his difficulties. It is also the one relationship in which neither participant is doing harm to the other (1) or, as with Jerry and Miriam, merely being selfish.

The difference between this relationship and the others is increased by the personal and social differences between Carmen and the young intellectuals. This gap is suggested by Carmen's innocent but tactless question on first meeting the Termites; "Are they real?" She is middle-class, well-off and free of soul-searching about social problems ("What's wrong with going to a good school if your parents can afford it?" as she puts it). At the same time there are no satirical overtones to Salkey's presentation of her innocence about social problems.

The Jerry-Carmen relationship is thus quite distinct from all the others in the novel; it is a kind of oasis in a world devoid of emotions other than malice and self-interest. Within the limits of Salkey's portrayal, it is possible to trace the development of Carmen's feelings from sexual interest to the point at which she follows him in her mind's eye as he walks up the street. One is thus prepared for the statement that she fell in love with him. It is quite apparent that in this relationship, as in no other, there are potentialities for good and Jerry becomes aware of it on receiving the letter:

(1) i.e. no one sees it or could reasonably see it in this way and no implied moral judgement like Sally's reaction to Jenny's adventure with Berto appears.

"As he held it, it seemed to him to be the most convincing evidence of another area in his life where failure had scored deeply. In a curiously perverse way, failure had come to mean so much in his reckoning, in his moments of self-criticism, that he was no longer afraid to encounter it or examine it. He knew that it meant the dilemma of unpreparedness; it was the short-sightedness of his parents' generation; it was the ignorance, waywardness and impatience of his own, it was the colonial situation....."

The failure of love thus appears at the end of the novel as the final failure, a kind of symbol which sums up all the other failures in Jerry's life. It is possible to accept it as such because, throughout the novel, the love-relationship of Jerry and Carmen appears as the one element which is capable of going towards success rather than failure. It appears so on balance, in spite of the ominous hints provided by Jerry's occasional failure to communicate and his wilful isolation of his emotions. One instance is his desire to return to the Termites after making the tactless remark about "little rich girls". Such hints make the failure which does occur appear inherent in certain flaws which were always present in Jerry's personality. Nevertheless the positive aspect of the relationship, has sufficient force to make Carmen glad that she had not left for America "without having had the chance of falling in love with him." Romantic love appears once again as the accepted criterion by which purely sexual relationships are subjected to critical examination and, as in the Mais's novels, social criticism is bound up with that examination of human relationships.

White West Indian novelists

Romantic love is handled with sure understanding by one class of novelists of whom it may be said that this success of theirs is predictable: these are the white West Indian writers whose novels are set in European society in the West Indies. It is true that, in the Self Lovers, Christopher Nichole creates a society of unprincipled sophisticates (on a fictional island called Grand Flamingo) who live in a chaos of moral nihilism reminiscent of that of the Termites. Their attitude to man-woman relationships is typified by Alison Brice's remark that she wants to be laid, not loved:

"I want to be laid only like I want to drink all the Bisquit I can find and like I want to eat all the Beluga I can afford and like I'd like to persuade my old man to fork out the necessary for a D.B.6." (1)

However Nichole, unlike Salkey, exaggerates the rapacity of his characters. In the absence of adequate causes in The Self Lovers (as there are in Salkey's novel) to explain the characters' distorted moral viewpoint they emerge as caricatures of some natural evil, the resulting failure of credibility is not supported by any sense of an intentional use of grotesques.

It is in Nichole's White Boy (2) that the love-ideal makes its appearance and it does so with an effect relevant to the novels I have already discussed. The novel deals with the development of the hero, Rupert Longdene, from childhood to a recognition of his racial identity and its implications for his life. Rupert grows up in British Guiana in 1936 (Nichole was himself born in British Guiana). His family is European by descent, He is, as a boy, a good friend of Johnnie Sikram, the East Indian son of the family's butler. He experiences some calf-love for one of two allegedly Lesbian sisters, the (white) Van Forests.

(1) The Self Lovers: Christopher Nichole: London 1968, 0.127
(2) White Boy: Christopher Nichole; London 1966.

The sister he likes, Marian, is killed, after being raped and mutilated, by workers on the estate his father manages. He meets Shirley Collan, daughter of a near-white doctor and slightly older than Rupert. Shirley treats him with condescension because of his naive ideas about class and race. He gets similar treatment from another girl, Romy Coulston, daughter of the owner of the estate, who is English and is visiting the colony. Johnnie Sikram wins a scholarship to the Big College in Georgetown and is later joined by Rupert who is prevented from going to school in England by the outbreak of war.

At the age of fourteen, Rupert is seduced by the remaining Van Foreest sister, Monica Gillian, after a party at which the police-chief is shot and killed by an unseen marksman - assumed to be East Indian because there are labour troubles on the estate. Rupert gradually grows out of the resulting emotional attachment to Monica and decides, instead of going to University to join a bank. At work, he meets Romy again since she now works as a secretary at the bank. His early attempt at initiating a relationship with Romy fails.

Rupert then takes Shirley Collen to the interior of the country for a "dirty week-end" and tells his parents - to their shock - that he intends to marry her. Johnnie Sikram returns to British Guiana with an English wife who has led him to become a Communist. Shirley, unimpressed, for reason of social status, by Johnnie Sikram, makes it clear that she has no wish to be the wife of a friend of a "coolie politician." There is an argument and the relationship ends.

At this point Romy persuades him to take her to a political meeting held by Johnnie Sikram which ends as a violent fracas between blacks and Indians. They escape to his home where, after some hesitation, Rupert ignores Romy's protests and makes love to her. She then accepts him and the novel ends.

Rupert's final choice is a white girl in preference to a childhood playmate of remote Negro ancestry. The final love-relationship is, in part, an expression of his realisation of identity. That Nichole is able to express that realisation in the terms of romantic love is the result of the assumptions inherent in the European world of his characters. Rupert says:

"I love these people and I love the colony..... but I also love my parents and I thank God my skin is white. I can't determine my own feelings towards colour. Shirley was a test case. I never loved her. I can see that now.... Father was right. He said I was expiating a guilty conscience My guilt is for being white." (1)

Because of this identification of personal and racial identity with love, Rupert's eventual choice of Romy, the white girl seems to be a function of his own identity, a natural and inevitable result of what he is, racially as well as individually. The idea of a limitation of choice that white racial identity in a black world imposes is fused with the idea of a limitation of choice imposed by romantic love. The two things reinforce each other.

Rupert uses the word "love" rather freely, with the idea that there is one and only one girl to whom his individual nature - and later, by a natural extension, his racial identity - should lead him. He loves Marian Van Foreest. Later he loves Shirley. Then he loves the white (and English born) Romy.

(1) Nichole (op.cit.) p.284

Rupert's assumptions are, by his own statements, those of his European world; as a boy, having erotic thoughts he remembers that such thoughts are "nigger thinking" not "white thinking"; simple sexuality, he is educated to accept, is the preserve of the black.

At one point, the coloured girl, Shirley says to Rupert: "I don't want to be the wife of the friend of Johnnie Sikram, the coolie politician cum lawyer. I want to be the wife of Rupert Longdens the son of George Longdens." Rupert replies that he thought she wanted to be "the wife of the boy (she is) in love with." :

" 'Love' said Shirley. 'Love is just a word. A word which covers a lot of things like respect, companionship and understanding.' " (1)

It is obvious that Shirley does not understand the word "love" in quite the way that Rupert does - she is, for one thing, considerably more prosaic, Shirley, of course approaches the stereotype of the mentally tortured, insecure mulatto and her comparative world-weariness is perhaps an aspect of this state.

Nevertheless, her promiscuity, the ease with which she decides to spend a "dirty week-end" with Rupert and the fact that she is, when Rupert approaches her, "second-hand" as she puts it, contrasts with Rupert's discovery, as he is about to make love to Romy, that she is still a virgin. The contrast is between coloured sexuality and white ideal, between lust and love.

In the moral world which Rupert, Shirley and Romy evoke by verbally rejecting and actively seeking, love is "purer" than lust as virginity is "purer" than sexual experience and white idealism is "purer" than coloured earthiness. These three antitheses are at the heart of the plot and lead inevitably to the meeting of Romy and Rupert in "love". The result is a complete and revealing identification of the romantic love theme with the European world of the hero.

(1) Nichole (op.cit.) p.260 189

Shirley is decidedly not a peasant so that it is clear the the element which distinguishes her from Rupert in matters of "love" and opinions on the subject cannot be one of class; it can only be a matter of racial and national identity. Indeed it makes no difference in effect that the relevance of romantic love to European society is as much dependent on social status as is its relevance of romantic love to West Indian society, since the image of Europe in the West Indies has been^a strenuously maintained, largely unreal, bourgeois image. In that image, the idea of the working-class Englishman was non-existent (almost a contradiction in terms). It is possible in a novel set in the West Indies, to identify certain values with "Europe" or "England" without allowing for the actual complexities those terms should imply because in a West Indian environment, they have referred to a uniform, simplified and recognised image.

Nichole makes the difference between the image and the reality fairly plain. There is a great difference between the pretensions of the British in the West Indies and the England Sikram eventually finds. The distinction is amusingly suggested in Ian McDonald's The Hummingbird Tree in which the hero remembers a relative's anger at the Norwegian sailors who persist in "letting down the side". Yet if Nichole is aware of the unreality of the image, the knowledge does not prevent his incorporating it into the structure of the novel; the difference between "nigger thinking" and "white thinking". Nichole's use of a West Indian illusion even as he demonstrates that it is illusion bears some resemblance to the ambivalence about "Caribbean sex" in Hearne's novels (no ambivalence in any one novel, but there is a world of difference between Hearne's presentation of the similar attitudes of Jojo Rygin and Tiger Johnson).

The Humming-Bird Tree (1) may serve as a bridge between the novel of the white West Indies and that of the East Indian community. Alan the young white boy in McDonald's novel, is considerably more sexually innocent than Rupert. The differences between Alan and the Indian yard-boy Kaiser are represented as a matter of age and upbringing. Jaillin, Kaiser's sister, is a little younger than Alan but her superior knowledge of the world, like Kaiser's derives from the fact that:

"...they had been living in a world where they had been forced to fend for themselves like any other man or woman in their village from an age when I was hardly rid of my long, girlish golden curls.... As a result I hadn't lost much of childhood's innocence while they, in their compulsorily hard life, had lost it long ago." (2)

The novel is told by Alan, a European who grew up in Trinidad. As a boy, he was a close friend of the family's yard-boy, Kaiser, and his sister Jaillin both of whom are of East Indian descent. Alan tells us that he admired Kaiser for his fund of knowledge about boyish pursuits and fell in love with Jaillin. Their friendship was discouraged by Alan's parents and ended one night when he and Jaillin were discovered bathing naked in the sea. After this incident, Kaiser and Jaillin were sacked. Alan grew up and became absorbed more and more by the prejudices of his new friends. At the end of the novel we see the final meeting between Alan and Jaillin, now adults, and Alan feels a strong sexual desire for her which is thwarted by the bitterness she feels and they part. Most of the novel concerns their childhood relationship, a series of moments of tenderness and painful moments of unintentional hurt caused by differences in social status and education.

- (1) The Humming-Bird Tree, Ian McDonald; London 1969.
(2) McDonald (op.cit.) p.21

It is a minor tragedy which cannot lay claim either to great originality or to profundity. McDonald rescues it from banality by refusing to permit the reader the easy escape of cynicism, his total identification with the sensations of Alan beguiling his reader into a suspension of that condescending amusement which disguises discomfort:

"It is not true to say that the feelings of a young boy don't go as deep as those of a grown man. A boy lives more with terror that is sure. And it is not right to scoff at what is called calf-love. It is difficult for people who are grown up and know how to be passionate to realise that the depth of children's love is as deep as theirs, but that is the truth. The love is as deep but it seems less real, since the ways of giving it and taking it have not been learned..... What is felt cannot be communicated, or if it is, only in ways that seem laughable to grown ups who have the techniques of adult love at their finger tips. In my love for Jaillin was that despair of fulfilment which lies at the centre of real suffering.....The root of love was as strong, it grew as fiercely in the heart as it may grow in a man's." (1)

This clearly, is a novel of romantic love; it is childhood love but, as the above extract indicates, different in expression but not in kind from the love of adults. On Jaillin's part, her enforced early adulthood is a further guarantee that this love is no mere childhood fancy. During their final meeting, Jaillin says:

" 'All right, Master Alan, I going tell you something..... You say you remember so many years gone now when we use' to walk up the river free for' so. You remember that time well ?'
'Very well, Jaillin.'
'All right, Master Alan. I was so sweet in love with you that time I could a gone to sleep to die.'
There was the silence of the centre of a stone.
'Indian girl grow up early, you know. I was loving you like a big woman then. You know how nothing could happen. An' you was white an' I was a brown girl an' things in every way was different. Boy, I use' to cry like a dam' stupid baby sometime. You ever hear that ! An' I only going to Ol' Boss all the time so to tell he what happen.... I say, they shouldn't have a dam' t'ing like love in this worl' at all if it only bring girl like me to be unhappy as hell.' " (2)

(1) McDonald (op.cit.) pp. 19, 20
(2) McDonald (op.cit.) p. 179

In some ways, the expression of childhood love is similar for both Alan and Jaillin - Alan's shy compliments and Jaillin's timid gift of a hard-earned shilling on Alan's birthday are examples. Yet there are quite marked differences in the expression of emotion in terms of physical attraction. Jaillin is at a further stage of physical sexual development and her uninhibited peasant upbringing makes this a factor in the growing divisions between them:

"Sometimes, when the three of us went bathing in the river, I saw her without a dress. Her breasts were just coming up pointed and small and tight on her body, the teats pale and big compared with them. I stared at her body and wondered at the attraction I was lost in. She laughed at me when I looked so hard. 'What you looking so fo' Master Alan. You never see me befo' or what ?' I got confused then, and said I wasn't looking at her at all." (1)

Sexual attraction is awakened in Alan but only as a mysterious fascination. Jaillin is capable of far greater candour as the following passage shows:

"..... she told us openly that her breasts were a big nuisance; 'They itch like France!' she said and rubbed them hard with her fingers. I was unashamed of her nakedness because she was not ashamed but this shocked me. I had got it into my head that a girl did not talk about her body at all, that it was something sacred and unmentionable."

In addition to this difference between them Alan is capable of subtleties which Kaiser and Jaillin cannot approach. There are, for example, differences in their imaginations. Alan sees shapes in clouds which escape them and finds that he and Kaiser "couldn't agree on poetry and beauty...."

(2) Ibid p.20

McDonald scrupulously maintains these differences within a framework of social and cultural causes. However they take their appropriateness from the kind of difference that separates Rupert from Shirley and identifies him with Romy and that separates Mahler from the "sexual aristocrats" of Cayana.

The difference is between European subtlety and West Indian forthrightness, the former leaning towards love as an emotional and the latter towards love as a physical experience. These assumptions (not very original ones) lie in the background. When Jaillin induces Alan to kiss her she demonstrates her superior expertise. When she leads him to bathe naked, she "took off her clothes quickly without any show of embarrassment" and "when she was naked she stretched in the night as if she was proud of her body in front of him." (1) The fact that the initiative in physical love lies with the Indian girl has a peculiar rightness.

McDonald's identification of Jaillin's superior capacity for passionate expression with her physical and racial characteristics in the following extract considerably diminishes the impression that the emotional difference is caused simply by a difference of social status:

"She was a little younger than I and very pretty. She had the same glowing, deep brown skin as Kaiser, her hair was black as a black-bird's wing, like his Her face was thin. All its features were shapely, but the glory of that face were the dark eyes. They were eyes of true Indian beauty, soft, dark as night, yet they slept with some cruel fire deep within. I was in love with Jaillin's eyes, just to see them shape and glow with a smile, in vexation, in fear." (2)

When, later in the novel, the sexual initiative passes to Alan, it is represented as the cynicism of his adulthood and well within a tradition in the West Indies which would claim sexual exploitations of the poor by the rich as a colonial norm.

(1) McDonald (op.cit.) p. 136

(2) Ibid p.19

It is to this that Jaillin seems to refer when she asks Alan: "How many white man..... Indian woman befo', say that ? They like Indian then eh ? " (1) After Alan promises Jaillin a manicure set when she grows up, Kaiser's warning recalls the same tradition: "Boy, by that time you goin' expec' something back for any present you give she. And she not going give you so easy. She bring up well boy, I just telling you." (2) This is the squire's casual use of the village maiden not a relationship of equals. When, as children, they are equals (for all purposes of sex and love), the passion and the sophistication lies with the Indian girl; to some extent, the distinction between "white thinking" and "nigger thinking" again applies.

The difference between Nichole and McDonald on the one hand and many novelists of the black Caribbean, such as Hearne and Mais, on the other is that no criticism of pure "unsophisticated" sexuality can be seen in the novels of the white West Indians. Indeed J.B. Emtage's Brown Sugar (3) is decidedly unusual in being one novel by a white West Indian in which the animus against the life-style of black West Indians is totally unrestrained. Even Jean Rhys's The Wide Sargasso Sea, in which both the heroine and her husband - soon after the emancipation of the slaves - experience the unaccustomed nearness of the blacks as a mysterious, irrational threat, nevertheless suggests that the appearance of the blacks as a dangerous, animal presence is due to a necessary incomprehension by the whites (who are the narrators). It would not be difficult to imagine a reason for this reticence although it would be dangerous speculation to do so.

(1) McDonald (op.cit.) p.113

(2) Ibid, p.71

(3) Brown Sugar: A Vestigial Tale: J.B. Emtage; London 1966.

Nevertheless, McDonald portrays the development of childhood love very convincingly. In part, the novelist's achievement is the result of his remarkable control of West Indian dialect, his ability to shape it to express emotion, pathos and images of surprising beauty. He gives Alan's childhood experience precisely the fragile, dream-like quality and the combination of wistfulness and pleasure with which an adult mind recalls childhood happiness. The effect depends on imagery and use of dialect; in the following extract, Jaillin is speaking to Alan when they meet as adults. She is remembering the words of the local Sage, Ol' Boss, when she went to him as a child and said "they shouldn't have a dam' t'ing like love in the worl' at all if it only bring girl like me to be unhappy as hell." :

"..... he say quiet to me, I'm telling you, 'You know how it is when the rice is heavy with paddy an' the water-fiel's are thick with those green, brown-head shoot, then the bird come over, all the bird, all the scissor-tail swallow specially, looking to get grain in their craw. You know how it is. An' the whole worl' good then. The sky blue as a blue-bird. The sun buil'ing up a whole house o' heat. Everybody happy because the rice crop look so good there in the water-fields.... You know how it is chile. That is what mek a lan' good. Even the scissor-tail glad. You could see it. They going wil' up an' down over the rice-top. Dipping fas' like a woman's calabash bathing down a baby. Up an' down, up an' down, they giving that beauty from god's big han'. An' you know how it is sometime a bird in all those dipping an' dipping with the happiness come down smooth so an' lan' on the ground an' begin to sing like a whole heaven self tho' you know already scissor-tail can' sing fo' ten pennies even.' " (1)

In this area, McDonald compares favourably with Lamming who is more often cited for his masterly use of dialect but who is more often prolix. (2) More importantly, however, the success of the love-ideal depends on the ambiguous social identity of the East Indian community in the West Indies.

(1) McDonald (op.cit.) p.179

(2) The diction and sentence structure of dialect used in Lamming's novels are, in part, the author's invention. The passage quoted here (and all dialect in The Humming Bird Tree) is an accurate example of Trinidadian speech.

The calypsoes to which I referred are predominantly Negro art; the sociological observations are of Negro patterns, Indian communities, however, stand between the arranged marriages and the female subservience of their ancestral culture and the European colonial ideals to which West Indian society aspired. Romantic love has little to do with a cultural pattern in which men never see their future wives until marriage. The affection which may develop between such marriage partners is a product rather than a cause of their relationship. In the hiatus resulting from the decay of old cultural pattern into a new Westernisation, the process that provides grist for Naipaul's mill, there is room for Jaillin, Selvon's Virmilla in "Johnson and the Cascadura" a short story in Ways of Sunlight, and Seeta in The Plains of Caroni on the one hand, and Naipaul's Leela of The Mystic Masseur and Shama of A House for Mr. Biswas on the other. The psychological and social stresses of Papacita and Girlie are absent in both cases. No art-form like the calypso exists to foster an awareness of the philosophy of "every now and then cuff them down." McDonald and Selvon are thus not limited by well-known and strongly established patterns of man-woman relationships in the communities with which their novels deal. Unlike novelists whose work is set in the black working-class, they are free to depict the man-woman relationship in a number of ways without impairing the credibility of the narrative. As we have seen, one of these possibilities is romantic love.

CHAPTER 9

Novels set in the East Indian community

Naipaul's satirical novels are not, of course "about" man-woman relationships in any very important sense. However, Leela and Genesh in The Mystic Masseur and Shama and Mohun in A House for Mr. Biswas are examples of the matter-of-fact approach to such things that one finds in Naipaul's characters. The reason is probably that Naipaul's satire would be diluted by very much tenderness of feeling and, in any case, he is attacking the orthodox Hindu marriage system what Misir in A House for Mr. Biswas calls "cat-in-bag". Yet an important reason is simply that romantic love has little to do with the ritualistic older Hindu world with which Naipaul deals. Mohun is attracted to Shama. When Seth and Mrs. Tulsi broach the question of marriage, the sole matter of importance is whether he likes her - Mohun's question as to whether Shama likes him is regarded by Seth as merely eccentric. In the same way, Ramlogan tells Ganesh how much money he has and then, referring to his daughter, says "I think it is a good idea, sahib, for you to married Leela." To this Ganesh replies "all right". Naipaul represents the behaviour of both women as governed by subtle ritual. Affection develops and expresses itself at odd times through the network of ritual behaviour. Romantic love is far from their world, not simply because Naipaul's emphases lie in another area but because the inherent assumptions about human behaviour are radically different. Shiva Naipaul in Fireflies (1) describes the task of a typical Indian matriarch, Mrs. Khoja, in getting rid of her daughters.

(1) Fireflies, Shiva Naipaul; London 1970.

"The support of six daughters made tangible inroads on her finances and she was determined to free herself of this burden. Young men were not lacking. Dazzled by the Khoja name and wealth, parents flocked to the house offering up their sons. The elder Mrs. Khoja held court in the kitchen and listened calmly to their pleadings. Thus one by one, she got rid of her five older daughters. Waraswatee, the youngest remained. Hers was the nearest to a love match. The young man came himself to court her. Mrs. Khoja was appalled. Love was not a luxury the poor could afford, but the young man was insistent and in the end Mrs. Khoja gave in, consoling herself with the reflection that now there were no more mouths to feed..."(1)

Selvon's novel The Plains of Caroni (2) is set in Trinidad. An East Indian couple, Seeta and her husband, Harrilal, have made a good deal of money and risen in society since the days when Harrilal was a cane cutter. This success is entirely due to Seeta's ambition and Business acumen. Seeta's money and care are lavished on her son Romesh and she largely ignores her other children. One day, as Seeta and Romesh are having lunch in a restaurant, Seeta sees a Senator talking to a white girl and immediately sees an opportunity for Romesh's advancement in politics. As it turns out, Romesh is already acquainted with the white girl, Petra, since he knew her at University. The two are reunited and fall in love. Their relationship encounters difficulties because Petra resents the control which Romesh's mother has over him.

Harrilal's brother Balgobin, still a cane-cutter, lives on the estate Harrilal administers. Seeta claims to hate him and will not permit him to enter the house. One day a harvester is brought to the village for experimental work on the estate. Balgobin is so incensed at the thought of being put out of work that he wrecks the harvester with his cutlass. Later he is ill and staggers to Seeta's home and sees her for the first time in years.

(1) Shiva Naipaul (op.cit.) p.12

(2) The Plains of Caroni: S. Selvon: London 1970.

Seeta puts him to bed and as he raves in his delirium she finds out that it was he who had wrecked the harvester. Romesh, employed as a chemist by the Company which owns the estates, has been set to find out who wrecked the Company's machinery. At this point, it becomes clear that Seeta loves Balgobin and married his brother, Harrilal, only because the marriage had been arranged. Seeta tries to protect Balgobin by shifting the blame on to a half-wit called Pusher. Romesh, however, has found out that his "uncle" was to blame. Seeta seeks Petra's aid to keep Romesh in ignorance since they are both unaware of his discovery. There are labour troubles on the estate, led by Romesh's brother Seeka. Seeta reveals to Petra that Romesh, her eldest son, is in fact Balgobin's son.

One day, Seeta, Petra and Romesh are trapped in Seeta's home where Balgobin lies ill. The workers have gathered outside to get Balgobin and to hide him from the police. In a bitter scene, Romesh finally rejects his mother's control and steps outside alone to confront the workers. He and Petra escape. Balgobin dies and, as Romesh and Petra watch the funeral pyre from a distance, Romesh is making plans to leave for England and promising to return to Petra.

This is a more Westernised Indian community than those with which Naipaul deals. The romantic relationship of Romesh and the white girl, Petra, establishes a norm which prevents the love story of Seeta and Balgobin, the older couple, from seeming overly sentimental. Selvon makes full use of the ambiguities. Seeta is not a typical Hindu wife since she holds the purse strings and

"... this was so unlike the traditional image of the obedient, servile wife that Harrilal did not dare to let anybody know the true state of affairs in his house." (1)

(1) Selvon (op.cit.) p.12

At the same time, there is awareness of racial identity. To the problem of racial prejudice in England which may operate against Romesh, Seeta says; "that is black, we is Indians." (1); and Selvon adds an observation about Indian feelings that "they 'stand a better chance' than the negro, that racial discrimination is strictly a matter between the white men and the negro". Seeta is the perfectly amorphous social being because she is ambitious and cunning; Selvon says she could have :

"a village face and a city face, or exhibit certain manners and behaviour which fooled people into thinking they had her typed when, at will, she was able to transform herself into somebody else." (2)

Thus, Selvon adds confusion to confusion by separating Seeta completely from her social background in order to give himself complete freedom in the portrayal of her character and emotions. In the ambiguity and freedom given by the social situation and the carefully individualised personality of Seeta, Selvon finds (and makes) room to write a West Indian novel which handles a romantic love theme without faltering. We need only compare, for example, the scenes quoted between Surjue and Rama with Seeta's meeting with the dying Balgobin:

"Her love for him had never died. She had not even tried, in her relationship with Harrilal to transfer her affections. Seeing him there now, it was as if she stood completely naked inside and out, shorn of every pretension, as if a Maracas wave had tumbled over her, leaving a bewildered panic-stricken girl.Seeta, framed in the window by the morning sunlight, she seemed to him to be as he had always remembered.

'Seeta.'

He had turned his head to look at her and now, calling her name, he waited for a kind word, a tender look.

'Go away Balgo! Why you come her for ?' " (3)

(2) Selvon (op.cit.) p.61

(2) Ibid p.40

(3) Selvon (op.cit.) p.131

The lapse into dialect, the unaccustomed use of the diminutive, such details convey her terrified, startled voice as resistance becomes longing. Because Selvon is in control, he can make the characters themselves express the emotion and does not need Mais's rather more external approach. This kind of control also prevents him from being swept away into mere sentimentality. Seeta and Balgobin vowed not to meet

....."after that dark night in the cane-fields in a love that transcended all ordinary understanding. He remembered being glad that it was dark so that they could not see the tears on each other's faces. It was in the dark she had given herself to him so freely with such utter abandon that, had he not known better, he might have wondered," (1)

Taken out of context, the end of this final sentence may seem dangerously close to bathos; in fact, it is saved by a certain perverse realism and it turns the flood into shallows only just in time. That Balgobin would have wondered about Seeta's virginity is a detail which places the novel in a very different world from that of Mais's first two novels. In the mistrustful promiscuity of the "nigger-yard" such a consideration is not very relevant. It's relevance is to be found in White Boy as well as in The Plains of Caroni: This fact is significant since Selvon is applying a European ideal, "love" to a West Indian context.

At any rate, Seeta's attitude to her experience of life is conveyed in these terms:

"She had said afterwards that the only way she could live would be to turn her great love into great hate. She had been a virgin a few minutes before and he had pained her gaining entrance. She would forget the ecstasy and the exquisite joy and remember only the physical pain."

(1) Selvon (op.cit.) p.123

Seeta is making a distinction that Massahood, Girlie, Naomi, or even Grantley Russell (1) would find incomprehensible. Massahood, we remember "knew the very fibres of a woman's nerve centre... it could not distinguish between pain and pleasure.... all was one... all was love." The essential difference for Seeta is the separation of mind from pure physical desire and sensation. The difference between "love" and "lust" pre-supposes that in "love" there is the participation, even the ascendancy, of qualities and faculties other than the physical. In the characterization of Zolda or Girlie, it is difficult to perceive either a distinction of that kind or a controlling intellect or personality - they are both driven by their own desires. That we can accept this psychological manipulation on Seeta's part shows how far Selvon has moved from the great majority of West Indian novelists.

Any fictional work which deals with romantic love is likely to include a certain element of "determinism" by which I mean the notion that those involved are somehow acting as parts of a wider design. The story of Romesh and Petra, their meeting after a chance encounter at University and the rather hackneyed parting scene may justifiably be said to include rather too much "determinism". This predestination of human fate seems to overflow into the plot as a kind of biological determinism. Romesh, for example, tells Petra that he submits to Seeta's domination because "I guess I have a lot of the Indian idea of respect and veneration for my parents. Strangely enough I don't have it for my father." (2) At this point, Romesh is talking about Harrilal who is not his true father. Earlier, Seeta wonders aloud why Romesh always asks about Balgobin and not about Harrilal.

(1) In The Obeah Man, Brother Man, and Sylvia respectively
(2) Selvon (op.cit.) p.53

When eventually, Seeta reveals that Balgobin is really Romesh's father one has an irresistible and uncomfortable sense of *deja vu* as the plot begins to suggest comic opera. The weakness of the plot is in the appearance of what seem to be pre-determined events. That weakness seems to have infected the plot from the first appearance of the love-ideal in the story. The relationship of Romesh and Petra is different from that of Seeta and Balgobin in its relative calmness and sophistication. Petra is a Trinidadian white girl. The difference between her attitudes and those of Seeta is apparent in one conversation; Seeta tells Petra "If you love Romesh, that is enough", to which Petra replies "No, I won't go blindly into anything." (1) Petra is embarrassed and somewhat confused by Seeta's domineering. On the beach, in her conversation with Romesh, she is a sophisticated young girl whose intellect is paramount in her affairs. Petra's *savoir faire* separates her completely from the Trinidad Indians - in a sense the character has nothing to do with the novel's social and regional context. Romesh describes himself as having "a lot of the Indian idea of filial piety in him" but his half-brother Teeka described him as a "white Indian". Here Selvon is able to use education as a separating and individualising force. Romesh understands the forces that govern the little world that produced him but European education helps him to transcend it. It is no exaggeration to say that the romance of Petra and Romesh is only nominally a romance between two Trinidadians. Both characters could be found wherever a modern European culture exists.

(1) Selvon (op.cit.) p.39

Seeta, as Selvon notes, is not a typical Hindu wife. She is given a strength of character that takes her out of that cultural framework. Balgobin is individualised by being contrasted to his weak brother - a strong personality who is part of his rural Indian world without being merely representative. In the romance of the older Indian couple, Selvon moves as far from "the conventional mould" as is conceivable. If the word "love" has anything to do with "people in far-away places" and fits oddly into a West Indian situation, ^{the use of} strong individuals in an ambiguous cultural context may, ~~though West Indian~~ be one literary route to the successful treatment of romantic love in the West Indian novel - apart, that is, from the European West Indians of Nichole and the European subtleties of Hearne.

There is, however, an inescapable difficulty here. If, as Harris says, the conventional nineteenth-century English novel-style, "the novel of manners", is "consistent with most kinds of over-riding advertisement and persuasion on the writer for him to make national and political and social simplifications of experience" then The Plains of Caroni, though conventional enough in plot and theme is yet, since it escapes dealing too specifically with "the manners and morals operative in a given period" presumably all the more to be applauded for its peculiar kind of unconventionality. Yet this kind of individualism is obviously possible for a novelist whose satire in The Plains of Caroni is directed with particular concentration against "Trinfashions" and all that belongs to the emergent culture and nationalism of Trinidad. To admit that extreme commitment to "the search for national identity" may be limiting for the future of the West Indian novel is surely not to deny the value of literature in a political and social process of evolution. Selvon's methods belong rather clearly to his political stand-point and, if we ignore the fact that they probably account for his rather anaemic plot, that stand-point will become increasingly rare

as West Indian novelists cease to write while enjoying "the pleasures of exile" overseas.

The theme of romantic love thus brings into focus the whole question of the function of literature in the Caribbean. As we have seen, Hearne, Nichole and Selvon all represent ways of writing West Indian novels of romantic love. These ways are all of doubtful value in the face of the "overriding persuasions" of nationalism and the development of black working-class culture which West Indian novelists can hardly ignore. The alternative is the kind of fidelity to West Indian reality that Mais, Clarke and others have sought. The relationship based on "every now and then, cuff them down" presents a terrible temptation to the novelists of the region.

Ramchand says of The Obeah Man "Khan expresses the conflict within his central character in dramatic terms and makes the acceptance of partial withdrawal a logical act of choice that was always latent in the hero's attitudes and behaviour. But when the relationship of Zampi and Zolda is done in terms of aspiring spirit and voluptuous flesh, such a crude externalisation does little justice to Khan's intuitions embodied in the actual presence of Zampi." (1)

The temptation to which I feel Khan fell victim is the externalisation of conflicts of personality into the ready vehicle of sensual strife. This strife is the key element in the man-woman relationship most readily available to a West Indian novelist and by reference to a stated or implied criterion of "love", it can be presented as either unfortunate or deplorable.

(1) The West Indian Novel and its Background, p.127

A critical attitude to such a relationship, when the tension is represented as arising from external social factors, is an obvious way of focusing social criticism. It is a way which brings in its train the danger of neglecting human experience as such, of the occurrence of conflict within the mind and the personality rather than externally between personalities. Beyond a certain point, one is less aware of the conflict between Zampi's superior awareness of the superficiality of the Carnival and the "dead island" and his own aspiration towards a more satisfying direction in life than of the conflict between Zolda's sexual needs and his intellectual needs. Zampi's personal struggle is, at first, made clear as a rift in his own mind as he approaches his dilemma; Khan then merely echoes it within available terms.

One can find more complete externalisations of conflict which deprive the novels of any fully realised personality, concentrating on the sexual conflict as an expression of, for example, social problems (as in the case of the common despair in the face of poverty that inadequately links Shag and Euphemia), rather than taking into account the stress within the psyche, the individual mind where, ultimately such human problems take their effective toll. The unfortunate result is all the vigour and colour so often applauded in West Indian novels and none of the depth which a profound concern with the individual personality would confer and which can lift a novel beyond mere sensationalism.

Mais's first two novels, where sexual relationships of conflict are the rule are both examples of this kind of crowded stage, full of action but lacking in the depth that at least one complex, realised personality, a focus of emotional and psychological experience, would have provided. The most striking difference between Black Lightning

and the two earlier novels is the increase in depth in the approach of the former to human experience and suffering. This is also the novel which departs from the relationships of strife to concentrate on Jake and on Miriam and Glen.

It is not, therefore, surprising that in 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', Wilson Harris has this to say: "He (Lamming) must school himself to work for the continuous development of a main individual character in order to free himself somewhat from the restrictive consolidation he brings about which unfortunately, I find, blocks one's view of essential conflict.... the glaring case is Shephard.... in Of Age and Innocence. Here was an opportunity which was not so much lost - as lost sight of - to declare and develop the tragic premises in individual personality by concentrating on the one man (Shephard) in order to bring home a dilemma which lay in his coming to terms with the people around him.... To achieve the nuclear proportions of tragedy in Shephard, Lamming needed a remarkable and intense personal centre of depth." (1)

In Of Age and Innocence we first meet Shephard, a future West Indian leader, when he is having a nervous breakdown on the plane taking him home, as he relives his betrayal by a girl he loved in England. In this scene of anger, sexual jealousy and revulsion are directed against Penelope, a white girl on the plane because, as he later explains, she resembles the girl. Lamming creates a centre of tremendous energy and an almost self-indulgent imaginative vision:

(1) Tradition, the writer and Society, pp. 38, 39.

"Cactus, yes, cactus, I'd^{have}/cactus flowering from your hair and clinging to your nipples. Your nipples are pink, I know, the ones that poison and never give milk. Let the cactus hang there weighing you down and maggots crowd your mouth, marching to and fro through the perforated flesh I should leave your legs in all their natural lechery, but I'd have fat snails out of their shells slide plentifully into your womb, leaving you heavy and full with a lasting slime." (1)

The Websterian intensity and imagination are not original but, in a West Indian novel, the language of sexual jealousy and conflict has a special significance. When Shephard says to the woman whose husband thinks she needs a change:

"I know you have unmanned him ey ? I know the meaning of a woman's need for change. You have unmanned him, I know, you'll pay for it. All over the world, the sperm is running dry. The vultures have sucked our sex, sucked it all up, clean, clean." (2)

He is, like Surjue caught in the insecurity of his maleness, of "having the cojones" in a threatening environment. When the moment passes, Lamming begins to turn his attention to the effect of this conflict on Shephard's mind, entering the awareness of the character as he tells Penelope how his betrayal led him to re-define his own nature and role. Yet it is as though Lamming found it difficult to express this inner space with the sensitivity it requires or with the vigour of the externalised conflict lived in the action of the scene quoted. He does indeed lose sight of Shephard and the novel acquires a certain pictorial quality that fails to involve the reader in its action. What Harris observes in Of Age and Innocence seems related to what Ramchand finds in The Obeah Man.

- (1) Of Age and Innocence: G. Lamming: London 1958, p.57
(2) Ibid, p.55

Their criticisms have to be made because they are both seeing the effects of a fatal temptation to substitute the pattern of sexual antagonism in the novel for the inner tensions of experience, of the divided psyche or personality.

The effects have also been seen in Brother Man. Jean Creary says "at times the physical human presence of Brother Man loses its definition. The Word is no longer incarnate." (1) Ramchand notes: "Mais's failure with Bra' Man as a fictional character lies in this the conflict which ought to have been located in the character registers only as an uncertainty of intention in the author." (2) The conflict of sexual desire and spiritual aspiration in Bra' Man and Minette - like that between Zolda and Zampi - usurps the place of the novelist's insight into Bra' Man's personality.

The criticism can be made of other novels which lose themselves in the external tensions of sexual relationships in the colourful working-class. In spite of Sylvia Wynter's powerful sense of drama The Hills of Hebron similarly lacks that centre of awareness, as the opportunity given by the awakening of Moses, as he listens to the Irish doctor (or by Isaac's proud, hypersensitive character) is lost on another "crowded canvas", to use Harris's phrase. The result is that sexual conflict again gains ascendancy in the novel. One way of putting this criticism is to say that, when one thinks of West Indian novels, one thinks of individual novelists and individual novels, but never of particular characters which remain in the mind as do Lord Jim, Ursula Brangwen, and Yossarian. There has been a persistent tendency to represent suffering and conflict in an external way, concentrating on the colour and vigour of the effects of poverty in strife rather than on the complex effects on the mind, on human experience.

(1) Creary (The Islands in Between) p.58

(2) Ramchand (op.cit.) p.184 210

One sees a paucity of fully realised characters through whose experience conflict may be registered and, by a process of identification, compellingly communicated to the reader. From this charge I except Salkey's The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover, which, as I have said, is in many ways, one of the most important of recent West Indian novels.

If we except the novels of the white and East Indian communities in the West Indies, we find that the remarks made by Zolda in the quotation with which I began are indicative of a problem of approach common to a large number of West Indian novelists. The ideal of love has come into conflict with the realities of the social situation of the West Indian peasant and worker. The results of the conflict have not been altogether beneficial. Some kind of equilibrium in this particular literary area can be reached only by accepting the forms of relationship as they exist in the society and by genuine efforts to understand the more subtle possibilities of the West Indian reality being portrayed.

What has evolved from the conflict of (middle class) European love-ideals and (peasant) West Indian social reality is an image of the West Indian woman which has all too easily been supposed to be specifically mulatto, in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary. The mistake probably derives from the common element of social insecurity in the fictional images of the mulatto and of woman. However, Panty, the insecure mulatto of God the Stonebreaker is a man, Bernice, the mulatto woman of The Land of the Living is neither socially nor emotionally insecure and Zolda, a perfect example of the type, is nowhere described as mulatto. In the novels with which I have dealt, we find examples of the type in Zolda, both Sylvias, Minette, Shirley Collan, Rachel, and until she meets Mahler, Joan.

These women are all engaged in trying to preserve their self-interest in their world of insecure relationships while aspiring to a happiness which eludes them. They are victims of hostile circumstances which individual will is insufficient to combat. (1) That happiness proves to be "love" in every instance but that of Shirley; the insecure relationships derive from "the sexual snobbery of the West Indian male."

It is difficult to define the point at which a common theme becomes a cliché but, when it is presented with a lack of insight into the variations of personality necessary for individual characters it may be so regarded. In the personalities of the female characters I have mentioned, there is sufficient common ground to justify our regarding them as part of a common theme but not so much that the term "cliché" becomes applicable.

The days of this fictional image are presumably numbered since social evolution will make it anachronistic and it will no longer inspire instant recognition from a reader's experience of the West Indies. For the time being, the West Indian novel continues to express social criticism in terms of sexual conflict, deriving the critical attitude to the latter by reference to the implicit or explicit criterion of romantic love.

(1) Ramchand gives a very full analysis of the character traits as Mulatto traits in The West Indian Novel and its Background.

SECTION II: MOTHERHOOD AND IDENTITY

CHAPTER 10

The Novels of Ian Carew

I have dealt with one way in which social reality affects the West Indian novel by conflicting with ideas inherited from Europe. Human relationships in West Indian society have produced another trend or theme in the novel, although, in this case, no such conflict is involved. As Mädeline Kerr's work shows, West Indian society gives a very special place to motherhood. In West Indian peasant communities, the mother has tended to be the centre of the family, simply because fathers are more likely than not to desert the household. The phrase, "my mother who fathered me", which occurs in George Lamming's novel In the Castle of my Skin and is the title of a well-known sociological work on the Jamaican peasant class, may be taken as expressive both of the social situation and of the "strong attachment" between children and mother, to use Kerr's words, which tends to result.

It is apparent that most of the West Indian novels which now exist are very directly concerned with the social and political concerns of the region and that very few of the novelists have moved in the direction of the more detached individualism of Derek Walcott's poetry. This social involvement is a part of that movement described by the hackneyed term "the search for national identity". A sense of history and historical enquiry is felt to be a necessary part of that search.

At the same time, there is a marked tendency towards identification with working-class concerns. Naipaul and Lamming express two facets of this involvement. Thus Naipaul says that "the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is " and Lamming says, in The Pleasures of Exile:

"For the first time, the West Indian peasant became other than a 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." (1)

I have already suggested that, in the West Indies, the two things, the concern with the life-style of the peasant West Indian and the search for a new national and cultural identity, are necessarily linked. In literature, aspects of the two unite in a common theme. The historical aspect of the drive towards self-definition has obvious affinities with the socially important institution of motherhood. In a novel which, on the story level, concerns particular characters in particular situations, examination of ancestry and history as a means of defining one's place in the world may easily be expressed in terms of this kind of social structure. In some cases, this is exactly what has happened.

We may begin by considering some novels which may be called "novels of childhood". In Ian Carew's novel Black Midas (2) the boy, Shark, has lost both his parents; his father, the legendary Joe Smart is dead and his mother left him as a child. He lives with his grand-parents and his rather melodramatically evil Uncle Richard.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) pp.38, 39.

(2) Black Midas, Ian Carew; London 1958.

Most of the novel concerns Shark as a grown man but the early scenes of childhood are the key to the problems that face the adult. As a man he is the very image of the Guianese "pork-knocker" (gold or diamond prospector) and as such, is a very self-contained person. In both Black Midas and Carew's later novel, The Wild Coast (1) the heroes experience a sense of alienation from those around them. Shark's alienation develops out of the education he receives as a boy from the local preacher, Brother C. :

" 'Well, Shark, boy, We're back and we did it.' Brother C. said for the benefit of the assembled villagers, and I suddenly realised that I hated him, and the village, and the black faces with their white eyes and their white teeth shining in the sun. Mahaica was a womb out of which I had been wrenched and I did not want to return to it. Books had made me divided in myself and I knew I would remain that way as long as I lived. On the one hand, the language of books had chalked itself on the slate of my mind; on the other hand, the sun was in my blood, swamp and river, my mother, the amber sea, the savannahs, the memory of surf and wind, closer to me than the smell of my sweat." (2)

There is, of course, nothing original about the theme of the alienation of the educated West Indian from his society and Carew establishes the connection between education and alienation less convincingly than most. Shark goes into "the bush" and makes a great deal of money, becoming known as Ocean Shark, the Diamond King. He goes to Georgetown as a rich man with his woman, Belle, and an old friend, Bullah Daniels. There he buys a large house, in which the three make their home. Shark's neglect of his woman and his friends eventually leads to his desertion by Belle who goes to live with Bullah in the bush. The flaw in Shark's personality is his tendency to use other people and to trust those who eventually turn out to be his enemies. He is a restless, introverted character, perpetually aspiring to something that eludes him.

(1) The Wild Coast, Ian Carew, London 1958.

(2) Carew (op.cit.) p.42

The aspiration is connected with the sense of alienation since Shark feels he is without fixed values by comparison with the uneducated peasant-women, Belle;

"I knew that I needed Belle. She had planted her feet in the village mud the first day she had started to walk, rooting herself on an earthly base for life and because of this she could worship no false gods. I, on the other hand, took on and shed values and attitudes the way a lizard changes colour to merge with its own environment. When I was in the bush I acted the part of pork-knocker, and now that I was in the city I was acting the role of a town-man. Belle and Bullah were the only people who could break into the small enclosure of my fantasy and trample down the false gods, whoever they were for the moment, The difference between Belle and Bullah was that he always had more respect for my feelings. Belle had such a hatred for what was false..... that she often spoke her mind to me before she realised that what she was saying was pouring salt on a wound. She did not understand that I needed my enclosures of fantasy to keep me alive." (1)

Shark continues to seek material things which prove inadequate because what he has lost is something intangible; the sense of a profound personal connection with his environment and his origins. It is suggested by the fable told to Shark by the preacher, Brother C. near the end of the novel. Brother C. tells him that the story has come all the way from Africa and "black people tongue keep it alive and fan it like fire so it can never burn out." The story is about a people who lived at the foot of a mountain shaped like a woman's breast with a nipple always in the clouds. Eventually they decided to choose a head-man. The choice would fall on the member of the tribe who climbed highest up the mountain and brought back proof of the wonders he found. At the first trial, one strong man brought back a beautiful flower "bright and shapely and all who look at it had wonder-light in they eye."

(1) Carew (op.cit.) pp.187, 188

He became headman and had a long reign. After his death, there was another trial, and one young man brought back "a stone and nobody never see stone so bright and beautiful and all the folks reach and rub they hand over the curve of it, and the smoothness of it." (1) The second headman's rule passed quickly because the tribe was busy. After his death came a third trial and one bright-eyed young man, with a look of prophecy in his eyes, climbed so high that he was lost in the mist that covered the mountain's nipple. One day, he came running back to the village and collapsed, and, when they prised his fingers open, they found that his hand was empty. The bright-eyed young man said that, at the tope of the mountain, the Lord had sent down "a soft white thing like rain, and yet it wasn't rain cause it fall slow like leaf when there is no wind. It fall and flutter and spin, some of it settle on he head and shoulders and into he hands which he did open to catch it, and when he helt it, one minute it was cold like a mountain pool and next minute it was like fire." (2) The young man took some of the "white and wondrous thing" and set out but it vanished from his hand. He told the people it had been God's gift, the best of which was something no eye could see.

The fable is the key to Shark's tragic and frustrated aspiration which is misdirected towards diamonds and gold. His half-understood goal is presented in a dream:

"The night before we started work I dreamt that I was a boy in Mahaica again, hunting in the swamps. I walked up to a cluster of lilies, but before I reached them the earth suddenly swallowed them. I reached the spot and heard voices shouting under the water, the voices of a man and a woman, she was scolding him and he was laughing loud.

(1) Carew (op.cit.) p.211
(2) Carew (op.cit.) p.213

They climbed out of the deep hole and came towards me and for a moment I thought that they were my father and mother. I ran towards them calling them by name, but as I grew near, I discovered they were headless and the laughter and talk were coming from a hole in the centre of their shoulders. I ran away from them in horror....." (1)

Black Midas presents alienation in personal terms associated with the loss of a personal heritage - Shark's elusive parents - resulting in a frustrated aspiration towards an inadequate materialism. Carew does not maintain the link between Shark's early education and his continuing alienation from his society. Instead, as in the last quoted extract, the lost parents figure more and more in his life.

The society in which Shark lives is itself in danger of a total loss of contact with its heritage. Brother C. remarks:

"The white man does write down all they story in black and white but we does keep we own lock up in we belly. Time will come when we got to write down we story too 'cause if we don't write it down, it going get lost. Now all the young people going 'way from the land. In long time past days we used to tell we story with drum but soon, even the drum won't talk no more." (2)

A philosophical truth, the fable, has been saved from the ancestral land, Africa. That it is being demonstrated in Shark's life is apparent from the urgency and seriousness with which the old preacher detains Shark, to tell him the tale. The truth is that a simple aspiration towards material things will always leave a void because the deepest human aspirations always reach towards the intangible, the spiritual security that gold cannot give. The metaphor in which the truth is preserved establishes a relation between these spiritual values and parenthood, for the mountain is shaped like a woman's breast.

(1) Carew (op.cit.) p.13
(2) Ibid p.22

The tribesman who reaches the nipple received the miraculous white substance. One need not insist on the point but if the mountain is seen simply as a mountain, the substance, on the literal level, is clearly snow; however, the mountain is also a breast and the white substance is given to fulfil a need. The associations of manna and milk are difficult to avoid. Shark's life demonstrates the truth of the fable and here a blind and frustrated aspiration beyond the material co-exists with a frustrated aspiration towards contact with his parents. The conclusion is that this desired spirituality must necessarily be derived from a secure and profound connection with one's origins. The society is in danger of losing this connection and suffering the consequences. In the life of an individual, Carew shows the consequences of alienation and frustration.

Shark has lost the link with his origins in two ways. On the social level, he is divorced from his peasant origins and can only envy Belle her realistic attitudes. On a personal level, the link with his parents has been severed and he can only dream of replacing it. It is appropriate that the fable is told by a preacher since Black Midas contains a moral stated in the form of a parable. The author certainly seems to have intended a warning. Real or potential loss of contact with the past appears in three ways; Shark's loss of his parents, his loss of his peasant origins and the society's potential loss of its racial heritage. Here we have a progression from the particular to the general. Only one of these is merely potential. The particular fictional loss (Shark's) suggests a possible general loss in Caribbean reality.

The parable is the text of Carew's "sermon". By introducing the image of motherhood - the breast with its nipple where God's gift is given - it emphasises the metaphorical link between parent-hood and the past which is already latent in the plot, in the most personal of the three types or levels of alienation, that between Shark and his parents. It is true that the image of Shark's mother is not made any more important than that of his father: indeed it is the memory of Joe Smart which causes many of the major changes in his life. In the novel as a whole, however, images of motherhood predominate when origins of the past are referred to. ("Mahaica was a womb out of which I had been wrenched"....."swamp and river, my mother, the amber sea.").

In The Wild Coast the hero, Hector, is what, in Guyanese speech, is called a "red boy", that is of mixed European and African descent. In spite of my reservations about Kenneth Ramchand's application of specifically mulatto stereotypes to the image of "the coloured woman", his view, in The West Indian Novel and its Background, of the elements of social and personal identity-crises that go to make up the popular image of the mulatto, is, I think, essentially sound. Hector's father, Fitz Bradshaw, sends him to a house he owns in a village called Turlogie. There he grows up, watched over by the family servant, Sister. Hector is never told the identity of his dead mother in spite of his many questions. His education at Tarlogie comes from a poor, black school teacher, La Rose, whose air of reserve occasionally fails him as he explains to Hector how he pulled himself from the peasant class, by force of will and self-deprivation, to become a school teacher. This was the only profession available to him as a poor man.

Hector makes friends with an old black peasant, Doorne and his son Tengar. The latter lives with a black woman, Elsa who had been Fitz Bradshaw's woman. Hector grows up among the peasants and learns how to hunt and to develop physical stamina. He is eventually seduced by Elsa. One night he and the yard-boy, Tojo escape Sister's surveillance to go to a wind-dance (an obeah ceremony) which is being performed by Tengar and Doorne among others. After the ceremony, Hector, sexually aroused, returns to Tengar's home and again makes love to Elsa. He is followed, unawares, by Doorne. Some time later, Doorne seeks out Tengar and Elsa to tell his son of his woman's infidelity with Hector. Elsa interrupts the story to reveal the reason Doorne bears a grudge against her; at the age of fifteen, she was seduced, with the help of obeah, by Doorne. Hector is present, in hiding, to hear this revelation. Tengar then leaves Tarlogie in anger with Elsa.

Hector is successful at his matriculation examinations and is visited by his father, who is now close to insanity and who lives with a silent Amerindian woman, Dela. During his raving, Fitz reveals the identity of Hector's mother. She was his wife's sister; having been denied her lover by her family she deliberately sought out her brother-in-law to make her pregnant so that she might be revenged. Shortly after this Sister dies. Hector leaves Tarlogie.

Carew compares Hector with the black yard-boy Tojo, in these words:

"Tojo lived in a sub-world in which his ancestors had existed since they had been brought from Africa as slaves... Tojo was content with his heritage of waiting but Hector had the blood both of master and slave in his veins and the problems of both to solve. Before him lay the choice of allegiance, the question of loyalty, the need to discover who he was and what he was." (1)

(1) Carew (op.cit.) pp.154, 155.

Doorne makes the point clearly to Hector after telling him of the death of one of Doorne's slave ancestors at the hands of one of Hector's white ancestors:

"I had to tell you because I wanted you to know that you got the blood of both the master and slave in you' veins. You' papa trying to foget it and acting like if he is a white man but you mustn't never forget it boy." (1)

The ambiguity of Hector's situation is the generally recognised ambiguity of mulatto identity. In relation to Tengar and Doorne he is set apart even though, as the training for their journey across the swamps to Black Bush shows, he envies their physical prowess and longs to be like them. In relation to the black school-teacher, La Rose, Hector can muster only an embarrassed incomprehension in the face of the teacher's raging envy. For La Rose, the mere possibility of Hector's academic failure calls up a vision of "a curse.... a host of black tongues like ladles dipped in poison" which will put a curse on Hector and "the hot venom in those black tongues will blight," (2) Hector's life. For Hector, the issue is largely an irrelevance; he has to find out who he is and what he is in the face of endless demands and impositions on him.

As the complex problem of the mulatto, caught in a void between two worlds, surrounds Hector, it is reflected and expressed in his personal situation. As an individual, the mystery that haunts him is that of his dead mother of whom no one will speak. The issue of his parentage on a personal level has the same sense of deprivation of contact that his relationship with Tengar and Doorne has on a social level. In both cases, a heritage has been denied.

- (1) Carew (op.cit.) p.47
(2) Carew (op.cit.) p.185

Of the black people, Carew says:

"Usually, it was the father rather than the mother who abandoned the family. The women generally had the strength, the resilience, the enduring sense of calm to hold the families together and to will their sickly, starving children to live. The womb of every mother on the coast was an archive which housed the memory of a black race, a memory snatched from dark and lost centuries." (1)

One may continue the metaphor by saying that, in the case of the mulatto, the memory is not so much hidden as confused. At one point, Hector thinks of his father's woman Elsa and wishes that Fitz would bring her home to be a mother to him and he has fantasies about sucking her breasts. The sense of a loss of contact with a personal heritage is increased by the personality of Hector's father, the violent and autocratic Fitz Bradshaw with whom he is never able to communicate. It is symbolically appropriate that the woman who takes Elsa's place with Hector's father is Dela, the Amerindian "child of silence". In every way, as Hector confronts the question of his origins, he meets the kind of mocking silence with which Dela handles every situation. When Fitz Bradshaw tells Hector the identity of his mother the information seems irrelevant. The journey towards this revelation seems inconclusive, and when Hector leaves Tarlogie, there is no sense that anything has been achieved.

Fitz, at the point of this revelation is insane - in a condition that is, beyond communication. Hector's mixed ancestry and his father's money combine to separate him from the peasants around him. For the black people, the image of the mother is "an archive which housed the memory of a black race, a memory snatched from dark and lost centuries." For the mulatto boy, his mother is an unknown quantity forever lost to him even after he knows the bare facts of his father's explanation. Thus alienation from a mother is made to reflect the wider alienation of a whole racial group.

CHAPTER 11

The Novels of George Lamming

The connection between the individual mother-child relationship and the wider association of history and society is relatively subtle in Carew's novels. It contrasts with Lamming's work, which oscillates between being excessively intricate and obscure and being on the brink of naivete. Between the extremes lies a remarkable ability to construct complex pattern of related themes.

The fundamental failure of In the Castle of My Skin (1) results from the brave (considering the date of publication) but ill-advised attempt to cover too many issues in too little space. The result is an extremely diffuse work which undermines critical attempts to derive a clear direction or structure. One walks on very thin ice in attempting to postulate a deeper significance in the terms of the novel for a particular character.

The basic concern of Lamming's central character, the boy-narrator, appears to be the now hackneyed theme of the alienation of an increasingly educated West Indian from his native environment. To a certain extent, the boy's mother is a part of the world from which he escapes. Yet he knows that "my father, who had only fathered the idea of me, had left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me." (2) When he is about to leave Barbados, the sight of her evokes memories of familiar childhood things and

"the room seemed brighter and cosier. I watched her closely again as though I had been looking for the last time at something I couldn't do without." (3)

- (1) In the Castle of My Skin: George Lamming, London 1953.
- (2) Lamming (op.cit.) p.11
- (3) Ibid, p.278

"... when I looked at her, the feeling was like being a tooth which had been taken from its snapped roots leaving the gum a space to occupy the probing tongue." (1)

The intensity of the narrator's emotional response deprives the character of his mother of considerable depth. Lamming's consistent idealisation weakens her credibility; this, as far as this novel is concerned, is unfortunate but it has a wider significance, for my purposes, as a necessary step in the process which turns a type of character into a symbol in other West Indian novels. For my present purposes, Lamming's effort to "restore the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality" in In the Castle of my Skin may serve as evidence of one step in the evolution of an idea - the mother as a fictional symbol of cultural origins.

The relationship between the narrator and his mother is little more than the product of what was, at the time, the daringly new project of transcribing West Indian social reality into literature. Yet, in the same novel, we find a character who is closer to the level of pure symbol and who seems to have been the prototype of another character in Of Age and Innocence. The old woman, Ma, engages in long arguments with her husband in which Lamming uses his gift for verbal artistry to create a kind of dialect which is uniquely his, imparting a certain grandeur to the speakers.

One chapter in this dialogue ends as Ma turns Pa's attention from thoughts of death by telling him to sing "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child." (2) Another chapter ends with Ma's words "There ain't much we can do but pray, Pa, pray."

(1) Ibid, p.279

(2) Lamming (op.cit.) p.90

Mainly because of the old man's greater innocence and weaker character, Ma, in her simple faith, emerges as a source of wisdom and strength. She seems to be the product of Lamming's concern with the peasant's "true and original status of personality" which is given a rather naive expression in the boy narrator's reflections about the substitution of words for meaning in those who are educated to be articulate. Lamming's linguistic skill enables her particular brand of peasant wisdom to identify her with the past of the society. The people of the narrator's village are deceived by the aptly named politician, Mr. Slime, who cheats them of their money and their land. Pa, the innocent old man, is deceived to the end, but Ma is considerably more cautious, out of a fund of experience which is limited by few false hopes.

Yet the old woman's religious point of view is in no sense a "recommended" one in the novel. The old lady's religious replies seem, as a cumulative effect, merely evasive to the extent that they are based on blind faith. A similar ambiguity is to be seen in the case of Ma Shephard in Of Age and Innocence. The old woman is the mother of the central character (if the term "central" may be applied to any character in Lamming's diffuse technique of organisation). As the title suggests, it is another novel of childhood. Events are reflected in the make-believe world of three boys, Bob, Singh and Lee who presumably represent, on one level, the three major races of the West Indies.

As the novel opens, two couples are on an aeroplane taking them to the fictional island of San Cristobal; Bill and Penelope, both English, and Mark and Marcia were all friends in England.

Mark is a native of San Cristobal. On the aeroplane, a blackman named Shephard has a nervous breakdown and humiliates Penelope. The scene changes to San Cristobal where the three boys have formed a secret Society and are being told the history of San Cristobal by an old woman, Ma Shephard. They are joined by a little English boy, Rowley, the son of the chief of Police, Crabbe. They accept him as a member of their Society and, as a mark of their acceptance, they present him with a lighter which belongs to Singh's father and bears his name.

The fathers of the boys are engaged in a political movement for independence. Penelope meets Shephard in San Cristobal and he explains to her the reason for his reaction to her during his breakdown. He had noticed that she resembled a woman he had loved in England. The woman had betrayed him, bringing about a radical revision of his attitudes to other people. He came to see that his own place in the world had been largely determined by the assumptions of others in relationships with him. He realised that he could, by an effort of will, refuse to accept these assumptions and, to a considerable extent, escape their influence. His personal discovery is translated into political terms as he can no longer accept the colonial status imposed on him. Shephard becomes the leader of the independence movement.

Bill, annoyed by the hypocrisies of the colonial administration, obtains a letter written by Crabbe which is evidence of a plot to murder Shephard. The authorities, including Crabbe, see the native leader as a threat. Bill gives the letter to Shephard. At this point, Marcia goes insane and has to be put into a mental hospital.

Shephard and his supporters cause a strike by the staff of the hospital and the workers who supply electricity and oil for lighting. However the boys obtain some oil for sale to Rowley's grandmother to earn money for their Society. They leave the oil in a car near the mental hospital. Meanwhile, madmen free of supervision, are roaming the grounds of the hospital. One of them frightens the boys, takes the lighter and hides in the car. There is a fire which destroys the hospital, killing Marcia and Penelope who was visiting her.

Bill discovers that Shephard was responsible for the strike which led to Penelope's death. He and Mark go with Shephard to Paradise Point where Shephard intends to offer up a prayer for victory. Bill sees his opportunity to revenge Penelope's death by killing Shephard.

In the final section of the novel, Shephard has been killed and Mark and Bill are on trial for murder. A witness at the trial, Rocky the fisherman, was the last to see Shephard alive having taken the dying man from the water off Paradise Point. Shephard mistook the fisherman for Bill Butterfield and his last words were "Don't burn the letter Butterfield!". Crabbe sets out to regain the letter which implicates him. In the ensuing interwoven conspiracies it becomes clear that Shephard was killed by one of Crabbe's Indian spies, Baboo, who wanted Singh, another Indian, to lead the Independence movement.

Singh is arrested for the fire at the mental hospital because the lighter bearing his name, has been found by Ma Shephard at the scene. The boys try to reveal the truth about the incident but they are ignored. Ma Shephard is shocked by what she sees as deliberate lying on their part.

The boys reject her and the novel ends as the boys, at Rowley's grave, confirm a new loyalty beyond race which the adults cannot achieve.

Ma Shephard is first seen through the eyes of Mark:

"Her face was hard and cracked like mutilated rock-face.
Her eyes were covered with age....." (1)

It is perhaps unnecessary to insist on the many implications of the comparison with rock. It is enough to say that suggestions of age and strength and origins which lie in the land, the natural bases of the peasant environment are here explicit. Lamming stresses the idea of age:

"She was not only Shephard's mother. She was also a source of some authority that was above any argument, a seer that San Cristobal would always seek. In their (the boys') eyes, the old woman had become Age itself." (2)

Like that of the old woman of In the Castle of my Skin, Ma Shephard's strength depends heavily on religious conviction. In exactly the same way, that conviction implies either evasion or a limitation of perception:

"Ma Shephard was growing restless on the chair. She had forgotten her prayer for the boys. It was her son who occupied her attention. He was looking at her from across the table as though he wanted to bridge the time and the world which kept them apart although their wish was the same. But she could not see beyond her faith." (3)

Mervyn Morris's remark in The Islands in Between that "in this novel, innocence seems, in the end, to see more accurately than age," (4) appears to be an overstatement. One is not aware, at the end of the novel, that the boys see anything of importance except the bare facts of the tragic fire which they are in a position to know about.

(1) p.176

(2) p.177

(3) Lamming (op.cit.) p.287

(4) Morris (The Islands in Between) p.78

Lanning is limited by his technique of placing adult language in the mouths of children. Beyond a certain point, such a technique must necessarily collapse into absurdity; the author cannot, therefore, afford to be too explicit about the more profound concerns of the novel in speech that comes from the children. The result of this limitation is that, although innocence, in the end, transcends race as age cannot, it does not appear to do so by seeing, (understanding).

The theme with which Lanning is most concerned in this novel is the importance of perception and its effect on what is perceived. Shephard tells Mark:

"Of all the senses which serve our knowledge of those around us, it is the eye which I could not encounter in peace. It is as though my body defined all of me, and then played the role of traitor for those who watched, so that the eye of the other became for me a kind of public prosecutor. I felt surrounded by a perpetual act of prosecution." (1)

Beyond the question of "seeing", there are the deeper concerns of understanding and truth. Lanning frequently insists on the subjectivity of most of what passes for truth and on the elusive and variable nature of our purely subjective observations. When Thief and Rocky are afraid of being implicated in the murder of Shephard, this conversation takes place:

" 'I will make San Cristobal hear', said Rocky, 'innocent is innocent.'
'An' if Butterfiel' innocent too', said Thief, 'what difference it make? '
'How my action innocent I know', said Rocky, 'like I know my face.'
'But it ain't matter what you know', said Thief, 'it's what the next man don't see.'
'I can talk', said Rocky, 'innocence can talk.'
'It ain't got no language', said Thief, 'unless the next man lend you his belief.' " (2)

- (1) Lanning (op.cit.) p.112
(2) Lanning (op.cit.) p.370

As far as the boys make a wiser approach to events (I would emphasise that this movement is not sufficiently explicit in terms of motivation to be called "seeing") that movement surely concerns their devotion to the memory of Rowley. Lamming leaves no doubt that the activities of the boys in their Society parallel those of the adults in their political sphere. The obvious conclusion from the comparison is that the boys are capable, in their innocence, of a deeper sympathy, since their feelings for the white boy are utterly impossible in the bitterness and hatred of the adult world.

It is Ma Shephard who points the direction to them in the early part of the novel:

"Now you watch me here on the sand this morning, old, old as ever in your eye, an' I feel your innocence take to me, an' in your years the head is open to false and different favours which the worl' always makin'. So I speak to warn you 'way from any turnin' you know my prayers may contradict. An' if your heart keep a right respect for age, the little wisdom my time collect can help your understandin' too. Never you look to the ways that teach those round how to hate, an' different as you be in name and nature, 'tis the same love my prayers will ask to favour any wish you make." (1)

The words "eye", "see", "understanding", "wisdom", "innocence" and "age" tend to recur and bear an obvious relation to Shephard's profound problem of external appearance and changing actual identity. That which separates Rowley from the boys is also a question of externals, that is race and social conditioning. Since the boys' blind wisdom can transcend the limits of these externals, one may say that they find a resolution of complexities they do not fully perceive.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.71

In a sense, the act of moving beyond racism is as much a deliberate limitation of perception as a deepening of it. Wisdom which sees beyond racially given physical attributes to the human being beneath, is sometimes slower than innocence which has not yet learnt to attach false significance to those attributes. The achievement of the boys, who are loyal to each other and to the memory of a white friend, is in the second category, "a blind understanding."

Ma Shephard's vision, like that of Ma in the earlier novel, is finally a limited one. At the end of the novel, she has not been able to "see", since she is completely wrong both about events, and about blame. In a sense, it is entirely to be expected that a limitation of this kind should arise, since one of Lamming's main concerns in both novels implies limitations on the validity of history. At the end of In the Castle of my Skin, the narrator still has the knowledge of what it means to be "alone in a world all by yourself and, although there were hundreds of people moving around you, it made no difference. You got giddy." (1) In Of Age and Innocence Shephard examines and resolves the problem of individual identity in a lucidly argued case for refusal to accept a socially defined version of one's role and nature in favour of the exercise of individual will. This kind of concern necessarily implies a limitation on the validity of the accumulated wisdom of society (Ma Shephard) since it limits the validity of all judgements outside individual awareness and will. Yet one must beware of confusing perception (seeing) with wisdom; there is, as I shall show, a sense in which Ma Shephard's wisdom goes beyond the final failure of her perception.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.301

One may argue that Ma Shephard's wisdom in the passage above derives ultimately from her blind religious conviction, the relevance of which is shown as seriously in doubt in both In the Castle of my Skin and Of Age and Innocence. Yet the distinction between "understanding", in the sense of seeing the connections between causes and effects, and "wisdom", in the sense of knowing the course of right action, is always insisted on in Lamming's work. It has to be given his rather romantic faith in untutored wisdom. The boys act in human sympathy and reach the final resolution of the complexities that baffle Shephard into insanity and death and that bedevil political ambitions in the novel. What matters is that their resolution has its origin in Ma Shephard's wisdom.

She is also the source of awareness of the past. It is Ma Shephard who tells the story of the history of San Cristobal, the great flood which once covered the island. It is from her too, that the boys learn the story of the Tribe Boys who once lived on the island and, facing defeat by invaders, clasped hands and leapt to their deaths from a cliff. As one of the boys says, "Her head hol' a lot of history" - "an prophecy too". The similarity between the flood of which she speaks and the Biblical flood is too obvious to be ignored. In telling the story of the Tribe Boys to Marcia and Penelope the boys say that it happened "long, long before human interference - like in Genesis." My point is that Lamming suggests a story of memory and experience, in the mind of Ma Shephard, so ancient and so all-embracing that one is forced to take the character, at times, as more than a simple human being.

Before Mark and Marcia arrive in San Cristobal, Mark remembers "the old woman of San Cristobal" who was the village midwife and who gave birth to a son when she was well past the age of fifty. It soon becomes clear that the old woman in question is Ma Shephard. Compared with the mother of the narrator of In the Castle of my Skin the old lady is close to the symbolic use of a social type and of the associations which can be derived from social attitudes to that type. Her age is emphasised to such an extent that credibility is strained. Mark, a grown man, speculates that "the old woman" may have "had a hand" in his birth.

Ma Shephard is a mother as well as an old woman. The affection of the mother-son relationship is insisted on:

"She was glad he had come to speak with her. She looked at her son who sat beside her and then at the stool..... She took his hand and turned her eyes towards the ceiling as though she was going to pray.... He felt the aged fingers cling to his hand, and he knew what she was thinking. He belonged to her. He was her son; for ever and ever he was hers." (1)

The colonial age from which San Cristobal is emerging was an age in which the motto of the West Indies was contained in the words Mark remembers Shephard saying, as a boy, to the chairs, his "children" as he stood in the dim room:

"Children in darkness, do not ask to change, and do not be angry that you cannot of your own accord make a change in your conditions. Be happy to serve, and if you serve well, there will be a reward for your service. Your purpose is fulfilled in your perfect service." (2)

In terms of the novel's theme of "seeing", the metaphorical import of the dim room and the darkness is the past and its "blindness" the absence of understanding.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.292
(2) Ibid, p.109

Mark comments: "I say to myself, that if he were a man, I would say he was mad." (1) Shephard's peculiar form of "seeing" isolates him and, at one point, becomes neurotic (his nervous breakdown). (The novel examines insanity, a different, distorted perception of reality. The boys observe that those in charge of the mad-men at the hospital are behaving just like their charges and they discuss the possibility of setting the mad-men free and putting away everyone else. Bob says "Sometimes I hear my father say it might be better that way." (2) In other words, Lamming blurs the line between sanity and insanity to imply that distorted perception is more general than might be supposed.) Ma Shephard, however, was born in "the dark"; she cannot "see beyond her faith." Hers is the blind wisdom of historical knowledge - "blind" in the old philosophical sense that the past may contain the germ of an answer to present problems but cannot actually formulate the solutions.

At the end of the novel, she says in prayer:

"Love 'mongst men is not enough when any small deceit can work on their weakness. 'Tis a hard saying, I know, but true, I feel, good Lord. Love is not enough when man meet man in some evil opposition their heart cannot hold." (3)

The whole point of the boys new start is that it does not impose a preconceived identity on the basis of mere externals and reaches out to the white boy Rowley, answering the problem of "seeing", identity and race raised by Shephard. Ma Shephard is saying that mere human love is insufficient in the face of human weakness but she has no way of knowing the nature of the missing power which would make it sufficient.

- (1) Ibid p.110
- (2) Lamming (op.cit.) p.279
- (3) Ibid, p.401

I think we may deduce that the power is understanding (seeing) that awareness of causes and effects, as opposed to mere historical facts, in politics and in human relationships which is her son's strength. Thus Lamming, in the words of Shephard's mother, is able to examine both the limitations and the validity of the past in relation to specifically West Indian concerns and to the universal issue of personal identity.

The relationship between mother and son in the novel has a relevance beyond the story itself. At the trial of Mark and Bill, Ma Shephard, as a witness, says:

"The manner in which he die on that bad beach I shan't know, an' it ain't in my power to say how, an' I am not one to pretend to know what didn't come within the reach of my two eyes.... But it is the end o' a long, long worry for me; for without meanin' to, he wasn't really a bad child, he bring in his time much botheration to my life. I never ferret out his ways from a child upwards to when he was tall and strappin' man and I withdraw an' leave him to himself. If he was going to bring downfall on his life I had nothin' but prayer...." (1)

To the degree that Ma Shephard can be identified with the dark past and its limited vision, her inability to "ferret out the ways" of her son who has emerged in his way of seeing, into the light, is symbolic of the limited validity of that past in the eyes of one who has freed himself from its assumptions. Just as Ma cannot understand her son, the past of San Cristobal is divided from its present by a new way of "seeing". Paravecino, the Prime Minister, makes the process of transition clear as he tells Crabbe:

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.331

"You gave Shephard an image (1) of yourself and then circumstances provided him with an opportunity to examine that image (1). If you had never allowed these colonials to flock to your country as they please, Shephard might not have happened. So they went, and you know better than I what they found. They found you in a state of disorder which was worse than anything they knew in the colonies and it was their experience of this disorder that suggested to them what could happen when they got back home. You treat these men like children and forget that children have a way of growing up and what they understand (1) is always different from what the parents had imagined." (2)

The false "image" faded to be replaced by understanding; theirs was a new awareness. Just as Ma Shephard, who knows only what comes before her eyes, and whose wisdom is therefore pure experience, cannot comprehend the wisdom of her son, which though founded on hers, has moved beyond it to the freedom of clear perception and understanding, so the lessons of history, the novel seems to say, are always contingent and never necessary. Ma Shephard is not, of course, purely a symbol, but Lamming's technique in the novel certainly does not belong to what Wilson Harris calls "the conventional mould" (one may wonder whether this accounts for Harris's singling out Of Age and Innocence for comment). His methods depend on the repetition and mingling in a subtle and complex manner of certain basic ideas - to such an extent that Mervyn Morris criticises him, I think rightly, for "his preoccupation with themes at the expense of credible life in his characters." (3) It is this preoccupation which makes the identification of Ma Shephard with a certain idea so clear. However, as I shall show this type of identification is by no means confined to the works of Lamming.

For the moment, Ramchand's warning about Lamming's novel Season of Adventure is both true and necessary:

(1) My emphasis

(2) Lamming (op.cit.) p.168

(3) "The Poet as Novelist" p.83 in The Islands in Between.

"The reader has to accustom himself to responding at the same time to the fullness of each relationship and to its being part of a larger web; its realistic particularity and its symbolic representativeness." (1)

In Season of Adventure, Lamming places the problem of the assertion of individual identity in the face of the preconceptions of others in a new context. The novel is set in San Cristobal where, in a Forest Reserve, the poor of the island celebrate ancient African mystical ceremonies. Three men in the Reserve, Powell, Crimrod and Great Gort are accomplished musicians on the steel-pan and the music of the Steel Bands is both a part of the African ceremonies and a form of self-expression which is an integral part of the people's lives. Both the ceremonies and the music are frowned on by the Government of the newly independent island. Also in the Forest Reserve is Chiki, a painter, and the only educated man there.

Fola's mother, Agnes, is married to the chief of Police, Piggott. Fola does not know - and Agnes will not disclose - the identity of her true father. Fola has been educated at a "good" school and she moves in the middle-class milieu, into which both Agnes and Piggott have recently moved. One day, Fola's teacher, a European, Charlot, for reasons which have to do with his own sense of alienation, takes Fola to witness a ceremony of the dead in the Reserve. The souls of the dead are being released from their prison of water by the magic of the celebrant, the Houngan. Before they can be released into eternal freedom they must confront those whom they have known in life, through the body of the Houngan, and forgive injuries they have suffered. One of the dead souls is that of a young man whose mother deserted him as a baby.

(1) Ramchand (op.cot.) p.140

The man spent his life trying to find his mother. His father had contracted syphilis from her and the dead man refrained from sexual contact all his life for fear that he had inherited it.

He became insane. Lamming's moving description of the mad voice of the spirit coming from the Houngan's tent made vivid by our awareness of Fola's terrified reactions and by Powell's picturesque language ("His head was a furnace what scorch all sense out o' his mind") indicates quite clearly how much importance we are to attach to the young man's situation. The intensity of the emotional reactions is so significant that it justifies some extensive quotation:

" 'Even if it true she give him the sickness', Crim said, 'would have been a help to own up she was his mother. Was she who drive him so.'
There was bitterness in Crim's voice as he reflected on the mother's crime.....
'Not to own she birth him', Crim said, and spat, 'to turn in hidin' wherever he appear asking, asking who might be his mother; Was crime, downright crime, I say,' " (1)

The old woman, Aunt Jane adds;

" 'Was crime as you say.... was all he was asking, just to know who she is.... Only to hear from the woman who carry him in her guts. Only to hear from the one woman who nature open up to let him into life, that and no more might have save him from the blastin' his poor brain take.' " (1)

Later:

" Powell sniffed into his sleeve.
'It make the deadest conscience wake up', he said.
'Crime, crime, crime!' cried Crim." (1)

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.47

Her presence at the "tonelle" presents Fola with a special problem; her precarious middle-class status revolts against the possibility of being identified with the folk ceremonies in the "tonelle". Charlot makes precisely that identification. He tells Fola that she is a part of the women in the ceremony just as he is a part of his own mixed ancestry.

"Fola was reluctant to answer. She glanced at the woman, and quickly turned to see Charlot's face.
'It's not the same thing, you know, unless you want to suggest....'
Fola stopped sudden. She had that self-protective nerve which can pick up the slightest particle of danger. There was going to be trouble in the turn their talk had taken.
'You want to suggest that I believe in all "that",' she said. Her voice was low, distant, closing on a note of quiet disdain.
'But I've seen you dance, Fola.'
'What's that got to do.....'
Charlot wouldn't let her finish.
'It's the same rhythm,' he said, 'and the music of the steel-drums. You yourself have said no music makes you feel the same way.'
'But what's that got to do with holding ceremonies?' she challenged, 'And talking to the dead?'
'There wouldn't be any music without the ceremonies,' said Charlot, 'you couldn't do your dancing without those women. It's from being so near to them that you learned how to move your body.'
Fola felt a sudden resentment towards him. Her triumph would have to be as large as the families whom she was about to defend for the civilised honour of the whole Republic was now in danger.
'Near?' she said, curtly.
'In feeling you are,' said Charlot. 'You can deny them anything except the way you feel when the same rhythm holds you.' " (1)

It is clear from Fola's growing resentment that she is prepared to deny Charlot's point for fear that there may be some truth in it. In scenes from Fola's childhood, Lamming makes it clear that her middle-class status has been very recently acquired by her family and is necessarily very susceptible to Charlot's attacks.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.27

Nevertheless, it soon becomes clear from the behaviour of such middle-class characters as Lady Bاده-Semper that a similar vulnerability would be shown by anyone of Fola's class.

"Fola was quiet.....'s^o that's how he sees me. The college where he teaches, the way I live; all this means nothing compared with what he thinks I am. He thinks I should be like those women.....'

..... She wanted to say something that would offend Charlot; but her confidence was badly shaken.

'If you could dance,' she said. 'If only you could dance! Wouldn't it be the same?'

'Never,' said Charlot. 'I could never be held that way. However much I'd like to feel like you, I know now that I can't.' " (1)

At this point, Charlot appears to be guilty of one of the most insulting of racial cliches but, as Ramchand rightly says, Lamming uses the cliché for his own purposes;

"The novelist's problem at this point is to create in the reader an expectation that something is about to happen to Fola and that the something has to do with the special relationship that exists between Fola and the cultists but not between the cultists and Charlot. At the same time, the specialness of the relationship between Fola and cultists must not preclude the possibility of a more remote but equally valid kinship between the cultists and Charlot who is human after all." (2)

The more remote kinship is indicated in a later conversation between Great Gort and an Englishman. Lamming does not set out to suggest that vigour and "rhythm" are the preserve of blacks but makes it clear that those who are deprived of these qualities are so deprived by forces which are social and cultural and not racial. Race enters into the issue almost coincidentally as a result of historical processes.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.28

(2) The West Indian Novel and its Background, p.144

Fola remembers an incident from her childhood in which she had thrown the ultimate insult at some girls who had envied her by calling them "black rats".

"And even then, Fola thought, even in that innocence of insult there was already secreted an aesthetic denial of their blackness. An insult which she had learnt, an insult which all her infancy had suckled like an udder. And the udder was Charlot's history, the essential history of all Charlot's world.

Fola looked at her own hands, brown as sugar in the light, and the words were screaming through her fever; it was not race, I swear it was not race, it was not race, repeat, repeat, not race, it is not race. It was and is the contagious blackmail of slavery; and near, too near in time to be forgotten by the Americans, or Charlot or me.

History was the udder Charlot had taught her mind to suckle at. Now it was through his tutelage, through a tutelage foreign to San Cristobal, that Fola had returned to the tonelle. Part product of that world, still under the shadow of its past disfigurement, all her emotions had sprung from a nervous caution to accept it as her root, her natural gift of legacy, Fear was the honest and ignorant instinct she had felt in the tonelle. Her shame, like that of all San Cristobal, was unavoidable." (1)

It should be noted at this point that both Fola and Agnes are mulattoes. Charlot tells Fola of a remark Chiki made to him. Chiki said that the ceremony of the souls was "every man's backward glance" which can be made "only by the dead and living who are free." The result of Fola's experience of the African ceremony is that she sets out to make her own "backward glance" to look back beyond the stultifying effects of her family's newly acquired bourgeois identity to the strenuously denied history of her class. She decides that she will not only be Fola (that is, Fola as she is seen by her family and friends) but also "Fola and other than". She must free herself from an imposed identity to discover more profound possibilities of personality and kinship of which the tonelle has made her aware.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.1/4

She does this by inventing stories about her experiences which serve to shock others out of their complacent acceptance of their image of her. One day, the Vice President, Raymond, is murdered. The police, led by Piggott, immediately raid the Reserve and ban the Steel Bands. While the police are in the Reserve and are interrogating the men with characteristic brutality, Fola unexpectedly appears on the scene and saves them, including Chiki whom she has befriended - by telling her step-father that she knows who killed Raymond. She says that the Vice President was killed by her true father.

Chiki, who knows what Fola is trying to do, is drawn into a conspiracy with her and claims that he has painted a portrait of Fola's father. He supplies the police with a drawing which becomes the basis of a yain hunt.

Some time after this, Fola so infuriates Piggott that he puts her out of his house and she goes to live with Chiki. One night when she is alone, Powell comes in and attempts to murder her because while he does not understand people of Fola's class, he has been betrayed so often by their kind that he cannot trust them. He is interrupted by Chiki but Fola is left in tears wondering why her attempt to help the Boys of the Reserve was rejected. Through Agnes's memories, we learn the truth about Fola's father. Agnes does not know his identity, since one day as she lay in a garden, the white son of the local bishop saw her and meeting no resistance, made love to her. However, the boy was then frightened away by a local black man who raped Agnes. A speech by the new President, Baako, makes clear the relationship of the drums to political life:

"The new problem was language. It was language which caused the first Republic to fall. And the second would suffer the same fate; the second and the third, unless they tried to find a language which was no less immediate than the language of the drums. He did not care to be President.... But remember the order of the drums, for it is the language every nation needs if its promises and the myths are to become a fact." (1)

The drums symbolise communication which is sincere and spontaneous. This spontaneous communication can be contrasted with the use of language in England which is seen by Charlot as the subterfuge of a dying culture.

"And in this atmosphere of argument, his own live corpse, his own England, was still speaking with a tongue which knew only shades of emphasis. Time and the skill of poets had forged their language into the finest instrument of speech he could imagine. One word to release an image that returned your meaning finely balanced by an infinity of lucid shades. Without this grace of language given, the corpse might have been betrayed. The language helped. The most monstrous implications of a difference between political enemies could not disturb the general ground of their agreement. If those voices in debate, so gracious and so involved, were not human and alive, history could have recorded a miracle of the dead in a dialogue of judgement on the living." (2)

There is no romanticising influence at work in Lamming's presentation of the peasant ceremonies and the peasant way of life. Baako's speech does indicate as Ramchand says, "a recognition by this authorially approved character that the practice of the cultists can also be seen as a symptom of economic frustration." (3) The qualities which Fola seeks in the tonelle can reappear in the life of the nation in new contexts. For Fola herself, the problem is that of coming to terms both with what is desirable and with what is undesirable in the entire body of peasant wisdom and illusion which education and upbringing have conspired to make her suppress. At the same time, the relevance of Fola's task goes far beyond the West Indian context.

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.363

(2) Lamming (op.cit.) p.37

(3) The West Indian Novel and its Background, p.148

Lanning tends to present isolated incidents in such a way as to give them the full focus of attention, even though their relationship to the rest of the narrative on the level of events is either obscure or non-existent. This concern with a kind of thematic relevance partly accounts for the diffuse quality which has denied Lanning the degree of attention won by Naipaul or Hearne. The incident in the tonelle, during which the soul of the dead boy cries out for his mother has this kind of relevance to the rest of the novel. The effect of the heightened emotion and drama of the tonelle as the boy's spirit is recalled is to impart an almost metaphysical significance to the relationship of mother and son. It appears that the boy, in losing his mother, has lost something absolutely essential to his own continued existence. Particularly in relation to Fola's life, the boy's insanity seems to suggest that a profound disorientation of personality follows this personal loss - in addition, of course to what Aunt Jane and Powell ascribe to the harmful effects of his enforced celibacy. As Crim remarks "only to hear from the one woman who nature open up to let him into life, that and no more, might have save him from the blastin' his poor brain take." Such a point of view is surely so exaggerated as to be unacceptable on a purely naturalistic level, although the hysteria of the tonelle temporarily supports it. The acceptability of this kind of significance, ascribed to the relationship between mother and child, depends on the fact that the relationship has a certain "symbolic representativeness" in the novel as a whole. The question of whether or not the mother had syphilis is introduced to support the extreme weight Lanning gives to the boy's situation.

It is clearly meant to increase the likelihood of the boy's spending his life in a hysterical search for his mother (since he seeks assurance of his own health). Even this explanation is inadequate on a naturalistic level - even peasants have heard of doctors. The emotional reaction to the boy's loss requires some other justification: it is to be found in the emphasis it gives to the mother-child relationship which has symbolic value in the more central story of Fola.

Fola herself has an unknown parent. She seeks her father. Like the boy, she sets out to find him. Her application of her own will to her personal identity leads to a blurring of reality which makes the objective truth about her father's identity seem increasingly unimportant. This is a logical conclusion; a denial of the validity of external factors in determining individual identity tends towards a devaluation of external reality itself. Thus we find Fola, with the help of Chiki, fabricating a story about her father's murder of Raymond just as she invents a story about a boy on a motor-cycle who took her virginity. In the end we find that even Fola's mother, Agnes, does not know who Fola's father is. Agnes's ignorance whether Fola's father is black or white has an obvious symbolic relevance to the situation, of the middle class mulatto in the void between two identities. Nevertheless, the effect of the decreasing importance of objective truth about the unknown father is to focus attention on the one concrete relationship in the existential juggling of Fola's world.

Beyond a certain point, Fola's search for her father becomes less an end in itself than an ingredient in her relationship with her mother and step-father:

"Nothing could embarrass Fola now the search for her father had changed its meaning. Indeed, she was no longer so eager to know who he was or what had happened to him. Her enthusiasm had taken a new turn. She wanted to find him in order to see what would happen to those who had deprived her of this knowledge." (1)

The insecurities of her social status, which make Fola self-consciously reject Charlot's insinuations about her relationship to the world of the tonelle and which make her need to apologise to him for the gauche behaviour of Lady Carol Baden-Semper, also lead her to judge her mother's lack of inhibitions as vulgarity:

"Fola had a feeling of terrible separation from the things she had been taught. She was losing her hold on what she knew; like the night she felt her reason slip and sink into the improbable realities of the tonelle. Her mother's presence seemed to drag her back into the experience of the Houngan's voice in dialogue with the dead souls of the tent.

Condemned to this woman by the fact of birth, she felt severed from her mother by the meaning of her past. Fola could see no point of contact between the nature of a whore and the accident which had entitled this woman to call herself a mother." (2)

Fola's anger is caused by an incident at the Vice President's ball when a sophisticated doctor, Camillon, mistakes Agnes for someone of Fola's own age. In an attempt to get Fola's co-operation, he lies, and tells her that a friend of his has "fixed up a date" with her "friend". Camillon's faux pas lies in the faint suggestion that he saw Agnes as "easy" by comparison with Fola.

In the intricacies of Fola's situation, the college education and middle-class upbringing that divide her from the tonelle also divide her from her mother. Camillon's mistaken view of Agnes is enough to drive Fola to a fury of rejection. It is impossible for her to remain unmoved by the judgement of the sophisticated doctor even though she knows that nothing is, in fact, wrong with Agnes's behaviour:

(1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.246
(2) Ibid p.153

"There was nothing improper about the way Agnes enjoyed herself. She was always gay on such occasions, but Fola resented the exuberance which was a natural part of everything her mother did. In Lady Carol or anyone else, Fola would have seen it as a quality to be admired. But it seemed that Agnes was always too near her own way of feeling." (1)

It seems clear from the two passages last quoted that Agnes and the tonelle stand in the same relation to Fola's mind. Agnes is presented too sympathetically and in too much depth to make a simple identification of the character with the abstract values of the tonelle possible. However, when Fola and Chiki are being driven from the Forest Reserve in Piggott's car, after the Police raid:

"She had abandoned the thought of everyone except her mother. When she saw the Houngan's shadow slip beneath the bar the image of her mother had emerged into the room. It was her first recollection that her mother was alive somewhere." (2)

The obvious reference is to an association of ideas; the sight of the Houngan recalls the tonelle and the boy's loss of his mother which in turn reminds Fola of her mother. However, the connection, in Fola's mind between Agnes and the tonelle re-appears. At this point, when Fola's grasp of reality has become decidedly weak, she thinks of Agnes as the only fixed point in her shifting world:

"It didn't matter if her father came to life..... She cared for no one but her mother. Some old and dormant bond of blood had come alive. The darkness showed everywhere some promise of her return to her mother. The past had contracted into a single moment. She hoped that by some miracle of speech, some magic of recognition in her eyes, Agnes would understand this moment and her daughter's need. She had no other prayer but to be with Agnes." (3)

- (1) Lamming (op.cit.) p.139
- (2) Lamming (op.cit.) p.282
- (3) Lamming (op.cit.) p.282

At this point, Fola and Chiki, the man of the Reserve, are conspirators, together against the world. "Fola and other than" has established contact with the Reserve and so at least potentially, with the strength and immediacy represented by the drums and latent in herself. Now too, in the confusion which the effort has brought about in her personality, she is ready to establish contact with her mother.

There are three points to be borne in mind here. The first is that the memory of the dead boy associates Agnes with the tonelle in Fola's mind. The second is that Fola sees the division between herself and Agnes as a question of social inadequacy, of vulgarity; it is precisely the same issue of social acceptability that divides Fola from the tonelle and the drums. The third is that Fola resents the spontaneity of Agnes's behaviour and it is clear that the value of the drums is presented by Lamming as the value of directness, spontaneity and freedom. Baako, we remember, calls for "a language.... no less immediate than the language of the drums." Charlot seems to see the difference between England and Africa (equally the difference between West Indian bourgeois aspiration and West Indian peasant life) as the difference between a petrified history and a treacherous accumulation of lifeless custom on the one hand and an exciting vibrancy of spontaneous expression on the other.

Against this background of associations, the plot makes Fola's relationship with her mother and her relationship with the Forest Reserve develop in the same direction at the same time. In both, Fola moves from rejection, which entails a rejection of a part of her self, to acceptance which brings a new acceptance of all that she is.

In the case of the Forest Reserve, Powell's act of distrust does not diminish the value of Fola's achievement. It is understandable, even tragic but in no sense approved. Moreover, it may be argued that Powell's acts against Fola depend on just the kind of blindness (seeing her class and colour rather than herself) that the whole tenor of the novel criticises. The connection between Fola's relationship with her mother and her attitude to the African past of the people of San Cristobal (and so to the ethos of the Forest Reserve) is only emphasised by the suggestions of profound, almost super-natural significance in the relationship of mother and child which I have indicated in the ceremony of the dead. In Season of Adventure, Lamming has succeeded in the difficult task of giving a symbolic function to a character without in the least diminishing its credibility on a naturalistic level.

Austin C. Clarke and Edgar Mittelholzer

In the novels with which I have dealt, the image of a certain type of character begins to emerge; she has age, strength and sexuality in varying proportions. Age, of course, does not apply to Agnes. It is easily seen that these characteristics are all to be expected if, as I am suggesting, social reality has brought about a tradition of expressing the history of Caribbean society in terms of the mother-child relationship.

I shall show that in at least two novels, these three characteristics are all present and the identification of the mother-child relationship with the connection between the society and its part is complete. The two novels are Edgar Mittelholzer's Children of Kaywana and Wilson Harris's The Whole Armour.

The element of sexuality is present in Agnes in Season of Adventure. I have already pointed out the special position of sexuality and a certain earthiness in West Indian art - especially calypso. It is a good deal more easily seen in Austin C. Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns.

Clarke's book is another novel of childhood. It is written from the point of view of a little Barbadian boy, Milton. Like the narrator of In the Castle of my Skin, Milton knows only one parent, his mother, and, during the first half of the novel there is ^a powerful emotional bond between them. The novel follows Milton's difficulties as a child in class-conscious and race-conscious colonial Barbados. At first, the boy's mother is quite similar to the mother, in Lamming's novel.

She is a woman who gives her son a penny from her last sixpence to buy "sweeties" and he says "her face was the face of kindness; my mother was capable of such kindness." (1)

After some time, the man who is generally supposed to be Milton's father, Nathan, returns to the boy's mother and after a struggle, they make love and are temporarily reconciled. Milton, at this point, had long seen his mother as:

"very different from the other women in our village. They had men like a sow has pigs.... My mother's breasts were solid like two mounds of stiffly kneaded dough which refused to shake but which looked as if they were always shrugging their disgust at men." (2)

When the mother, Ruby, is reconciled with Nathan, the boy is listening. His horror as he listens to the creaking of the bed and his sexual jealousy serve to make the mother's awakened sexuality more striking than a less biased viewpoint might have suggested. A striking difference between Amongst Thistles and Thorns and In the Castle of my Skin is that, beyond a certain point, in the former novel the boy's affection and idealisation are not permitted to obscure the fact that the mother is also a woman and a sexual being:

"My mother is a woman once more. She moving about the house like a woman expecting her man, my father. But I cannot enjoy with her, her happiness. To me, a father is like the coming of a rival in a love affair. My mother has been my lover all these years." (3)

The themes of age, wisdom, strength and sexuality meet in Mittelholzer's Kaywana. Kaywana, we are told, means "old water". The family history of the Van Groenwegels in Children of Kaywana begins with Kaywana and follows a tradition with deviations caused by the differing genetic legacies of August Vyfuis and Adriansen Van Groenwegel.

(1) Clarke (op.cit.) p.17

(2) Ibid p.20

(3) Clarke (op.cit.) p.50

Kaywana is half Amerindian a significant fact since these are the indigenous people of the West Indies and associations of ancient natural wisdom which belong to the stereotyped Amerindian are a part of Kaywana's aura and mystique.

Kaywana's meeting with August at the beginning of the novel is typical of the stress on violence and passion that characterises Children^{of} Kaywana:

"She knew that August Vyfuis was following her but made no attempt to evade him. August, the nephew of one of the leading traders, had arrived with the last ship from Middelburg, and was twenty-three.

..... August came up to where she stood and held her arm. She looked at him and told him: 'Loose my arm' But he continued to hold it. He had blue eyes and yellow-brown hair. His eyes, were bright and she could feel him trembling. He said that he had to have her. He glanced about with urgency, and looked at her again.- at the nakedness of her. She wore only a lap-cloth. Her breasts were spiked, with golden tips.

'Loose my arm'

'No. I must have you. Today. Now.'

'My people won't like it.'

'They won't mind. You're a half-breed....'

'But who says I want you? '

'I'll take you by force. I must have you.'

She began to smile...1.

'You're burning up. I can see it.' " (1)

The Spaniards raid the colony and kill August. Later, Kaywana gives birth to a son and:

"seeing him in the grey light of dawn, she gave a tired moan of content. She told herself that, though the Spaniards had killed August, he had, through her body, triumphed in the end. This was he again - a new August and with some of her own blood added." (2)

(1) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.5 (Four Square edition, London, 1962)

(2) Ibid, p.9.

A new trader, Adriansen Van Groenwegel, comes to the colony. Kaywana decides that she wants him and loses no time in getting him in her typically direct and somewhat arrogant fashion. She bears him three children, Willem, Aert, and Hendrickje. It soon becomes clear that Adriansen is a man of guile and cunning, very different from Kaywana and August:

"She laughed contemptuously.

'Adriansen, you're a fool in many ways that you don't know. I cannot read and write, but I know human beings. They only respect you when you show them you're strong.

'There are other ways of being strong than the way of guns, Kaywana,' he smiled as he got into his clothes.

'The way of cunning, eh?'

She stood at the bedroom window.... thinking, 'He and I are no more one.... He thinks I am hard and bad, and I think him a fool for his soft ways of dealing with people.... So different from my August who was simple and frank in everything. August had no deep secrets and plans. August was not cunning and full of flattery.' " (1)

The novel is set in Guiana when the three constituent parts, Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice, were separate colonies of Holland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The story of the Children of Kaywana is the story of the qualities of strength, directness and passion, symbolised by Kaywana, complicated by the recurrence of weakness and guile derived from Adriansen Van Groenwegel. It soon becomes clear which of the two types of personality is valued in this environment. Near the end of the novel, Kaywana's descendant, Jacques, after the Slave Rebellion of 1763 in Berbice, arrives at these conclusions:

"..... I'm convinced now that heredity decides all family histories. If our sons have it in them to be brutes, nothing will stop them from being brutes; if they have it in them to be humane, then all the elements in heaven and earth cannot change them.... events like this insurrection should make us realise that we humans are not as noble as we would like to think ourselves. We over-rate ourselves immensely. Under their layer of culture and refinement civilised men are animals, and it doesn't take much urging to have them flying at each others' throats.

Therefore while the Christian philosophy is an excellent one
..... we must live up to its ideals only in so far as they
enable us to be humane one to another. They must not be
allowed to convert us into sentimental weaklings. We must
always remember the animal and we must be prepared for
outbreaks of savagery. And in order that savagery may be kept
in check we must be strong - physically strong. ... Strength
respects strength and peace follows. Strength despises
weakness and strife follows." (1)

Kaywana is killed defending herself and her family against
the angry Amerindians led by the plaiman (1) Wakhatai, whom she had
insulted. The memory of Adriansen is altered in the mind of his
son Willem who has conveniently forgotten his father's sly ways. The
values of Kaywana, the manner of her death and consciousness of
descent from her are transferred in part to the memory of his father.
He tells his wife:

"It's the blood that counts, Griselda, blood. Men can say
we're Van Groenwegels with the bar sinister. Let them say
it. Not a mortal can drain the blood of that old man from my
veins, or the veins of my children. ...Ha! and my mother.
Who can take her blood from me? Who can rob me of the fire
she put into me? My mother was a fighter. Do you know what
it is to have a mother who can stand up with her sons and fight
to the death? You think that a small thing Griselda?? ' He
was deeply moved. His head shook and a low guttural sound
came from him." (2)

Unfortunately, Aert inherits the family weakness and becomes
"a book worm", "a dreamer" and (2) "an insect-collector" in his
brother's phrases. August, son of August Vyfuis, inherits his father's
directness and his mother's ruthlessness and acquires a reputation for
cruelty to his slaves.

(1) witch-doctor

(2) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.42.

He fathers many mulatto children and one of them, Katrina, becomes the mistress of Willem's son Laurens, Their daughter, Hendrickje marries Ignatius, son of Laurens's brother Reinald. Thus the two family lines, the descendants of August Vyfuis and those of Adriansen Van Groenwegel and are interwoven and inbred in a very complex family tree.

Because the descendants of August and Adriansen intermarry, the constant factor in their memory of their family history is Kaywana. August Vufius once compared her to " a jet of fire". The family always remembers that it has "fire-blood". Hendrickje, for instance, decides to marry her cousin Ignatius to "keep the blood together" because she says "we are the children of Kaywana. We mustn't let the name down. We are fighters." (1)

The place of Kaywana as the matriarch of the Van Groenwegels is taken by Hendrickje. It is clear that the qualities of bravery and ruthlessness which make up Hendrickje's character are wholly derived from Kaywana. Katriⁿa tells Laurens: "Hendrickje is not like either of us - She has gone back to one of the others. She has taken after one of her old people (2) Kaywana." (3) Hendrickje's son Adrian thinks, as she prepared to defend herself and her family against the French:

"The belligerent ideas great-grand father Willem put into her head are flaming alive today. The fire-blood of great-great-grand mother Kaywana is blazing magnificently. Perhaps she thinks she is Kaywana reincarnated. Poor thing. I do hope she won't meet the same end. If she got killed I'd have to die with her." (4)

- (1) Mittelholzer (op.cit) p.105
- (2) Ancestors
- (3) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.107
- (4) Ibid, p.301

Later on, whenever a battle threatens, the Van Groenwegels hark back to Kaywana:

" 'Dashan and Van Goos have gone, have they? Hendrickje sniffed. 'Very well. We want no cowards in our midst, white or black.' She looked round at them. 'How are you feeling, my sons? Lumea?'
'Full of blood,' said Pedro
'The old blood!' David raised his arm.
'The old blood!' said Laurens
'We'll have a drop on that,' Lumea mooted.
'A toast to Kaywana, by God,' barked Pedro. " (1)

Hendrickje and her descendants die fighting during the Slave Rebellion and Mittelholzer entitles the last chapter which describes the death of Hendrickje, "Finale: Like Kaywana."

Many of the events in Children of Kaywana are historical fact. Several of the characters are taken from Guyanese history, actual names are used and even some of the dialogue is as recorded by historians. The thesis, that strength is all, is often repeated in the novel and while it is true that Jacques seems to regard it as a universal truth, the claim is explicitly related to the situation of the pioneers on the Guiana coast. Hendrickje tells her grand-children, as she sends them to murder their mother, "This is a country and an age in which we have to live desperately if we're to survive. Only violence can suffice." (2) She later says, contemplating the spread of the Van Groenwegels over the three colonies:

" 'We must spread, Faustina. Our goal is power. Power. The pinnacles.' She began to pace again, hands behind her back clasping and unclasping slowly. 'We have to justify the blood in us. It's grand blood. Fire-blood. We must always be on top. Masters! The Wild Coast must tremble at our name.'" (3)

- (1) Ibid, p.301
- (2) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.259
- (3) Ibid, p.79

Mittelholzer's use of the theme of heredity, in this novel as elsewhere, is naive. An excessively crowded and lengthy procession of characters and incidents leaves insufficient room for any but the most superficial presentation of individual personalities. The result is that the conflict or competition of guile and intellect, on the one hand, with heroism and brute strength on the other, is expressed very crudely as the recurrence - with few complicating aspects of individual personality - of two types of genetic inheritance in a lengthy family-tree. The structure is worthy neither of the colourful historical material nor of the many implications and possibilities in these two basic approaches to the difficulties of life.

One effect of Mittelholzer's insistence on genetics as the ultimate determinant in personality is that the value of strength in building a stable society - the argument set out in Jacques's comments at the end of the novel - is clearly related to the figure of Kaywana which is present as a symbol of force throughout the book. Hendrickje's position as matriarch derives very clearly from her ancestress. At the same time, Mittelholzer's choice of Guyanese history as a setting is not at all incidental (This is a country and an age in which we have to live desperately if we're to survive.).

The saga of the Van Groenwegels begins with an Amerindian, one of the original people of the Guiana coast. Kaywana finds her qualities of strength and directness echoed in the personality of August who she says is "strong and simple like an Indian." (1) Along the way, the family incorporates African blood from Katrina, and Hendrickje later modifies her opinions on the subject of race sufficiently to adopt the illegitimate mulatto children of Adrian, Ziddy and Janny. By the end of the novel, the family is a mixture of the three races

(1) Mittelholzer(op.cit.) p.30

that lived in the Guiana coast at that time. They are thus absolutely creatures of their environment, as far as race, therefore heredity - is concerned, in a way that the pure races are not. They represent, that is to say, the totality of the ethnic composition of the land. It is only to be expected that in a novel set in the West Indies and primarily concerned with genetics and heredity, the matter of racial origin and identity should assume some significance. Such is indeed the case; Mittelholzer's only successful presentation of character and incident in the novel is the baffled, frustrated attempt by the slave-leader, Cuffy, to humble the white woman, Amelia George, whom he has forced to become his mistress, into admitting his humanity and equality. (2)

In a novel, then, in which race is clearly and perhaps inevitably an important theme, the fact that Mittelholzer chooses to show the guardians of the truth, the Van Groenwegels, becoming a sort of ethnic compendium of Guiana is significant because it suggests that their "truth" is being given particular applicability to the birth of a specific society. This is not to deny that Mittelholzer, through Jacque's words, gives the point that "strength respects strength" a wider relevance, a larger context than Guianese society in the eighteenth century - or even the four centuries covered by the entire Kaywana trilogy (Children of Kaywana, The Harrowing of Hubertus, and Kaywana Blood). My point is, rather, that we are justified in accepting the values Kaywana symbolises as deliberately and specifically related, on one level, to the society in which the story is set. (That it need not have been so is obvious if we consider the proposition that Hamlet is about Denmark.)

(2) The characters and the relationship are based on historical fact.

Louis James says of the Kaywana trilogy:

"The historical research and technical control is impressive. Mittelholzer handles the complicated relationships of the Groenwegel family in Guiana through the eventful years 1612 to 1953 across more than half a million words. The importance of Mittelholzer's attempt must not be underestimated; it was to create, where there was only a sense of deprivation, an awareness of national history in the Caribbean." (1)

Mittelholzer's use of historical material for the purposes of fiction is successful in the character of Cuffy, the only character in Children of Kaywana whose rhetoric appears wholly justified and whose personal trauma is not a neurosis but a dilemma still present, to some extent in the lives of many West Indians and presented with drama and skill. With this exception, the author's historical research very often obtrudes in the form of tedious administrative material and such characters as Storm Van's Gravesands and Herr C. Mittelholzer, who contribute nothing to the narrative. Creating an awareness of Caribbean history, though, no doubt, a laudable undertaking is a dangerous one for a novelist to accept.

However, Mittelholzer's concern with the actual past of Guyanese society is further evidence that the superiority of intuitive strength to intellectual cunning, though occasionally presented as universal philosophical truth may be taken as specifically related to Guyanese history and that the choice of setting is not merely a convenient one. It has been necessary to insist on the point because the relationship between Mittelholzer's work and Guyanese society is seldom as precise and as obvious as the connection between Naipaul's work and the West Indies or between Clarke's work and colonial Barbados. Children of Kaywana was first published in 1952, the year in which a sense of the possibility of a national identity first began to appear in British Guiana.

(1) p.39 Introduction to The Islands in Between.

The pressures on Mittelholzer to be a "West Indian novelist" cannot have been, as he wrote the first book of the trilogy, as intense as they would be today. This should not be allowed to obscure Mittelholzer's involvement with the problems of his native land:

"..... Mittelholzer was pursuing a deeply personal thesis. Throughout the saga we see the conflict in the family blood; on the one hand there was the Dutch Adriansen Van Groenwegel with European sexuality, restraint and sexual mores, and there was the wild, intuitive and uninhibited stock of Kaywana.... In preface to Children of Kaywana Mittelholzer relates the experience of the Van Groenwegels to that of his own family. And in A Swarthy Boy, he tells how he himself was a "swarthy" throwback in a "white" family, an alien resented by a "negrophobe" father. This trauma may well be central to the tragedy of his essentially lonely life which culminated in his suicide by fire in a lonely Sussex field in 1965." (1)

The character of Kaywana is so superficially drawn that it is tempting to think that the author was less interested in the creation of a complex personality than in the establishment of a symbol of strength at the beginning of the novel. A subtle insight into the complexities of an individual personality would obviously hinder the second purpose. However, Mittelholzer's dabbling in psychopathology allows no such subtlety anywhere in Children of Kaywana except for Cuffy. There is a succession of characters who are so easily identifiable as neurotic case histories that they are not so much people as, collectively, a simplistic resume of Freudian categories. Adrian falls in love with his mother and almost makes love to her (the Oedipus complex); Cornelis grows up dominated by his mother, Hendrickje, and becomes a homosexual; Ignatius and Hendrickje have a sado-masochistic relationship; Adrian spends his old age alone, in a room, with fears of persecution by his family (paranoia); Rosania is a nymphomaniac.

(1) James (The Islands in Between) p.139

Mittelholzer was capable of far more subtle and complex representations of the diseased psyche, as Thunder Returning shows. In Children of Kaywana, his concern with psychology accounts for a most unfortunate simple-mindedness in the exploration of character.

It has to be remembered, therefore, that the absence of subtlety in the presentation of Kaywana occurs in the context of a general lack of insight into personality. One cannot be certain that this lack of depth indicates, in the case of Kaywana, a deliberate disregard for the requirements of credible, naturalistic characterisation in favour of the creation of a symbol of a group of related concepts - strength, determination and directness. Effectively however, the creation of a simple personality whose qualities may almost all be placed under the heading of "strength" the derivation of an extended family tree, which is the basis of the plot, from that character, the adoption of heredity as a rigid determinant of personality and the glorification of strength in individual lives and in society all necessarily amount to the symbolic use of the original character. In other words, whatever the reason for the simplicity of Mittelholzer's characterisation, such a technique, if it can be called that, leads necessarily to a straightforward and uncomplicated association of any given personality trait with a particular character; when that trait, strength in the case of Kaywana becomes the basis of a philosophical statement ("Strength respects Strength"), we are necessarily justified in calling the author's technique in the use of symbol. Further, the insistence on heredity ensures that every re-appearance of strength of character is traced back to Kaywana so that she is always the representative of it. Kaywana becomes pure symbol after her death because her descendants are all unaware of the one way in which she occasionally showed weakness, her fear of abandonment. Even that complication is absent from her memory.

The single complication is itself significant. Kaywana's fears become apparent when she has to lose her son August who goes to Holland to be educated:

"After he had sailed, Kaywana fell into a spell of sadness that lasted nearly a week. She hardly spoke, and attended to her household duties in a mechanical, preoccupied manner. She looked old and defeated, and one night she said to Adriansen: 'I feel I won't ever see him again. I shouldn't have parted with him. Now that he has gone it's as if my last bit of girlhood has gone with him.' " (1)

Another instance is the attack on the colonies by the Spaniards. Adriansen leaves the house to join the defenders:

"As he turned to go aboard the skiff again, Kaywana said: 'Adriansen, squeeze my arm before you go.'
'Do what?'
'Squeeze my arm,' she regarded him with a shifty distraction. 'Squeeze my arm and say: "I'm going, Kaywana, I've got to go, but I'm coming back later in the day."'
He laughed. 'Very well....' " (2)

The first of these passages indicated that Mittelholzer goes some way to suggest a powerful maternal streak in Kaywana. She is often shown suckling her children and, during the battle with the Indians, she panics once and cries 'My babies, My poor babies. They'll kill you.' (3) The second example, by emphasising the emotion of the man-woman relationship is related to the matter of Kaywana's sexuality. This sexuality is admittedly, largely a question of physical attractiveness, nudity and lack of inhibition. However, one source of Kaywana's fear is her decreasing physical attractiveness:

"If only she could have remained young and not have faded away like this. It made her ashamed before him sometimes, to think that her charms were going and what she had to offer him now was not as good as what the younger girls in the village had." (4)

- (1) p.30
- (2) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.23
- (3) Ibid. p.36
- (4) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p.28

Earlier, in her youth, she takes the initiative:

" 'Adriansen'

'Yes?'

'You haven't kissed me for two days.'

He grunted. 'Pity that fellow on the Corentyne taught you how to kiss. You're better than a European at it now.'

'You haven't lain with me in bed for nearly a week.'

'No?'

'You don't care for me that way any more?'

'Go to bed. Go to bed. I've told you I'm busy these days.' " (1)

Within the limits of Mittelholzer's characterisation, Kaywana has all the characteristics to which I have referred. Her strength is obvious, her wisdom the approved one of the novel (as Jacque's message shows) her sexuality is apparent. The association of age derives partly from her name "old water", and partly from her position in the history of the Van Groenwegels.

I have said that these mother figures are used to represent the past of the society to which they belong. There is an inevitable national association in the resemblance between the words "Kaywana" (old water) and "Guiana" (many waters). More important however is Mittelholzer's use of the ^astereotype attached to the Amerindian race. Kaywana is a half-breed but whenever a connection between personality and race is mentioned, it is the Amerindian half which is involved. We remember that, in Kaywana's opinion, August Vyfuis was "strong and simple like an Indian." The difference between Kaywana's directness and strength and Adriansen's guile and cunning is often presented as the difference between the Indian in general and the sophisticated European in general.

After an attempt has been made to kill Hendrickje, Kaywana, taking it for granted that the culprit was Wakkatai, has the witch-doctor's daughter, Wikki-Wikki, killed. Adriansen later gives advice to the young August before the boy leaves for Holland:

(1) Ibid p.16

".... let me give you a word of warning. Remember what happened the other day? Remember Wikki-Wikki? You sided with your mother on that occasion. You felt that she was right in killing that poor girl. It in the Indian way, it was probably right. But you're three-quarters white - three quarters European - and in future you're going to live in accordance with the codes and laws of the Christian world. You can't apply Indian law to your dealings with men in the life you're going to lead. I've tried to educate you in the European way, August; and if you want to live with Europeans and make a man of yourself, then you must behave and think as Europeans do." (1)

When Adriansen finds out that Kaywana was responsible for the death of Wikki-Wikki he tells her that "in the eyes of Christians" she is a murderer and adds: "If you care to live according to the laws of the beasts, then you must do so and suffer as the beasts do" (2) The whole course of the family history of the Van Groenwegels and of the novel leads to Jacque's conclusion, at the end, that these "Christian codes and laws" are in large part, an illusion, for "under their layer of culture and refinement, civilised men are animals". The only way of controlling the essentially savage nature of "civilised" men, he feels is physical force. The Christian code is an ideal but no more. Adriansen gives his name to the family motto, "The Van Groenwegels never run", but in spirit, it derives from Kaywana and her fatal courage in the face of the angry Amerindian tribe.

The personality traits of Kaywana are elevated to the status of philosophical truth and those personality traits are clearly a function of her racial identity. The novel's "truth" is derived, through Kaywana from the alleged qualities of the original people of the Guiana coast. The savage, though not necessarily able to formulate the doctrine, is held to be in possession of essential truth (Strength respects strength). Kaywana represents that simple strength and Mittelholzer's genetic determinism enables him to use her to demonstrate Jacque's point in the life of several generations.

(1) Mittelholzer (op.cit.) p. 30

(2) *Footnotes*
Ibid. p. 29

CHAPTER 13

Wilson Harris's :The Whole Armour

I should now like to turn to Wilson Harris's The Whole Armour, bearing in mind Joyce Sparrer's blunt comment that "The art of Wilson Harris is different in kind from the art of anybody else." It is difficult and necessarily inadequate to give a resume of one of Harris's novels because Harris spurns our everyday ways of experiencing reality. He makes every character a symbol, confuses the distinction between reality and illusion, and makes references which, though superficially insignificant, are related in a complex network of images.

The violence Harris does to our preconceptions about experience and language is quite deliberate. His reasons are set out - unfortunately in his customary gnomic language - in "Tradition and the West Indian Novel", Harris's reasons for his unusual techniques have been condensed and explained in many places but they have a special significance here:

"What, in my view, is remarkable about the West Indian in depth is a sense of subtle links, the series of subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him, the latent ground of old and new personalities. This is a very difficult view to hold, I grant, because it is not a view which consolidates, which invests in any way in the consolidation of popular character. Rather it seeks to visualize a fulfilment of character. Something which is more extraordinary than one can easily imagine. And it is this possible revolution in the novel - fulfilment rather than consolidation - I would like first of all to look at it in a prospective way because I feel it is profoundly consistent with the native tradition - the depth of inarticulate feeling and unrealised wells of emotion belonging to the whole West Indies." (1)

Harris calls the nineteenth century European novel "the novel of persuasion" since its purpose is "consolidation"; "the rise of the novel in its conventional and historical mould coincides in Europe with states of society which were involved in consolidating their class and other vested interests."

(1) Harris (op.cit.) p.27

The "novel of persuasion" does so by depending on the manners and the conversation on "an accepted plane of society we are persuaded has an inevitable existence". Harris adds that "the novel of the West Indies belongs-in the main - to the conventional mould". He finds this "conventional mould", "academic and provincial in the light of a genuine native tradition of depth." (1)

The native tradition derives from the broken heritage and history of the West Indies, "broken into many stages in the way in which one surveys an existing river in its present bed while plotting at the same time ancient and abandoned indeterminate courses that the river once followed." He describes the main division as "Pre Columbian/ Post Columbian" (2) and asks "How can one begin to reconcile the broken parts of such an enormous heritage, especially when those broken parts appear very often like a grotesque series of adventures, volcanic in its precipitate effects as well as human in its vulnerable settlement." This reconciliation has to be done "in a manner which fulfils in the person the most nebulous instinct for a vocation of being and independent spirit within a massive landscape of apparent lifelessness." (2) This task is described as "a peculiarly West Indian question" and "peculiar to every phenomenal society where minorities exist, and comparatively new immigrant and racial cells sometimes find themselves placed within a dangerous misconception."

Quite obviously, in such a situation, "consolidation", the business of flattering particular social and national groups by accepting their nature and qualities as "given" in our perception of individual human beings, is largely irrelevant.

(1) Ibid, p.30

(2) Harris (op.cit.) p.31

Harris feels that what is required is "fulfilment" which seeks to enable the individual to realise his own nature and purpose in the light of original perspectives with regard to his past. Literature is peculiarly suited to this task because in it "the life of tradition in all its complexity gives a unique value to the life of vocation in society." (1) That tradition, as Harris sees it, "since it is inherently active at all times..... participates the ground of living necessity by questioning and evaluating all assumptions of character and conceptions of place or destiny." (1)

The native tradition then, deriving from the situation of unrelated immigrant groups unable to communicate with each other on accepted planes of language and custom, is that of seeking ways to relate the fragmented inheritance of mankind "rather than vested interest in a fixed assumption and classification of things." (2) Within such a classification, "freedom becomes a progressive illusion and it is within the open capacity of the person within the suffering and enduring mental capacity of the obscure person.... that a scale emerges and continues indefinitely to emerge to make it possible for one (whoever that one may be today or tomorrow) to measure and abolish each given situation." (3) The task of measurement and abolition, which is essentially a search for freedom, is "in the terms of the novel the distribution of a frail moment of illuminating adjustments within a long succession and grotesque series of adventures, past and present, Capable now of discovering themselves and continuing to discover themselves, so that in one sense, one relives and reverses the "given" conditions of the past, freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry

(1) Harris (op.cit.) p.46

(2) Ibid, p.33

(3) Ibid, p.34

and blindness to one's own historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future." (1)

The passage just quoted has an immediately obvious relevance to the special concerns of Fola and Shephard in Lamming's novels. It is not surprising that Harris describes Lamming as "one of the most interesting novelists out of the West Indies" for both Fola and Shephard are concerned with escape from the accepted classifications imposed on them by, in the first instance, society and more importantly the past - their own and that of their race and society. In Ma of In the Castle of My Skin and in Ma Shephard of Of Age and Innocence Lamming is concerned to demonstrate the limits as well as the validity of what may be gained from the past. Harris is concerned with the abolition of whatever is accepted and, therefore, rigid and constricting, in our view of the past: he evokes history to destroy its power. These approaches necessarily imply a strictly critical attitude to all wisdom gained from history. Neither Harris's perception of the problem of history's lessons nor his literary method is wholly original; his way of stating it suggests "The Four Quartets" (The knowledge imposes a pattern and falsifies/ For the pattern is new in every moment) and the shifting ^{identities} ~~identities~~ of his "characters" probably owe something to "The Wasteland". However the technique, which easily lends itself to poetry, is at least unusual in the novel. No character in his novels is given a single identity which is fixed: all characters symbolise several concepts which are related on different levels and they may merge unpredictably into each other.

(1) Harris (op. cit,) p.34

The pregnant Amerindian woman, Petra, in Heartland (1) is one example of Harris's use of a "character" as pure symbol - in this case, a symbol of the past. However, the limitations of the mother-figure and her wisdom are most apparent in the figure of Magda in The Whole Armour. Magda is a black prostitute among the river people in the Guyanese interior. She is described as:

"A vigorous and strong black skin of a woman, polished like mahogany, approaching forty - Chinese eyes - emotionless in expression and filled with the blackest unshed tears. Barefoot. The columns of her legs were sculptured to stand out from the loose, formless, miraculous stone of her dark body and dress, unadorned and plain." (2)

The associations of age, strength and sexuality are all present here and will become more obvious. Magda's wisdom however, is strictly limited by the discovery and new awareness of her son Cristo just as Shephard's new awareness limits the validity of his mother's wisdom. The novel begins with a fisherman Abram, who lives in a hut at the mouth of the Pomeroon river. He is called Abram because people suppose he must be barbaric to live in such a place. If this explanation is enigmatic it must be remembered that the Biblical names in the novel import a series of connotations which do not depend of a very precise correspondence with the characters of the Bible.

Abram dreams that he is standing on a branch of a tree, about to leap. He does so and feels himself lying on the ground, seeing the entire tree suspended in the air above him. He wakes in fear and is visited by Magda who begs him to hide her son Cristo. The river police of the Pomeroon are looking for him as he is suspected of the murder of a rival for his "sweet heart", Sharon.

(1) Heartland, W. Harris; London 1964

(2) Harris (op.cit.) p.12

Abram is described as having a red face and short curling hair. He refuses to hide Cristo and Magda accuses him of disliking the boy who could be his son. Abram points out that, since he only recently began sleeping with her, he can hardly be the father of her twenty-one year old son. Magda retorts that he would never believe himself the father of Cristo because, she says, "He too black and you too white." She promises him that she will be available to him whenever he wants her if he will shelter Cristo. Abram agrees. Cristo has the feeling that Abram's hut has "no geographical location" but is the ground of the dreams of pirates, sailors, slaves and masters. These associations seem to identify Abram with those who colonised the Guyana coast but the identification is imprecise. Magda insists on the point that Abram "could be" Cristo's father. This entails the association of Christ's descent from Abraham to bring a new dispensation modifying the old laws.

Magda, as is clear from this conversation represents something of which Abram is at once ashamed and afraid. She laughingly tells him: "Stop feeling eternal shame about me and you, Abram. I is you body-in-the-dark woman, you convenient sphinx of a woman." (1) There is a series of overlapping associations where: "white" man and "black" woman, slave-master and slave, "victor" and "victim", all complicated by the fact that the temptation to regard these relationships as simple antitheses of active versus passive breaks down when we glimpse that ambiguity, in either element - the sense in which the victor may be victim and in which the victim is never wholly innocent.

(1) Harris (op.cit.) p.15

Magda's special skill is the imputation of guilt with which she overwhelms everyone, bringing them into her power. Magda is the victim, the one used (black; woman; whore) who, nevertheless, acquires power from the fact of being used.

She has her moments of perceptiveness; she says "Sometimes I feel we is a dying race, Abram" (1) The comment, coming soon after Abram's terrifying dream prompts him to insist "I'm not dying" (1) She says later: "It is as if an old race is bound to be always dying in the world." (1) This comment again terrifies Abram who snaps: "Don't parrot every fool you hear." (1) In Abram's hut, Cristo tearfully protests his innocence of the murder, and Abram, watching the boy's confusion and resentment, suddenly and inexplicably dies.

Cristo goes to his mother who in a curiously perverse and quite irrational way, not only accuses Cristo of murdering Abram but succeeds in inspiring him with a feeling of guilt. She takes him to Abram's hut where they find that Abram's corpse has vanished; only the blood-stained shirt remains in the corner. Cristo supposes that a tiger has removed the body. Harris makes it clear that the man-eating tiger is one of the myths of the Pomeroon, long a convenient scapegoat for inexplicable death. Magda leads Cristo out to the shore where Abram's corpse is rotting. She forces her son at gun-point to dress the body in his own clothes. Cristo goes into hiding and Magda convinces the police, who have no interest in too close an investigation partly because Abram was disliked and partly because of the persuasive force of Magda's sexuality, that the body is that of Cristo and that Abram has escaped.

(1) Harris (op.cit.) p.15

Magda holds a wake for her son. Among the guests are Sharon, her father, Peet, and her sweetheart, "Mathias". The wake is intended to have a healing function, to convince an illiterate people in a hostile environment that due respect has been paid to death and the inevitable breach in the pattern of their lives has been repaired by some dramatic action which must affirm the continuing pattern. Peet seeks to provide this necessary act by entering Magda's room, intending to make love to her on the night of her son's wake. He fails because Magda sees an unexpected resemblance between the appearance of Peet and that of Abram. She strikes out at him and he falls; in his half-conscious state he imagines that he is lying on the shore and that hands, not his own, are undressing him. He gradually becomes aware that the hands belong to Cristo. Next he is in the mouth of a tiger which is bearing him away. When he recovers, he finds that Magda has torn the money he was offering her to shreds and is ordering him from her room.

Since Peet has failed in his mission, the wake has to find another affirmative act which will balance the negative presence of death. Sharon is the next to go to Magda's room. Magda tells her that Cristo is alive and Sharon wants to make the information known so that Cristo may return. Magda will not hear of it and in subtle ways, accuses Sharon of being guilty, despite her seeming innocence and purity and responsible for the death of the man Cristo allegedly killed. Sharon, like Peet, is bound to Magda by a combination of fascination and fear. She has the "illusion" that her own identity is fusing with that of Magda. She is significantly, a virgin and is made to symbolise innocence as emphatically as Magda symbolises and conveys guilt; in this conversation the simple distinction is progressively blurred until Sharon's illusion symbolises the ambiguity of these terms.

Mathias, meanwhile, is telling Peet about a tiger who had been seen by the latter's cousins. He says the reason he and Sharon were late is they had been listening to the story. Peet has Magda's irrational way of imputing guilt; he suggests that they were late because the young man had just seduced his daughter. He tries to stab Mathias who wrests the knife away and falls on it. The cry goes around that Peet has killed Mathias but the young^{man} revives long enough to explain that it was an accident. Sharon has left the wake and run into the jungle where she suddenly comes upon Cristo, and they make love. Cristo is wearing the skin of a tiger he has killed and there is a scratch on his cheek which at times, appears to have been made by Sharon as she lost her virginity and, at other times, by the tiger. Cristo tells her the things he has seen in the jungle and his experiences. He set out to find a factory, since, at the time, it seemed perfectly plausible that he would find one in the jungle. He suddenly found himself among a band of Caribs fleeing from defeat by the Arawaks. He was running with them and realised they had mistaken him for one of them. He was covered with mud like them and his Chinese ancestry from his mother, gave him some ancient link with these originally Asiatic people. Sharon explains that the Catholic mission is staging a mock battle between Caribs and Arawaks to commemorate an historic tribal battle. Cristo insists - that - even if this is true - his Indians were nevertheless "real". He explains that his mother is now changed, that she is now no more than a child and is far younger than her son. He has been reborn into a more ancient heritage. Sharon notices that he does, in fact, look older. It becomes clear that the new generation can be much "older" than the rootless "immigrant" generation that preceded it, able to transcend the immediate disorientation of immigration (slaves, Chinese traders Portuguese and East Indian peasants)

to a more remote human kinship which made it possible for Cristo, a black man, to be mistaken for a Carib Indian.

Nine months later the child of Cristo and Sharon is born. As they wait for the police to arrest Cristo, Magda bursts in explaining that she has bought time for Cristo to escape and insists that he hide. He refuses knowing that his new awareness of ancient links is sufficient protection (the whole armour) against the guilt-ridden misconceptions, the unending cycle of accusation, innocence and guilt, of Magda's generation.

A summary of the events in the novel cannot do justice to Harris's technique which depends rather on the many correspondences between images. The tiger, for example, is an image which is carefully developed to acquire more than one symbolic function. When Cristo suggests that Abram's body has been taken by a tiger, Magda refuses to accept this view, succeeding once again in imputing some imprecise guilt to him. Peet, in his drunken rage, frequently interrupts Mathias's story about the tiger to suggest that the animal was really a human being, referring to it as "Cristo". As Peet lies on the floor, after his struggle with Magda, he dreams that Cristo is replaced by a tiger, which carries him away. At this point, the animal is referred to as "the tiger of death". However, the association between Cristo and the tiger is becoming clear. The connection is clearest after Cristo kills the tiger and is dressed in its skin. There is the specific statement that "the tiger was manking."

The tiger is at once destructive death and destructive man - Cristo, however, is himself man (as Christ was) and the tiger comes to symbolise his power which, like Christ's, suffers the undeserved imputation of guilt and transcends death.

The tiger is used to symbolise both the power of the new victor, the power to triumph and to heal, and the destructive power of mankind, death, because Cristo, though like Christ, born of man, transcends the limitations to which man has been subject.

The symbol of that destructive mankind is Magda and the image of the tiger does, at one point, fuse with her identity. As Cristo makes love to Sharon in the jungle, she is looking over his shoulder at the moon:

"Once again she saw the perverse countenance in the dim room as Cristo held her, the incestuous tiger of the jungle, the hiding mother in the son." (1)

Just as man can transcend man's past limitations, so that which has been destructive can also be healing. Harris insists on the ambiguous nature of the act of intercourse and Sharon's loss of her virginity - the co-existence of pain and pleasure, aggression and love, suffering and ecstasy. The act recalls the stabbing of Mathias but is creative by destruction; the "ruby of blood" completes Sharon's escape into new possibilities from a dangerous innocence. The destructive tiger brings about a new birth - both for Sharon herself and for her child.

The tiger is also death and Cristo kills death - as Christ did - and is dressed in its skin as a mark of his triumph (2) This is not wholly distinct from his triumph over the destructive nature of mankind (the tiger) nor is his own identity wholly distinct from the image of the tiger for he is himself man. Yet the destructiveness of which he necessarily partakes can, under new circumstances, be creativity. The destruction of Sharon's virginity is in fact an act of love and death's destruction of him (as of Christ) is a path to victory.

(1) Harris (op.cit.) p. 28

(2) Presumably, Harris intends his readers to think of T.S. Eliot's famous line, "In the juvenescence of the year came Christ the tiger." The birth of Cristo's generation proves to be the "juvenescence" of mankind.

This is but one of the many ways in which images in Harris's novels can be related. Relationships between images occur on many levels and depend on deliberate ambiguities. The ambiguities are present because the theory of "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" is being put into practice. Our perception is being freed from the accepted and the "given" to make possible new ways of seeing; destruction may be creation, innocence may be guilt and so on. Harris's technique runs the risk - I believe profitably - of creating confusion; it can give rise to a kind of self-indulgent intellectual exercise in relating normally disparate concepts merely for the pleasure of doing so. Freedom, at least in this instance, is allied to chaos.

Nevertheless, in the light of "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" the general direction of The Whole Armour is easily seen. The "broken parts" of the "enormous heritage" of the West Indies are all present in various ways. There is Mathias, half Portuguese and half Syrian, son of a Portuguese trader, who sits in an office languidly seeking a point to his life. There is the Chinese ancestry which is present in Magda but is without significance until Cristo meets the Carib Indians. There are the white colonists whose arrival on the Guiana coast is symbolised by the ambiguous location of Abram's hut. Finally, there are the black people, represented by Magda. At first the colour black is made to convey mystery and then it becomes clear that the mystery derives from confusion in a society where "comparatively new immigrant and racial cells sometimes find themselves placed within a dangerous misconception." Magda's eyes are filled with the "blackest unshed tears" and there is a reference to the "loose, formless, miraculous stone of her dark body and dress." Later, "black" is associated with "the wilderness" which, of course, is at once mysterious and chaotic. Sharon thinks, as Cristo makes love to her in the jungle:

"It was a moon struck world, Sharon knew. Woman grew into an unattainable idol that stood on the highest blossom in the world or into a compulsive fantastic whore with black roots in the wilderness. Sharon could not help shrinking a little in her skin at the memory of her every limb and bond of extremity as when the serial dreadful vision of Magda and herself fused into one." (1)

The "moon-struck world" is that of the people of the Pomeroon. Sharon herself has been the unattainable idol, the symbol of a purity which is not wholly distinct from guilt, and Magda, symbolising the opposite principle of guilt, which is not wholly distinct from naivete, is the compulsive fantastic whore with black roots in the wilderness. Yet all the "racial cells" are bound up in dangerous misconceptions. Innocence and guilt are deprived of meaning in a world where the "massive landscape of apparent lifelessness" so threatens the people at the wake that they need any dramatic action, however crude, destructive or irrational to reassure themselves. We remember that "one relives and reverses the given conditions of the past freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry and blindness to one's own historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future" (2) This catastrophic idolatry is precisely the problem faced by the people at the wake:

"Her (Magda's) mourning wake was a debt they must exact for the sovereignty she had exercised upon them in their weakness, men and women alike dominated by a furtive desire for unrestricted union with the goddess of identity, superior to a divided, unsettled world." (3)

Magda, then, is the source of this idolatry, the people's misconceptions. Her function is the creation of guilt, insecurity and untruth. This, at first, is what she means to her son. As she forces him to the shore, to Abram's body, he realises:

- (1) Harris (op.cit.) p.81
- (2) Harris (op.cit.) p.34
- (3) Harris (op.cit.) p.44

"His mother had become the womb of terrifying contempt and meaningless execution and pride, someone he must consistently humour with a desperate pathetic lie." (1)

Only after his experiences in the jungle can Cristo see beyond this immediate source of misconceptions. He tells Sharon that it is "no use worshipping the top-soil", they must examine "every root and branch, even if it looks like nothing." Magda, clearly, represents the recent past. She is the top-soil of history which presents many illusory patterns, Cristo points out to Sharon that parents are all, in a sense, imperialists, new arrivals seeking to derive an identity from their creation and possession. Cristo's rebirth into an older inheritance means that he and Sharon are "the first potential parents who can contain the ancestral house." He is able to find within himself - his Chinese inheritance - a point of contact with the ancient indigenous people of Guiana, then reconciling the broken parts of "the enormous heritage, the grotesque series of adventures."

The distinction between the misconceptions of the recent past and the entirety of history seems connected with the distinction between "consolidation" and "fulfilment". Cristo finds the top-soil insufficient and seeks "every root and branch", the entire tree (suggesting "family-tree" and hence descent and history) of which Abram the "white" man is aware, in his dream, but which he senses as a threat. The acceptance of the entirety of history seems to "fulfil the most nebulous instinct for a vocation of being and independent spirit." Cristo's prior adherence to an accepted view of history (Magda, in the sense that she was the only heritage - ancestress - he knew) bound him to the world of guilt and falsity inherent in that accepted version.

(1) Harris (op.cit.) p.29

Harris seems to say that "consolidation", the celebration and strengthening of the accepted, is specially misleading in a new society of superficially unrelated groups where misunderstanding is rife. This is not to say that he presents the problem as uniquely West Indian but rather as specially urgent in the West Indies (hence his comment that the issue of "fulfilment" is "a peculiarly West Indian question")

Magda, then, represents the recent past, the accepted version that blinds present and future generations to the totality of history which, so far from dividing them by consolidating some image of uniqueness, would point towards a more profound brotherhood between men by indicating their common heritage. The recent past is most easily accepted because of its nearness (the topsoil). It is in this sense that Cristo's new awareness of that common heritage,^{his} new ability to "contain the ancestral house," makes him older than his own mother.

Magda, like Ma Shephard, comes to represent a past of which the validity is limited by the discoveries of a new generation. Of course Cristo's discovery is rather different from Shephard's. The image of the mother as a symbol of the accepted version of history has a special usefulness for Harris's purposes.¹ Harris feels that idolatry may "bind" one to a false present and fut^ure; his choice of word suggests considerable force, broken with great difficulty. The mother-son relationship enables the author to suggest the unavoidable authority that the past can exert on the minds of a (present) generation ("someone he must consistently humour with a desperate pathetic lie.") and the fact that authority derives from the reappearance of elements of the past in the self-image of that generation. Precisely because one has, as it were grown out of the past (one's mother, "the womb of terrifying contempt and meaningless execution and pride" in this instance), the past seems to reappear in one's very nature and being

("the incestuous tiger of the jungle, the hiding mother in the son.")

The son derives his being and his nature from his mother and a generation derives both from its past. The paradox is that one is required to struggle against an authority based on a part of oneself. Cristo appears to be fighting an enemy who has outposts in his own head; he is driven to humour her with desperate lies by a force from within. The solution to the paradox is that man (Christ, Cristo) transcends man's nature by "dying" (i.e. refusing to acknowledge the illusory limits of that nature and so destroying it) into new life. A generation is required to transcend the very past from which it is most nearly derived and the mother-son relationship suggests the power of the link. That "accepted" past is a part of the present; if no wider history is entertained, the recent past with all its faults and misconceptions determines one's present nature.

It is not necessary to demonstrate that Magda functions as a symbol since the same could be said of any character in Harris's novels. Significantly, however, this symbol conforms to a type which is now familiar from other novels of the West Indies. Only one "character" in The Whole Armour, Magda, has what may be recognised as personality traits. One is not aware of Peet, Sharon and Cristo as anything more than symbols in a metaphysical theorem. It is, however, possible to abstract certain qualities from the character of Magda. She is physically and emotionally strong ("a vigorous and strong black skin of a woman", "the loose formless miraculous stone of her dark body"). She is sexually appealing; the river-policeman is reluctant to investigate the death of Abram because of the powerful presence of Magda's sexuality. When she is appealing to Abram to hide Cristo, she pulls her dress tight around her to emphasise the power of her limbs, a habit to which she resorts whenever it seems useful.

She is represented as old; she tells Sharon that the young woman's view of life will be different when she is as "old and ancient" as herself. There are suggestions of age as well as strength in the reference to stone. The phrase "approaching forty" is true only on the most superficial level of the story and useful because Magda is a prostitute who is still active and - she tells Peet - has her "refusing days". She has knowledge which the course of the novel rejects as wisdom but which, up to the end, is powerful and effective. We see her posing as the bereaved mother at the wake, alone in her house above the crowds "the goddess of identity, superior to a divided, unsettled world." The presence of qualities of personality in Magda, her nearness to the status of a character when all else in the novel is pure symbol, requires some explanation. The explanation lies in the fact that Harris is making use of a character type which has become traditional in the West Indian novel for a purpose which has also become traditional. The traits are the familiar ones; age, strength, wisdom, and sexuality.

It has not been possible to show a chronological development from the "novels of childhood" which present a naturalistic, usually first-person account of childhood in the West Indies - In the Castle of my Skin, Amongst Thistles and Thorns, Black Midas and The Wild Coast - to the novels which use the mother-child relationship for purposes of symbolism with regard to history and identity - The Whole Armour, Children of Kaywana, Season of Adventure and Of Age and Innocence. Mittelholzer's novel was written six years before Black Midas. The main output of novels from the Caribbean, excluding those written by authors from the European planter class at the beginning of this century is contained within forty-five years.

This short time does not allow for very much in the way of a linear development of themes in time. However, given the two extremes of the more or less straightforward presentation of reality in In the Castle of my Skin on the one hand and the highly complex symbolism of The Whole Armour on the other, it is possible to trace the evolution of an idea within the works of individual novelists.

The most striking example is George Lamming's work. From the straightforward description of a peasant West Indian mother-child relationship with revealing emphases on the intensity of the emotional bond we move to the figure of Ma Shephard who, in the eyes of the boys "had become Age itself". Finally we have the "symbolic representativeness" of Agnes which does not preclude credible characterisation. In Season of Adventure Lamming's "pre-occupation with themes" does not deny "credible life" to Agnes as it does to Ma Shephard in the previous novel. No criticism is here implied since Lamming appears to have deliberately made Ma Shephard a flat symbol of history in the abstract. At the same time, his control of the delicate balance between theme and character, symbol and personality in the presentation of Agnes deserves greater admiration.

Carew's Black Midas and The Wild Coast, far from the pure symbolism of The Whole Armour nevertheless occasionally move from naturalistic fiction to metaphor and allegory. It is no accident that I have depended heavily on Guyanese novelists. With the possible exception of Laudhmonen (Peter Kempadoo), Guyanese writers, for reasons which are elusive if one is not to escape into speculations about landscape, are easily distinguished from the mass of Caribbean writers by a tendency towards symbolism and metaphor and a concern with types of experience and perception which are outside the "normal". Black Midas and The Wild Coast are typical of this Guyanese tendency; they are both concerned with the search for a "real" mother on the story level but make the image

of the mother appear in metaphor in various contexts as a symbol to express a wider alienation (the mountain shaped like a woman's breast with its nipple in the clouds; the womb of every mother on the coast, "an archive housing the memory of a black race; snatched from dark and lost centuries, the scolding, headless mother whose voice comes from a hole in her shoulders).

The idea of using the image of a mother as a symbol of identity and the past is neither ^enow nor peculiarly West Indian. Some such idea occurs in the mythologies of widely separated lands. There is a Great Mother in the tribal myths of the Bantu and one thinks of Rhea in Greek myth, of the primacy of Mary, mother of God, in Roman Catholic doctrine and of the Sumerian mother-goddess Ishtar. Nor is it unique in English literature; one may cite Eve, mother of mankind in Milton's Paradise Lost. However, we are concerned here with the novel form.

In the West Indies a unique set of factors have combined to make the use of this device prevalent in the novel. The special place of the mother in peasant families resulting from the absence of a single recognised male head of the household leads to a powerful bond between mother and child. The colonial history of the West Indies has meant that any search for a national identity in opposition to the identity of the former metropolitan power has had to focus its attention to the peasant classes, least influenced by the culture and life-style of the metropolis. The situation of a black population severed by slavery and colonialism from its place of origin and therefore unable to maintain even the illusion of a continuous history (as can the white populations of the rest of the New World) has made such a search for identity inevitable and necessary.

Therefore the powerful bond of the peasant West Indian mother-child relationship recurs in the West Indian novel and provides a ready vehicle for that inevitable examination of origins - identity and the validity of the past.

Neither the prevalence of descriptions of that powerful link nor the symbolic use of the mother-image to examine the past can be said to be characteristic of the English novel. The mother-centred households (in a class which is necessarily the primary subject of a developing art) and the sense of a deprivation of history and identity which have produced this element in the Caribbean novel have not been present in English society in the life-time of the English novel. Inevitably, one thinks of an English novel which can be called a "novel of childhood" and which describes as powerful a link between mother and son as any in the West Indian novel - D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers.

Yet Lawrence did not even attempt to make Mrs. Morel in any way representative of the working class origins of Paul Morel and it is in the nature of the character that he could not have done so. If anyone is representative of the working class Nottinghamshire mining people in the novel, it is Paul's father and not his mother who qualifies. Mrs. Morel "came of good old burgher family, famous independents who had fought with Colonel Hutchinson and who remained stout Congregation-
alists.... Her father, George Coppard, was an engineer, a large handsome, haughty man, proud of his fair skin and blue eyes, but more proud still of his integrity." (1) Mrs. Morel's relative refinement makes her out of place in the proletarian society in which she lives. When she first moves into "the Bottoms" she is afraid of contact with the women there. There is thus no sense in which socio-historical significance can be ascribed to her, either on the basis of her being a mother or on the basis of the link between mother and son.

(1) pp.14, 15. Sons and Lovers, Penguin edition.

Of course, if it is possible to trace the appearance of a certain type of character in several novels, it is possible that one is tracing the evolution of a cliché. It is difficult to specify the point at which an idea becomes a cliché but the applicability of the latter term surely depends on the exhaustion of imaginative possibilities in the idea on its evoking a conditioned response which is a barrier to original creation and experience. Harris's imaginative and original use of the character-type in The Whole Armour as the basis of new and complex associations of ideas within a consistently maintained viewpoint and argument is evidence that that point has not been reached.

CHAPTER 14

Obeah and Christianity

The word "obeah" is an imprecise term. It is used to describe practices and beliefs which vary from one West Indian territory to another: there is, however, much in these patterns that is common to the entire region. I shall not attempt a comprehensive description of these beliefs, partly because no definitive body of research exists and partly because such a description is not essential to my present purpose.

Obeah is the body of occult beliefs held primarily but by no means exclusively, by the uneducated, the lower social levels of West Indian society. Like all believers in occult systems, obeahmen claim to influence forces (spirits) beyond the material and tangible world, for good or evil, by means of ritual and ceremony. Belief in spirits is strongest in the rural areas. There are similarities between some of these "spirits" and some European myths; the spirit called a "bakoo" is, for instance, exactly the same as a poltergeist. In The White Witch of Rosehall, H G. de Lisser refers to another spirit, the ol'higue (perhaps, originally, old hag) and one of the characters says the spirit is only a West Indian version of the Vampire. This is not quite correct. An ol'higue is an old woman who is supposed to leave her skin under a stone at night and to go in search of her victims in the form of a ball of flame. When she finds them, she sucks their blood. The correct way of dealing with a vampire is, of course, to drive a stake through his heart. An Ol'higue is disposed of by the lucky person who finds her skin and sprinkles salt on it: the old woman is then unable to re-enter it. Yet another spirit is the moon-gazer; the spirit is supposed to appear

in the form of a very tall man whose gaze is always fixed on the moon.

Belief in such evil spirits is for many West Indians, quite genuine.

In Guyana in 1965, some young men were charged with throwing pebbles at an old man's house. The old man had been under the impression that the culprit was a "bakoo". The magistrate asked the old man whether he still believed in the spirit and, much to his dismay, received a strongly affirmative answer.

Obeah ceremonies have various names but they all seek to influence supernatural forces and are characterised by drumming and dancing. The "wind-dance" described in Carew's The Wild Coast is based on an obeah ceremony of that name which is, in fact, performed in Guyana (Carew's imagination is freely used in his account). The purpose of such dances may be to heal the sick, to keep bad luck away from a home or to dispel the evil influence of some enemy's obeah.

Obeahmen are the rural West Indian equivalent of witch-doctors and medicine-men. The social function of all of these is to calm the ^{normal} human fear of the unknown by claiming a special rapport with a supernatural power or powers. Much as a Catholic priest may claim to make the supernatural power manifest in some inanimate object by means of a ritual - the Consecrated Host, for example - an obeahman supplies his clients with charms, powders and medicines which are said to contain the power of a god or spirit. Just as Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism claim knowledge of the fate of human beings after death, obeahmen claim to know the situation of the spirits of the dead (in Christian terms, their souls) - an obeahman, however, is supposed to be able to communicate with the dead when necessary. Just as

the early Christian church ascribed mental and physical disorders to the intervention of malign spirits - Christ cast out demons from the insane, for example - obeahmen try to cure the sick by appealing to supernatural forces.

There are three important differences between obeahmen and those who administer such religions as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. An obeahman does not depend on any complex body of doctrine comparable to the Bible, the Koran, the Veda and the various other commentaries on these books.

There is no coherent philosophy which may be called "obeah". The term simply refers to belief in the powers of obeahmen to combat evil influences and of the ritual dances to bring the celebrants into spiritual contact with occult powers. Secondly, in one respect an obeahman is rather more like a lawyer than a priest; he uses his ability to intercede with the powers on behalf of the client who pays him and against the (human) enemies of his client. He may use his powers to cause harm; there is no question of impartiality. Finally, obeah, like Christianity, has a great deal to do with the sexual behaviour of its adherents. Unlike Christianity, however, obeah does not play a prescriptive rôle in this respect; obeahmen try to bring about fulfilment of their client's desires rather than to curb or channel them. Probably the greatest significance of obeah in the lives of working-class West Indians is in the area of sex. Charms and spells are used to win a desired sexual partner or to keep one: special ingredients are mixed with food and given to the prospective lover¹ or husband to win and hold his affection.

¹ i.e. sexual partner

I know of no research which has conclusively demonstrated the African origins either of the institution of the obeahman or of ritual dances such as the wind-dance. Such research would be forever doomed to obscurity in the West Indies since it would demonstrate a proposition that West Indians have always held to be self-evident; that obeah is a survival of African tribal beliefs and African rituals. It appears obvious because it is difficult to imagine any other possible origin. At any rate, the objective truth about the origins of obeah is irrelevant to the present literary enquiry. It need only be noted that the connection between obeah and Africa has always been accepted in the West Indies and that the connection - as my examination of the novels will show - is similarly accepted by West Indian novelists. I shall concern myself with the literary consequences of deliberate attempts to alter West Indian social attitudes to obeah and to the origins ascribed to it.

In 1851, in a Circular to the Legislative Council of Trinidad, the Governor Lord Harris, remarked that he considered that all religions deserved equal treatment "at least so far as their not being interfered with is concerned," and that, if protection under law ought to be afforded to the various Christian denominations, it ought also to be given to "the followers of Mumbo-Jumbo and the believers in the Fetish." Lord Harris's surprisingly liberal attitude was not shared by his contemporaries. In the same year, the Commission on Education for British Guiana was making plans to bring Christian principles to the "primitive Africans and the coolies sunk in the degrading superstitions of their native India." The Commission's point of view prevailed. Obeah became an illegal practice throughout the West Indies although the police, whose lower ranks have always been recruited from the working-class, have not always shown either zeal or consistency in enforcing the law.

1. Gordon (op. cit.) p.49

2. Ibid. p. 50

Nevertheless, Christianity arrived in the West Indies as the religion of the civilising power and the educated upper-classes. Obeah was the religion of the "backward peoples." Christianity, therefore, became the emblem of civilisation, education and social status. Obeah was associated with Africa, for so long, in the West Indian imagination, the ancestral barbarian land from which the black man was struggling into the light. Moreover, as it was the practice of the poor and illiterate, an emergent West Indian middle-class could not do otherwise than reject it with a self-conscious emotional response which precluded objective consideration of the merits of obeah as religion. This is illustrated by the reaction of the middle-class girl, Fola, in Lamming's Season of Adventure to Charlot's suggestion that she may be, in some way, connected with the occult ceremonies in the tonelle :

"What does it matter about all those mixtures, she said you're still you'. 'I'm all these,' said Charlot, 'just as you're a part of those women there.' Fola was reluctant to answer. She glanced at the women, then quickly turned to see Charlot's face.

'It's not the same thing, you know, unless you want to suggest.....' Fola stopped sudden. She had that self-protective nerve that could pick up the slightest particle of danger. There was going to be trouble in the turn their talk had taken.

'You want to suggest that I believe in all "that" ' she said. Her voice was low, distant, closing on a note of quiet disdain. " 1

Fola is a part of the new West Indian middle-class struggling to convince the European that she is "different" from the "primitives" around her.

The preservation of her precarious social position is far more important to her than any objective truth about the merits of the ceremony taking place before her. Yet the identification of Christianity with civilisation and obeah with barbarism is particularly absurd in the West Indies, where Biblical references to such supernatural phenomena as demons have been emphasised by ordinary people just as they have been quietly disregarded by modern Christians elsewhere.

1 Lamming (op. cit) P.27 Lamming does not use the word 'obeah' in Season of Adventure but the ceremonies of the cultists of his fictional island would be so described in reality.

Yoni Legge, in Claude McKay's novel Banana Bottom, finds that the Bible gives her sanction for believing in obeah and spirits, for Christ himself cast out demons. In recent times, the absurdity of the distinction between "civilised" Christianity and "primitive" obeah has become even greater with the proliferation, in the West Indies, of American fundamentalist Christian sects; when an American preacher cures a "sinner's" psychomatic affliction in the name of Christ, his therapy is much the same as that of the obeahman who depends equally on faith but prefers to speak of evil spirits. In Banana Bottom, set in the Jamaica of the early nineteenth century, McKay suggests the ease with which Southern American revivalist Christianity with its heightened emotion, could, in the West Indies turn almost imperceptibly into a pagan ritual.

It is true that, with the decline of Christian faith among the educated of Europe and North America and with the growth, in those areas, of faith in scientific rationalism, the insistence that Christianity is truth while other religions are "black magic" may have lost much of its force outside the Caribbean. Furthermore, the distinction between primitive magic and science is beginning to appear dubious. The following passage is taken from a recent newspaper article by an American psychiatrist:

"Witch doctors and psychiatrists perform similar functions in their respective cultures. They are both therapists; both treat patients, using similar techniques; both get similar results..... The fact that the two are essentially the same is not just an intellectual aperitif, a curiosity to be sipped as an afterthought. It's an important and substantive issue with implications for the whole range of mental health services everywhere.

The term "witch doctor" is Western in origin, imposed on healers of the Third World by eighteenth and nineteenth century explorers who approached other cultures with the tolerance of the Crusaders. The world was simpler then, the newly discovered cultures were quickly assigned their proper status in the order of things. We were white, they were black. We were civilised they were primitive. We were Christian, they were pagan. We used science, they used magic. We had doctors, they had witch doctors. The term "witch doctor," then, is a vestige of imperialism and ethnocentrism - the reflection seen by those who would look upon the world through their own umbilical cord." 1

Yet these growing doubts about the European rejection of "primitive" healing practices and religious beliefs in favour of science and Christianity have hardly touched the West Indies. Obeah is still illegal and is not subject to serious investigation either as therapy - psychiatric or medicinal - or

1) E Fuller Torrey in "The Guardian", August 2nd 1972

as religion. Here I use the word "religion" to mean a pattern of belief which attempts to explain phenomena and areas of human experience which have not yet been satisfactorily explained by scientific investigation.

It is not necessary, here, to argue the validity of Christianity, obeah or any other pattern of belief based on the supernatural as truth. My point is rather that a certain cultural egocentricity on the part of European colonisers in the West Indies established Christianity, the religion of Europe, as the vehicle of civilisation and relegated obeah, the religion of the colonised, to the status of "mumbo jumbo." The recent growth of West Indian nationalism necessarily involves, at least on the part of the intelligentsia, a questioning of that division. West Indian nationalism seeks to restore racial pride and self-respect to black West Indians and can do so only by destroying the association of what are believed to be traces of their African origins with barbarisms. An obvious way of destroying the connection is to reject the dichotomy between "civilised" Christianity and African primitivism in matters of religion. In place of the distinction, it is possible to say either that both Christianity and obeah are valid and legitimate as religions or that both serve the purely social function of eliminating man's fear of the unknown and have no validity as truth.

In referring to the distinction between science and obeah, I am not suggesting that the latter is as complex or as comprehensive as the science and technology that have evolved in what is commonly called "the Western world." Yet the claim that obeah is no more than "mumbo jumbo" leads naturally to the stereotype of the obeahman or witch doctor as the scheming individual who uses a cynical awareness of the weakness of others to profit by their ignorance. Fuller Torrey's exposition of the close similarities between witch doctor and psychiatrists suggests that this image of the obeahman may be decidedly ill-informed. One West Indian novel, Khan's The Obeah Man, takes a wiser view. Belief in spirits and in occultism still exists among the uneducated in Europe. Educated Europeans and orthodox Christianity dismiss witch craft as "mumbo-jumbo" just as educated Christians in the West Indies dismiss obeah. The supernatural appears in a large part of the literature of Europe and in many English novels. Yet there are two important differences between obeah and

and European witch craft. The first is that obeah is part of the folk-culture of peasants in a society driven by peculiar historical processes to define its nature and identity by reference to its lowest social levels. As the West Indian novel is involved in this process of self-definition, obeah, as a part of peasant-culture, appears more often and is given greater importance in the West Indian novel than witchcraft has ever had in the English novel. In the second place, obeah is accepted as one of the vestiges of an ancestral culture by peoples whose urgent task is to recover self-respect by coming to terms with that heritage. More specifically, black West Indians have either to live with the proposition that they were rescued from the jungles and from barbarism or to reject it. Obeah, has borne the full weight of condemnation by the law and by established Christianity as a symbol of that alleged barbarism and is, therefore, an essential concern of any West Indian who would re-examine the origins of his society. Nowhere in Europe does occultism appear so urgently involved with the self-definition of an entire society.

A European novelist may exploit occultist practices for sensationalism or as part of a genuine interest in the possibility that "there are more things in heaven and earth" than scientists have found or are likely to find. For the West Indian novelist, obeah appears as part of a social and nationalist dynamic : its existence and the existence of inherited social attitudes which denigrated it in favour of the religious beliefs of a foreign culture are an aspect of a continuing social and cultural situation which inspires West Indians with feelings of inferiority about their past. These are the feelings that Lamming suggests in Fola's self-protective and excessively emotional response to the tonelle. There are West Indian novels which exploit obeah for sensationalism but, increasingly, Caribbean novelists are adopting an explicitly "corrective" approach to the subject. They have sought either to suggest some dignity in the practice of the West Indian folk or to portray both obeah and Christianity as illusion. In the twentieth century, with the increasing decline of religious belief of any kind among the educated of the world, the second stand-point is more likely to be adopted. One early West Indian novel, H.G. de Lisser's The White Witch of Rosehall, so far from adopting a "corrective approach",

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reinforces, on the whole, the identification of Christianity with civilisation

1. The White Witch of Rosehall : H.G.de Lisser, London 1929

and obeah with evil and barbarism. The fact that de Lisser's novel was written before the main surge of West Indian nationalism and literary effort has a great deal to do with the attitudes to be found in it.

The white witch of the title is Annie Palmer, the creole-white owner of a plantation in Jamaica^a during the 1830's.¹ A young Englishman, Rutherford, arrives in Jamaica to be her overseer. Annie falls in love with him but has a rival in the young mulatto grand-daughter of the local obeahman, Takoo, a powerful and unscrupulous man. Annie, however, is a worthy opponent for Takoo since she has supernatural powers; at one point, she terrifies her slaves by causing an apparition, the three-legged Horse of Death to pursue them. She interrupts Takoo's obeah ceremony by causing a monster to appear in the midst of the celebrants. Rutherford and his friends "explain" Annie's powers by a vague and cursory reference to the researches of Mesmer but they consider the fact that she grew up in Haiti² and was befriended by a Haitian woman, a practitioner of voodoo, to be the explanation of her evil powers. Thus the melodramatically^a evil "white witch" has, in fact, been corrupted by the blacks.

After a midnight ride and a spectacular little ceremony involving a child's skull, Annie places a spell on her mulatto rival and the girl, convinced of the white woman's powers, becomes incurably ill. Takoo's obeah ceremony to remove the evil influence from his grand-daughter is witnessed by Rutherford and his friend, Rider, who are in hiding. Ramchand comments on this part of the novel:

".....in The White Witch of Rosehall.....a main character, Rutherford, witnesses a ceremony. He is accompanied by a friend, Rider. The first thing to notice is that Rutherford is at a distance, not in the crowd. Nevertheless, he is given the beginning of an experience:

1. i.e. during the era of slavery.
2. Haiti has a considerable reputation in the West Indies as the land of occultism.

' A shudder passed through Robert; to his surprise he found that he too was slightly moving his body to the rhythm of the sound. Rider had himself better in hand, but the hypnotic influence of the scene did not leave him entirely unaffected. It had an appeal to the more primitive emotions. It stirred up something in the depths of one's being. He could understand how devotees in pagan lands were moved at times almost to madness by the call and compulsion of their strange and horrible religions. ' (The White Witch of Rosehall p.202)

After the appearance of Kurtz in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, episodes dealing with the European character affected by the primitive become a must in the second-rate literature of tropica. Once de Lissier makes the gesture towards this convention, a gap rapidly opens up again between the civilized Englishman and the pagan cultists. " 1

Later Ramchand says that :

"The sensational use of an African ceremony in The White Witch of Rosehall is accompanied by a revulsion against what is presented as African paganism and the fictional character's revulsion is shared by the author. In Season of Adventure, the 'dark continent' view is located in a character who is to be disburdened; the sensational aspects of the ceremony are used as a corrosive force, mesmerizing Fola into participating in the rites at the tonelle. Lamming does not try to present Fola's actions as arising from anything more than fear, shock and a confusion of the senses. Fola does not come to share the faith of the cultists. But when the girl begins to reflect on her experience later, she recognises that her fear and ignorance in the tonelle are closely related to her revulsion from the peasant masses." 2

Takoo's attempt to save his grand-daughter is thwarted by the appearance of the monster conjured up by the white witch. The girl dies and there is a slave-revolt during which Annie is strangled by Takoo. Rider is a former clergyman who was relieved of his duties because of his alcoholism. In the course of the novel, he becomes reformed; he forswears liquor and accepts Rutherford's help to return to Europe. There is a sentimental and highly significant scene as Takoo's grand-daughter lies dying, in which Rider asks to be left alone with her and then says a prayer for the dying girl. There is no question that the novel presents Rider's exercise of the duty of a Christian clergyman as a highly commendable event. Takoo's obeah ceremony, however, reminds Rutherford of the "compulsion" of "strange and horrible religions". The distinction between "primitive" obeah and "civilised" Christianity is the accepted viewpoint of The White Witch of Rosehall.

1. Ramchand (op. cit.) p.145

2. Ramchand (op. cit.) p.147

CHAPTER 15

TWO APPROACHES : McKay and Carow

Banana Bottom, by Claude McKay, is the story of a young black peasant girl, Bitá, in nineteenth century Jamaica. She is the daughter of Gordon Plant, a relatively well-off farmer. At the age of twelve, Bitá is raped by the mad musician, Crazy Bow, and becomes the subject of unkind songs and gossip. A local white clergyman, Malcolm Craig and his English wife, take pity on her and decide to take her into their home and to bring her up as "a lady". After some time, she is sent to school in England and Germany.

On her return to Jamaica, Bitá finds that the people of her village are extremely proud of her. The Craigs expect her to live up to their ideals of refinement and paternalism towards the lower classes and to uphold their Mission as the community's standard of virtue and good breeding. Bitá is expected to marry the young black preacher, Herald Newton Day. The young man, however, is full of self-esteem, snobbery and religiosity and he soon irritates, amuses and bores Bitá. Tension develops between Bitá and the Craigs, with her refusal to acknowledge the social and racial distinctions observed by middle-class Jamaican society and their notion of her fit station in life. She takes part in various activities which are, in the Craig's eyes, offences against good-breeding. One of these is to fall in love with the village dandy, Hopping Dick.

Another young man from the village, Tack Tally, sends a love letter to Bitá. Tack Tally, is, at the same time, continuing a sexual relationship with Bitá's friend, Yoni Legge, a sewing mistress at the Craig's Mission. Yoni is disturbed by the fact that their relationship has to be kept secret because of her connection with the Mission. She goes to Bitá for sympathy. Bitá disapproves of Tack and in an attempt to destroy Yoni's feelings for him, shows her the letter. Yoni becomes very jealous and goes, with her mother, to visit Wumba the Obeahman. The Obeahman's statements suggest to Yoni that Bitá is using black magic against her. Some time later, Yoni is discovered in her room at the Mission with Tack. Pap Legge puts Yoni out of his house and, in anger, finds Tack and insults him. In the heat of the argument, the old man has a heart attack and dies. Tack disappears from the village since he expects to be accused of murder. Two days later, as the Obeahman is returning to Banana Bottom at night, he finds the corpse of Tack hanging from a tree. He goes insane with fear and runs to the church screaming "Lawd Jexas, judgement come!" Tack, convinced that he had murdered the old man, had gone to confront the Obeahman (who had given him a charm against bad luck). As Wumba was away

from the village, Tack hanged himself near the Obeahman's cave. Herald Newton Day disgraces himself - he is found copulating with a goat - and so Bitá is free of the threat of marriage to him. The argument over her love for Hopping Dick ends when she leaves the Mission and returns to her father's home. Hopping Dick, however, has no intention of marrying her and Bitá soon forgets him. After her father's death, she marries his drayman Jubban.

The whole course of the novel is concerned with Bitá's re-discovery of the village way of life, which she comes to accept as her own, and with her rejection of the middle-class Christian ideals of the Craigs. Before she leaves the Craigs' home, she realises that:

"A latent hostility would make her always want to do anything of which Mrs Craig disapproved. Bitá could not quite explain this strong feeling to herself. It was just there, going much deeper than the Hopping Dick affair. Maybe it was an old, unconscious thing now manifesting itself because it was to Mrs Craig, a woman whose attitude to life was alien to hers, and not to her parents, she owed, the entire shaping of her career. And tracing the memorable stages in her growth it came clear to Bitá now that although Mrs Craig had never referred directly to it before that unhappy day, there had always been something about the woman proclaiming; 'You are my pet experiment!.....' But perhaps there was no means of the truth about herself being revealed to such an ingrained, self-confident person as Priscilla Craig.

Bitá knew she was going to go. She could not truthfully say that she was interested in the work of the Mission. The profession of religion left her indifferent. She was sceptical about it - this religion that had been imposed upon and planted in her young mind.

She became contemptuous of everything - the plan of her education and the way of existence at the Mission, and her eye wandering suddenly to the photograph of her English college over her bed, she took and ripped it from its frame, tore the thing up and trampled the pieces under her feet." 1

Claude McKay was a Marxist who saw the relation between the poor of colonial Jamaica and their rulers in terms of economic laws and class struggle. He was also an Anglophile British colonial, disillusioned by the time he wrote Banana Bottom by the experience of actually living in his "cultural homeland" England. As I shall try to show, the major faults in Banana Bottom can all be traced to one or the other of these facts.

In the village of Banana Bottom is Squire Gensir, a cultured Englishman who is obviously - too obviously - the authorially approved character whose comments on village life and culture are the accepted point of view of the novel. McKay, in an author's note, tells us ".....all the characters.....are imaginary excepting perhaps Squire Gensir." The author's admiration for his fictional character is easily illustrated.

1 McKay (op. cit.) pp 211, 212

"How different his life had been from the life of the other whites. They had come to conquer and explore, govern, trade, preach and educate, to their liking, exploit men and materials. But this man was the first to enter into the simple life of the island Negroes and proclaim significance and beauty in their transplanted African folk tales and in the words and music of their native dialect songs. Before him it had been generally said the Negroes were inartistic. But he found artistry where others saw nothing, because he believed that wherever the imprints of nature and humanity were found, there also were the seeds of creative life, that above the dreary levels of existence everywhere there were always the radiant, the mysterious, the wonderful, the strange great moments whose magic may be caught by any clairvoyant mind....."

Considering McKay's fervent Marxism, it is hardly surprising that Gensir is an atheist. This approved character is used to express tolerance and understanding of obeah as folk art and a critical attitude to establish Christianity as a force which tends to devalue the culture of the common people. Of course, the atheist's viewpoint can accept neither obeah nor Christianity as religion. Instead, through Squire Gensir, McKay seeks to redress the balance between the two by stressing the cultural value of obeah - which he considers underrated - and attaching the social prestige and importance of Christianity, which, as a true Marxist, he sees as an overvalued instrument of class and cultural oppression.

One conversation between Bitá and Gensir sets out the squire's opinion very clearly. He says :

".....'I think some of our famous European fables have their origin in Africa' even the mumbo-jumbo of the obeahman fascinates me.'

'But obeah is not the same.' said Bitá, 'it is an awful crime.'

'Oh, it's just our civilisation that makes it a crime. Obeah is only a form of primitive superstition. As Christianity is a form of civilised superstition. That's why it can't be rooted out by long prison terms and the unspeakable brutality of the cat.'

'But it is a low practice,' said Bitá.

'Father hates it. And I think we're the only family in Banana Bottom that don't believe in it.....'

'I don't mean that it's good to practice obeah. But the peasants waste a lot of money on Christianity also. Money that might have done them more material good. You must be tolerant. When you read in your studies about the Druids, the Greek and Roman Gods and demi-gods, and the Nordic Odin, you felt tolerant about them, didn't you? Then why should you be so intolerant about Obi and Obeahmen?'

'I don't know. It doesn't seem the same.'

'But it is, though. You're intolerant because of your education. Obeah is a part of your folklore. Like your Annancy tales and your digging jammás. And your folklore is a spiritual link between you and your ancestral origins. You ought to learn to appreciate it as I do mine.' "

'1 bid p.310

McKay (op.cit) p.110

1 bid p.110

Gensir later describes missionaries as "mainly responsible for the wreck and ruin of folk art throughout the world". The presence of Squire Gensir in Banana Bottom is one instance of the novel's major fault - authorial intrusions. The reader is frequently aware of recommended points of view which are intrusive, stated rather than implied, in the action of the novel. Elsewhere intrusion takes the form of decidedly contrived retribution for certain characters. Most important, in this connection, are the forms of retribution that overtake Wumba, the Obeahman and Herald Newton Day, the preacher. McKay is at least consistent in his attacks on "superstition", both "primitive and "civilised". Squire Gensir expresses tolerance for the maligned "primitive" religion, suggesting that it has some value as art. McKay then provides the story of Wumba and Tack Tally to emphasize the point that obeah is nevertheless, superstition. He intervenes, providing a most unlikely fate for Herald Newton Day and showing a certain vindictiveness towards the young native representative of bourgeois Christianity. In short, Christianity is attacked in every way, because it is over-valued, while obeah is attacked with the restraint due to the "superstition" of the underdog. McKay shows redeeming value in obeah as a "link with an ancestral past:" no sympathy is extended to Christianity and the missionaries.

Before McKay describes the visit of Yoni and Ma Legge to the cave of Wumba, the obeahman, he provides a description of Obeah which is clearly ^{against} _{biased} Wumba:

"Of the Reverend Lambert, it could be said that he was honest and sincere in his denunciation of the practice of obeah, but he believed in its potency. ^{In his} quoting the Scripture as authority. And that percentage was about evenly distributed in all the villages and little towns of the island. People worshipped the Christian God-of-Good-and-Evil on Sunday, and in the shadow of night they went to invoke the power of the African God of Evil by the magic of the sorcerer. Obi was resorted to in sickness and in feuds, love and elementary disasters.

And of ten families that had been friendly for years, different children growing up together like brothers and sisters, suddenly would be ~~riven~~ apart by deep hatred by the obeahman's maliciously imputing that one family had invoked the evil power against the other.

The colonial power had used every means to stamp out obeah - long terms of imprisonment and the cat - but it flourished as strong as ever and the demand for the sorcerer seemed greater than the supply. "

The reference to the authority of the Scriptures is important; McKay uses every opportunity to remind his readers of Biblical references to Satan and spirits. It is already clear that the author intends to take the accepted West Indian middle-class view of the Obeahman as a scoundrel. He does so for his own reasons, however, for as we shall see, he is no more compassionate to those who administer Christian doctrine .

' McKay (op. cit.) pp 134, 135

At this point in the novel, the Obeahman is allowed to be at least physically impressive:

"Wumba, the Obeahman, waited under the cashew tree to receive Yoni and Ma Legge, holding a candlewood torch that lit up the length of the ravine revealing the towering tree-ferns like sentinels under the starry night. Enormous rat-bats whirled around him, circling in and out of the cave, which was thick with them and their cockroachy odour. (1)

He was a stout junk of a man, opaque and heavy as ebony. Two goatskins were strapped around his loins and from the waist up, he was naked except for a necklace of hog's teeth and birds' beaks. His hands and forehead were stained, with mangrove dye and his hair was an enormous knotty growth.

Yoni was very timid but Ma Legge was not afraid of that apparition, it had the power to combat evil. "

After this description, Wumba's every action is made merely comic by the omniscient author's explanations. McKay's humour is, at first, reasonably subtle.

"Wumba squatted on the ground upon a piece of tarpaulin, and set in a circle around him were a jackal's skull and a human too" (2)

Then it becomes tedious as the author hastens to explain the Obeahman's conjuring tricks:

"Wumba tapped three times upon a little box near him, bent over and whistled against the box, then opened it and a black snake crawled out and coiled itself around his wrist.

Yoni uttered a low 'Oh' of wonder and fear. The practice of obeah was a more awesome thing than she had imagined.....

Yet the snake that so horrified her was merely one of the harmless Jamaican species that all Obeahmen keep as pets. " (3)

"Ma Legge dipped into her thread-bag to find the sum Wumba asked for his fee, which was two pounds. Yoni's salary for two months. " (4)

The second of these quotations receives considerable emphasis from the fact that it ends the chapter. The Obeahman is clearly meant to be seen as one of the exploiters of the poor. In reality the degree of comfort that a client receives from an obeahman - or a patient from a psychiatrist - is not unrelated to the amount he pays for it. McKay's point of view allows no awareness of the psychological and possibly beneficial mechanisms involved. The novel's major concern is political and social; superstition, escapism and illusions are the means by which the poorer classes are exploited. The thesis is maintained rigorously and consistently to the exclusion of all other considerations.

1 McKay (op. cit.) pp. 135, 136

2 McKay (op. cit.) p. 136

3 1 bid p.137

4 1 bid p.139

Yet this single-minded approach ends by being superficial. McKay is not prepared to consider in any depth, individual experience where minor characters are concerned. A look at the consequences of the transaction for Yoni's troubled state of mind might have made her an individual young girl in a difficult human situation rather than a mere representative of the repressed and ignorant poor. Similarly, an attempt to enter the Obeahman's consciousness, to consider his motives reasonably sympathetically, might have suggested mitigating intentions and attitudes; instead the Obeahman is merely another exploiter of superstition, set up to be derided. This is another way of saying that McKay is so far concerned to demonstrate the emptiness of all "superstition" and its involvement in exploitation and oppressions that he frequently uses his minor characters as mere counters in the argument. The inevitable result is that the author's message sometimes destroys the credibility of the action. Furthermore, it either limits insight into character or (as we shall see with Newton Day) ruins the development of character by introducing incongruous or inappropriate actions.

The physical impressiveness of Wumba at his first appearance contrasts with his comic fate. The awesome nature of obeah is shown as lying wholly on the surface, as the author's ridicule finally disposes of one half of the duality of obeah and Christianity:

"Two days later, Wumba, the Obeahman, who had been away magic-making in the neighbouring parish returned to Banana Bottom. He returned, as was usual (whenever he went abroad on his occult missions), in the dead of a dark night. As he picked his way home through the trailing ferns up the ravine, a monstrous bald-headed white buzzard flew down at him and, sorcerer though he was, he trembled with fear as the bird swept past. For a white buzzard is a sign of black evil. Wumba quickened his pace towards his cave where he would at least have some feeling of safety among his creeping companions and charms against evil. But as he passed under the cashew tree to enter, he felt something like a soft hugging around the neck."

1

Here, in the Obeahman's fear of the buzzard, is the beginning of his decline into an object of derision. McKay shows him to be no less superstitious than the other peasants. Yet the earlier suggestion that he was one who exploited the poor depended heavily on his being less ignorant than his fellows. Wumba is required to be a gullible rogue. It is difficult to reconcile these characteristics in the absence of an attempt by the author to explain the co-existence of credulousness and charlatanism in the same personality. It appears, instead, that McKay is pursuing the argument against "primitive superstition" at the expense of consistency in his characterisation.

1 McKay (op. cit.) p.149

"Wumba stood still in his tracks without looking up and said: 'Yes, Lawd, ah'on coming. Yes, Lawd, ah know dat de sins ob de wicked will find 'em-out. Oh Lawd ah knows ah'm a sinner, a wretched, wickod, lying, t'iefing an' murderin' black sinner. But, Oh Lawd, lemme go!'

He dropped upon his kness praying to God to forgive him, then he thanked God for letting him go. And when at last he summoned up enough courage to glance upwards, he saw the shape of a man suspended above his head. He jumped up with a blood-curdling yell, leaping long and high like a madman down the ravine and bawling: 'Lawd Jesus, judgement come! Lawd Jesus, judgement come!'

Over rocks and gullies, the deadly cutting grass across the Canje river; 'Lawd Jesus, judgement come!' On through the village. The astonished churchgoers opened their doors to see. Those who could not see heard the voice of the High Priest of Obeah roaring: 'Lawd Jesus, judgement come!'¹ and they trembled with fear. "

Since McKay's humour extends to other characters of Wumba's class and education, the above passage has the effect of denying him any status superior to his fellows but does not appear an especially severe castigation of the Obeahman. Wumba is reduced to the level of the other peasants but no further. In the case of Newton Day, however, Ramchand comments that:

".....the art of Banana Bottom is not free from impurities: it seems to be an indication of a loss of control in the novelist as well that, by the most violent irony, "Herald Newton suddenly turned crazy and defiled himself with a nanny-goat. Consternation fell upon that sweet rustic scene like a lightning ball of destruction and there was confusion among these hill folk which no ray of understanding could penetrate." The plot demands that Herald Newton should be removed from the scene but one cannot help feeling that the author is indulging in a spiteful impulse. " ²

Before the incident, the satire directed at Newton Day, does not appear an intrusion of an over-riding ideology into the novel, simply because McKay makes him so insufferable that the reactions of Bitá and Gensir in the following passage seem justified. Nevertheless, the fact that the satire depends on the criteria of Bitá, the enlightened heroine, and Gensir, whose voice is sometimes indistinguishable from that of the author, means that McKay's humour at Newton Day's expense is not entirely independent of an authorially imposed moral viewpoint:

"From under his craggy protruding eyebrows, the squire scrutinised Herald Newton taking tea and, for all his intellectual freedom and hatred of snobbery, he nevertheless engaged in appraising the young student by the severe and supreme standard of manners.

Herald Newton was also engaged in an appraisal of his own. Surveying the large, sparsely and simply furnished room and wondering why the squire should live so modestly, not upon a large scale like the planters with plenty of servants. And he believed the reason could be found in the fact that the squire was a congenital miser masquerading as a simple liver.

1. McKay ((op.cit.) P.150

2. Ramchand (op.cit.) p.p.269, 270

At last Herald Newton said : "I'm glad you find our common mountain people interesting enough to live among them. They are so rough and coarse. But of course, it's far from the towns up here and they haven't had chance of real refinement and progress like us townspeople. '

'I can get on without refinement, said the squire, and I don't care anything about progress'

'Really sir ! But life without progress is stagnation. Look at us Negroes for example. The savage brutish state we were in, both in Africa and America before Civilisation aroused us. We owe all we are to-day to progress. '

'That's a fact, ' said the squire. 'After all, progress is a grand fact. It does not really matter whether one believes in it or not.' " 1.

It is obvious that the squire has been introduced as a moral reference point. His appraisal of Newton Day has the whole weight of authority provided by McKay's admiration for the character. On the other hand, Newton Day's judgement of the squire reflects only upon himself. Gensir is interested in finding an orchid that the drayman mentioned to him.

" 'I think I'll try again tomorrow, ' the squire said.

'By God's help you'll succeed in finding it, Sir ' said Herald Newton.

Bitá was shaking from suppressed laughter and Herald Newton, remarking a humorous expression on the squire's face, wondered what he might have done. Surely he had not made a mistake and stuck the knife with the jam into his mouth.

'I wish I could be sure God would help me to find that flower, ' said the squire, his eyes twinkling. 'Do you think he could help me really? '

'I'm sure he will if you ask Him in faith', replied Herald Newton.

'Let us play, ' said Bitá, turning to the piano.

'I suppose you are a virtuoso, ' Herald Newton said to the squire.

'I adore music. I never feel so uplifted, so sure of the divine purpose of human nature as when the pipe organ in the city tabernacle fills the church with the grand notes of the Te Deum.'

'Some of the greatest music is sacred, ' said the squire.

'I should say all great music is sacred responded Herald Newton. 'I don't care about popular music. It doesn't stir me. I think it a shame that such a noble things as music should be put to such degrading purposes as dancing. '

'Let us play,' said Bitá again..... " 2.

The humour so far, is effective, restrained, and primarily dependent on a fault seen in Newton Day's own character. The incident which ends the young man's career occurs immediately after this conversation. The impression of a vindictive impulse on the author's part depends on the abruptness with which McKay introduces the event and on the fact that, in psychological terms, Newton Day's action appears incongruous. We are shown Day preparing his sermon on a text from the Psalms:

1. McKay (op. cit) pp. 170, 171

2. McKay (op. cit.) pp. 171. 172

" Wherewithall shall a young man cleanse his ways.....
By taking heed according to they words..... 1.
With my whole heart.....
Oh, let me not wander from they commandments. "

The congregation is waiting in the church for Herald Newton Day and

"Sister Christy was getting ready for church when the bleating attracted her attention and casually going to her garden down under the hill, thinking perhaps that the creature had gotten entangled in the rope, she was horrified to discover Herald Newton. " 2.

If McKay had shown the way sexual desire and religious ideals co-existed in Day's mind, either as occasional doubts about religion or as a losing battle against his sexuality, it would have been possible to accept the young man's fall from grace as a failure to reconcile contradictory forces. Instead, McKay's almost entirely external approach to the character leave a bewildering sense of his failure to relate the incident to Day's personality and experience. It is impossible to accept - without this kind of explanation - that an inflexibly puritanical and humourless young man, immediately after asking himself "wherewithall shall a young man cleanse his ways, " goes out and copulates with a goat; the credibility of the event is destroyed.

McKay's equal condemnation of obeah and Christianity as superstition is summed up in a sermon preached by the Reverend Lambert after the death of Tack Tally (pp. 154, 155, 156). The preacher attacks the obeahmen for taking the money of the poor and then complains that "the obeahman is robbing the churches of their dues. " (p.155) The sermon contains yet another reference to Christ's casting out of demons and Lambert notes that:

"From the beginning of the world there have been wicked people indulging in idolatry and sorcery. Just a hundred years ago they were burning 3. witches in the mother country. "

The sermon thus explicitly condemns obeah while reflecting, in an unflattering way, on Christianity and emphasising that superstition is not a peculiar attribute of "primitive peoples". In Banana Bottom, then, McKay sets out to correct the disparity between social attitudes to Christianity and obeah by presenting both as superstition. Unfortunately the thesis is developed at the expense of insight and credibility. It is particularly unfortunate that it should have occurred since McKay's examination, through Bitá, of the educational black West Indian's rediscovery of his origins and the vitality and importance of the peasants' culture and life-style is one of the most subtle and convincing in the West Indian novel to date.

1. Ibid P.173

2. Ibid P.175.

3. McKay (op.cit.) p.154

In The Wild Coast, Carew, like McKay, uses obeah to suggest peasant culture and the African past with which the hero must come to terms. The difference is that Carew never goes out of his way to condemn obeah as religion nor, indeed, does he ever provide "explanations" of apparently supernatural events. At Tarlogie, Hector escapes Sister's supervision to visit an obeah ceremony a "wind dance" with the yard-boy, Tojo. For the mulatto, Hector, obeah and Christianity appear as representative of the two cultures which have claims on him:

"Togo was content with his heritage of waiting but Hector had the blood of master and slave in his veins and the problems of both to solve. Before him lay the choice of allegiance, the question of loyalty, the need to discover who he was and what he was. Some day, Tojo and his midnight people would break and he would have to take sides.....

Hector wanted to go to the wind dance partly out of curiosity. Sister and the Reverend Grimes had denounced it too strongly for him not to want to find out for himself whether it was as evil and as demonic as they claimed it was. More powerful than this, however, was an unconscious impulse to discover how deep his roots in Tarlogie were planted, to see which was more valid for him - the abstract heaven and hell about which the white minister preached or Caya's shango bacchanal with its drumming and dancing harking back to the African forests of long twilight.

For the villagers there was no problem, no conflict of beliefs. They had embraced the Christian faith which guilty masters had forced upon them, with enthusiasm, for by claiming a common God they could remind their overlords of their responsibility for the continued survival of their brother and sister in Christ. But they wore their Christianity like the clothes they put on to go to church on Sundays only, for the rest of the week the Shango gods Dumbhalla, Legba, Moko were theirs. " 1.

Carew does not introduce the supernatural merely to enliven the novel with an easy thrill for the reader. The Wild Coast is very different from Mittelholzer's more eerie novels - Eltonsbrody or Of Trees and the Sea are examples - where the supernatural element, though expertly handled amounts to no more than ghost-story material. The relevance of obeah to the cultural dilemma of the mulatto hero has to be borne in mind since, out of this context, the passages which concern obeah may be seen exaggerated to the point of sensationalism. The danger arises also because Carew never indicates or implies that the peasants' beliefs are all illusions nor does he intervene with naturalistic explanations of unusual events; instead he forgoes the superior and detached authorial voice to describe obeah with complete involvement, to beguile the reader into a suspension of disbelief and to suggest, ultimately, that obeah is, as religion, at least as valid (rather than as false) as Christianity.

1. Carew (op. cit.) p.155

The shango ceremony is described in considerable detail. Its purpose is to cure Santa Bees's paralysed daughter and it is led by Tengar, Doorne and Caya. A goat is sacrificed and its blood is drunk by the celebrants. Eventually, the girl, who has not walked for a year, dances "as if she had the wind in her feet" :

"Caya pointed at her for the third time. She bowed down before him and, when he signalled her to stand erect an ague took hold of her. Her limbs began to jerk as if they had individual, separate lives in them. The paroxysm continued until she passed out and a man carried her away and laid her in the shade of the cromant tree". 1.

Later, she recovers and :

"Caya jumped down from the altar once more and danced into the fire. For a moment, he stood there like a black Phoenix and then he stamped his way out of the flames and into the centre of the altar. The shaking girl flung herself down on the sand and rolled towards the fire. She rolled through it once and, when Caya shouted, she did it again, then she took off her dress and picking up a handful of burning coals ran them over her naked body. The beat of the master drum was steady, unchanging. A group of women stamped into position and danced in and out of the flames and after this cleansing ceremony they began trembling. One by one they passed out shouting strange words and frothing at the mouth. Their voices echoed and re-echoed over the swamps, more terrible 2. than the cries of phantom slaves. "

Tengar is later bound with rawhide thongs by dancing men and under the spell of the ceremony, he strains against the ropes, snaps them and dances until he collapses. It is easy to be critical of Carew's methods - the banal comparisons with wind, the Phoenix and "the speed and power of a "jaguar" or the bathos of Tengar's Houdini - like circus performance at the end. What is of interest here, is the author's presentation of the unusual events at their face value, without the sort of explanations McKay provides in describing Wimba's rituals. Carew does not insist that miracles are taking place, the reader can, if he chooses, imagine naturalistic explanations of all the events described. Yet, if such explanations were present in the text, they would necessarily undermine the attempt to present the ceremony subjectively as a religious experience of the peasants by making the celebrants no more than ignorant dupes.

Yet Carew's technique is neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective. We may take the "strange words" uttered by the women as one example. We must assume, I think, that the words are "strange" to the participants themselves. It is possible that the words are gibberish. It is also possible that they are words of an African language recalled from some "racial unconscious" in the minds of the descendants of Africans by an

1. Carew (op.cit.), p.162

2. Carew (op.cit.) p.162, 163

ancient and magical African ritual. If Carew had specified the second possibility, the improbability of the explanation, on the face of it, would have forced the reader to dismiss it as fantasy. The first possibility, however, once it is made explicit, reduces the women to comic victims of a delusion. In the absence of any explanation of this kind, the resulting ambiguity causes both possibilities to register in the reader's mind simultaneously. The existence of the more plausible explanation ensures that we do not immediately reject the image of the women shouting "strange words". At the same time, the less acceptable supposition (less so on a naturalistic level) registers and is supported by the context.

Carew makes it possible for us to view the ceremony as the participants do and to understand their acceptance of "supernatural" events. Precisely because of the ambiguities that I have described, the entire question of the objective truth about events becomes far less important than our imaginative participation in the experience of the ceremony. It becomes possible to consider obeah, both as religion - in the sense I have indicated earlier - and as an ancestral cultural link.

Hector is gradually drawn into the ceremony and, for the time being at least, it is clear that he has made his choice between the culture of "the master" and that of "the slave" :

"The drums changed their rhythm and the villagers began to shuffle and dance to a slow monotonous beat. Hector felt the drum beats twisting inside his head and he didn't know when he joined the dancers or how long he moved round and round with the crowd worshippers. He only felt a dizzy heat suffusing his body and his limbs turning to liquid. He was released from all that was his life in Georgetown and in the big house in Tarlogie. The disciplines imposed by his father and aunt, by Sister and his teacher fell away. The savage singing and the shango drums had exorcised them. "

1.

After the ceremony, Hector is reproached by his fanatically Christian guardian, Sister. Sister sees the choice of Christianity rather than the worship of Dumbhalla as a choice of respectability rather than barbarism :

"To think that I bring you up all these years to be a Christian young man! And all the gratitude I get for it is that you climb out of the window like a thief and go and beat your body about in the moonlight and the dew! You don't have any pride or what, boy? The Bradshaws had they bad ways but en't ever one of them who could say 'this one or that one didn't have no pride because they was all prideful people. And after this night I won't never be able to hold up me head and look nobody in the face in this village I teach you to respect you'self but like I fail in me task. All I succeed in doing is bringing up a young savage who en't no better than the bare foot good-for-nothing people in this village....."

2.

1. Carew (op.cit.) p.162

2. Carew (op.cit.) p.166

Sister is making the familiar distinction between "civilised Christianity" and "primitive obeah". She has very personal reasons for the intensity of her emotional response.

"She regarded his going to the wind-dance as a terrible betrayal he had denounced shango worship and adopted a new faith since she was seventeen, and because it was so close to her, because the sound of drums still echoed in her blood, because church-bells had muted but had never silenced the invocations of shango chants, she had embraced Christianity with a fervour bordering on fanaticism. " 1.

Yet the distinction between the civilised and the primitive religion is made to appear dubious for several reasons. Hector goes to the wind-dance to choose between Christianity and middle-class respectability on the one hand, and the culture of the black peasants on the other. When he does choose, during the ceremony, it is represented as a release from a force which has been stifling him and as an escape, however temporary, into freedom. Furthermore, Carew describes the ceremony with such sympathy that he gives shango worship sufficient dignity to refute the charge of barbarism. Finally, the character chosen to express the old distinction between Christianity and obeah is shown as too personally involved in maintaining that distinction to be impartial. Sister is on the weary road to respectability, the very path that Hector, for reasons with which we can sympathise, is struggling to abandon.

A similar ceremony occurs near the end of Banana Bottom and its significance in Bitá's life is much the same as the importance of the shango ceremony in Hector's. After Bitá's departure from the Craig's mission and her return to Banana Bottom, Gensir suggests that she accompany him to a Revivalist Christian meeting which he regards as a "humorous spectacle. " The Revivalist preacher, Evan Baughan creates an atmosphere of intense excitement in his church to win converts (it is the dramatic and hysterical method typical of American Evangelists " which, in modern times is called "taking a decision for Jesus"). The preacher and the congregation seek to force Gensir and Bitá to submit to the "Revival Spirit" but they resist. The service is interrupted by a small procession beating drums and carrying supple-jacks (whips). The congregation turns away to "this more primitive excitement" (p.249) but Evan Vaughan objects that "that is not God's spirit but the devils." The drummers are followers of the Spirit of the Fetish. They dance to the drums until they collapse and are then whipped; the cries they utter are said to be the voice of the Spirit. Bitá is drawn into the ceremony, dances, falls on the ground and is saved from a whipping by the intervention of Jubban, the drayman.

At this point, Bitá's revolt against the Craigs and the Christian religion which "left her indifferent" is complete.

In the ceremony of the Fetish, she realises the truth of Gensir's claim that obeah is "a link with an ancestral past". The event occurs as she is, once again, becoming integrated into the life of the peasants in the village and her involvement in the dance completes and represents that re-integration : there are obvious similarities with Hector's discovery of a new personal and social identity:

"In the midst of them, Bita seemed to be mesmerised by the common fetish spirit. It was a stranger, stronger thing than that of the Great Revival. Those bodies poised straight in religious ecstasy and dancing vertically up and down while others transformed themselves into curious whirling shapes, seemed filled with an ancient nearly forgotten spirit, something ancestral recaptured in the emotional fervour evoking in her memories of pictures of savage rites, tribal dancing with splendid swaying plumes and brandishing of the supple-jacks, struck her as symbolic of raised and clashing triumphant spears.

The scene was terrible but attracting and moving like a realistic creation of the most wonderful of the Annancy tales, with which her father delighted and frightened her when she was a child." 1.

Yet there is an important difference between the author's uses of obeah ceremonies. Gensir, we remember, joined an appreciation of the cultural value of obeah with a condemnation of both obeah and Christianity as "superstition." In the ceremony of the Fetish, McKay combines Bita's discovery of a valuable "ancestral link" with renewed assertions of similarities between the two religions. The fact that the fetish ceremony occurs as an interruption during a Revivalist meeting means that the two kinds of religious experience are juxtaposed in the novel, making comparisons inevitable. McKay describes conversion to "the grace of Jesus Christ" in a way that is clearly meant to enforce comparison with submission to the Spirit of the Fetish. At the Revivalist meeting :

".... there were three of the Sisters in Christ working upon a famous rum-fighter named Delminto who came from the nearby village of Bull's Hoof. The man was resisting with strained face and muscles taut. But at last he threw up his hands crying : 'Oh Lawd, he'p a poah sinner! ' And shouting and swaying he went as if he were struggling against ten men 2. down the aisle to the Penitents Form. "

Very shortly afterwards, at the fetish ceremony :

".....at last the woman rose up and started prancing and brandishing her supple-jack, shouting intelligible phrases. With an eerie shriek, a little girl fell down swooning into the ring and the risen leader began supple-jacking her. A youth fell down, then another person and others..." 3.

Lest the similarity should escape us, McKay tells us that Evan Vaughan:

1. McKay (op.cit.) p.250
2. McKay (op.cit.) p. 244
3. *ibid* p.250

".....detested the drum and though it was a barbarous thing, maybe because it reminded him of something in his Salvation Army past that he would have liked to forget. "

1.

When Bitá discusses the event with Gensir, he admits that "he had registered similar overpowering feelings", adding that "the supple-jackers had more authentic power in them than a thousand Evan Vaughans" (p.257). This last comment is curious in view of the squire's atheism and his condemnation of "superstition" since the phrase "authentic power" seems to go beyond a purely aesthetic appreciation of a cultural display. It appears that McKay, having consistently presented obeah as the superstitious weakness of the exploited poor, was faced with the problem of replacing disapproval with approval to depict the cultural rather than the religious aspect of obeah; this major shift is ineptly brought about by placing an uncharacteristic phrase in Gensir's mouth.

Gensir's response to the ceremony has the same effect as the juxtaposition of the Christian, and obeah rituals. One is made aware of similarities between the reactions of Vaughan's congregation and those of the celebrants at the ceremony of the fetish. Gensir obviously sees the difference as one of effectiveness rather than a difference in kind. Precisely because the reaction of Delminto to the "spirit of Jesus Christ", is so similar to the reaction of the young girl to the spirit of the fetish, the authenticity of either ceremony as religious experience is diminished and the obeah ritual appears as a peculiarly West Indian expression of a universal human tendency. Since human reactions are much the same, whatever the "religious" stimulus, we are forced to conclude that the real stimulus is something inherent in humanity rather than present in the religions themselves. Moreover, the religious impulse is not only mistaken but human and universal since the effects of the African and West Indian religion are so strikingly similar to those of the American and European one.

Squire Gensir's confession that he "registered overpowering feelings" emphasises that the power of the fetish depends on universal rather than West Indian traits. The power of the African ceremony is not confined to the descendants of Africans such as Bitá, but can effect someone who is racially and culturally distinct from the West Indian peasants. This view is typical of McKay's presentation of race and culture in Banana Bottom; he emphasises common humanity rather than race and the reader is frequently reminded that the culture of the West Indies is one expression of a universal creative impulse. Bitá reflects on race and

1. McKay (op. cit.) p.249

culture after she has been called "nuttin more'n a nigger gal" by a mulatto who tries to rape her.

"She thought how the finest qualities of mind or brain or heart were the attributes of only the rarest spirits, who may spring like flowers from the commonest as well as the most exclusive places, in the proud domain as well as the peasant's lot, and even in hot-houses. How then could any class or people or nation claim a monopoly of a thing so precious and so erratic in its manifestations? Oh, she marvelled at the imbecilities of a sepulchre-white world that has used every barrier imaginable to dam the universal flow of human feelings by suppressing and denying to another branch of humanity the highest gifts of nature, simply because its epidermis was coloured dark " 1.

Bitá develops a point of view which is decidedly internationalist and inter-racial. She learns to be proud of her black race and her West Indian culture but only to the extent that she can accept the former as a pleasing variation on the human form, (see p. 266) and the latter as a worthy contribution to the culture of the world. McKay's answer to the distinction between "civilised" Christianity and "primitive" obeah is similarly "universalist". The entire novel develops the proposition that obeah is a particular manifestation of universal superstition and universal culture and creativity. In so far as it belongs to the former category, it is to be condemned; those aspects of it which belong to the second category are to be celebrated and valued.

No such synthesis is to be found in The Wild Coast. Carew prefers to accentuate differences while weighting the comparison heavily in favour of obeah and against Christianity. Before the shango ceremony, the Reverend Grimes, a white man, preaches a sermon against it. With heavy irony on Carew's part, the first lesson is "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Carew uses every opportunity to strengthen the association of whiteness with Christianity and, indeed, race assumes far greater importance than in McKay's novel. In The Wild Coast, the fact that one's "epidermis is coloured dark" appears not as a pleasant but ultimately insignificant variation on a theme but as an important determinant of individual personality. Tojo, we remember, was "content with his heritage of waiting" because he came from "a plastic race, a resilient people (who) had survived by living secret lives." Hector, the mulatto, had "the blood both of master and slave in his veins and the problems of both to solve." 2. This may be compared with Gensir's comment to Busha

1. McKay (op. cit.) p.266

2. Carew (op. cit.) p.154

Glengley; "I don't believe in any race. I take my ideas from the experience of the whole world" and with Bitá's angry rebuke to Herald Newton Day: "Let me tell you right now that a white person is just like any other human being to me.....I hope I shall never hear any more of that nauseating white-and-black talk from you." 1. 2.

McKay makes racial differences seem almost incidental because he is portraying the particular cultures of different races as products of universal human creativity. From Bitá's reverie after the attempted rape and from Gensir's comparison of Obi with Graeco - Roman gods, we may deduce that the reason for McKay's frequent references to universal creativity is that he seeks respect for West Indian peasant-culture by indicating that it springs from the same source as the prized creations of white men. To a later generation of West Indians than McKay's such a method of gaining respect is likely to appear dangerously flawed because it accepts the cultures of Europe as "given" and sets out to prove equality. The Wild Coast was written exactly twenty-five years after Banana Bottom. Carew insists on racial differences because he is emphasising cultural ones, suggesting dignity in the culture of black West Indians without the necessity, implicit in McKay's technique in Banana Bottom, to evaluate West Indian myth by reference to the accepted value of European myth and culture. When Gensir discovers that a native tune is really "original Mozart", in spite of his assurance that he does not "think it matters" since "everybody borrows or steals and recreates in art", it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that Mozart is being enlisted to lend respectability. 3.

Carew repeatedly associates the black race with the music of drums and with shango, and the white race with Christianity. Because the racial difference is emphasised, Christianity appears as alien to black people (as distinct from West Indians). Elsa objects to Tengar's love of church services :

"She would have liked to tear apart and destroy the need in Tengar for hymn singing, praying to a white man's God and making a fetish out of a book that white strangers had written to confuse black people." 4.

The religious and cultural difference between obeah and Christianity becomes linked with a physical, obvious difference, that of race; there is no more forceful way of making two separate worlds of/culture of the black peasants and that of the Reverend Grimes. The sermon follows a familiar theme :

1. McKay (op.cit.) p.130

2. Ibid p.169

3. McKay (op.cit.) p.124

4. Carew (op.cit.) p.88

" ' It is over a century since my forebears brought your ancestors up from slavery into the fold of Christ, brought them up from the dark place, the valley of the shadow, away from the iniquities of false gods and animistic cults towards the eternal light.....' Sister murmured a quiet 'A hmen' , and nudged Hector.

'Our Father's House has many mansions but some are empty waiting for the pagan souls that dwell in this village. I am told, "the parson paused to let his eyes search the row upon row of dark faces before him, ' I and told that something called the wind-dance is still practised in Tarlogie, and I must tell you that this is an evil thing, a harking back to the valley of the shadow which your ancestors left a century ago.' " 1.

In Banana Bottom, the sermon against obeah is preached by a black man; in The Wild Coast it is delivered by a white man. In McKay's novel, the black minister says "There are no people so addicted to sorcery as we Negroes. The continent we came from is cursed and abandoned of God because of magic. We brought along the curse with us from over there." Nevertheless, he points out that " from the beginning of the world there have been wicked people indulging in idolatry and sorcery. Just about a hundred years ago they were burning witches in the mother country." 1. McKay's corrective view, the universal nature of superstition, is never very far from the surface and the fact that the minister is himself a negro further softens the opposition of "white" Christianity to 'Black' obeah. Carew's preacher deliberately draws the lines of battle between the religion of his "forebears" and the cults of the "dark faces before him." The Reverend Grimes and Caya are themselves contrasted:

"Reverend Grimes looked old and tired and Hector noticed that the crow's feet at the corners of his eyes had multiplied and crinkled deeper since he last saw him. He was wearing a black three-piece suit, and apart from the cock's comb flush on his face and his inflamed eye balls, did not seem to mind the heat. It was as though the sun had already dried up all the sweat in him. " 2.

The preacher is thus inside a building, in the self-imposed discomfort of unsuitable clothes. The image is supposed to that of Caya, the shango priest, who is in the open, thinking of the wind and beating his drums while the church musician, Bull Mackenzie, plays, in Doorne's words, "according to the Bible so that his right hand did not know what his left hand was doing." (p.93). In contrast to the restrictiveness of the minister's way of life, Caya's drum and the wind-dance come to represent freedom. During the sermon :

1) McKay (op cit.) P.154
2) Carew (op. cit.) P.94

"Caya was beating out a fast one-three rhythm on his drums and its echoes drifted in to mock the parson. Caya found more solace in a drum beat than he did in churchbells and the holy words that rolled off the parson's tongue. The wind-dance was a link with Africa. His ancestors had been hauled out of this continent and scattered over a hemisphere..... But wherever a man wanders he will find the neighbour - wind, the comparison wind..... The wind was a symbol of absolute freedom; it was invisible, amorphous, imbued with titanic energies, no stockades could contain it nor could whips and chains humble it. For the descendants of the slaves, the meaning and the message of the wind-dance had not changed." 1

Though Carew's comparisons are to the advantage of the shango priest, The Wild Coast does not, as a whole, embody a romantic, sentimental view of obeah. Carew presents the theme of obeah as it is experienced by those who accept it rather than as objectively valid or invalid. In one incident the experience is shown to be a painful one. Yet Carew does not adopt the contrary view of obeah as the black man's evil, a view, which prevails in de. Lisser's The White Witch of Rosehall. Instead, as we shall see, he takes advantage of ambiguities.

As Elsa's relationship with Tengar begins to wane, she recalls a time when, as a young girl, she was seduced by his father Doorne. She blames this seduction for her inability to be faithful or to love. Doorne is known as a "devil-man" - an obeahman. Her mother often sent her to buy milk from him although she was afraid of him. The old man's gaze and his laughter had an effect on her that was hypnotic and, eventually irresistible. Yet her fear is mixed with fascination :

"The old man never spoke to her but his eyes always left her feeling there was something unclean in her body. One morning, she was bending over her pail of milk when he came and stood close to her and the consciousness of his evil presence was so overwhelming that she began to shiver. After a while, she felt his hands fondling the tight lumps of her breasts and she jumped away, crying out like a curlew startled in its sleep. She'd snatched up her milk and fled and his deep chuckling laughter followed her. As she ran down the baked mud-path, she felt as if her head was spinning round and round on her neck. His laughter followed her all the way home. The feel of the man's thick, moist fingers persisted. If he had cut his hands off and glued them to her bosom, they could not have felt more real." 2

The suggestion of awakening sexual desire mingled with fear and revulsion is particularly successful here. One begins to see that Elsa is afraid of her own developing sexuality and that Doorne is merely the man who has made her aware of her sexual desire. Since the entire incident is recalled through Elsa's memory, we are aware of the possibility that the mysterious evil ascribed to Doorne is really the young Elsa's reaction to a powerful

1. Carew (op. cit.) P.95

2. Carew (op. cit.) P. 173, 174

and uncontrollable aspect of her own personality. She may continue to hate him simply because she is unable to accept her own sexuality. On the other hand, Doorne may, in fact, be an evil minister of the shango gods preying upon innocence. Carew provides a basis for accepting either possibility:

"She grew to hate as well as fear him. She was certain that one day he would turn into a snake and coil around and constrict her body, mashing up her bones and crushing her into jelly. It came to her suddenly that she had to kill him: One morning she wrapped a prospecting knife in a piece of cloth and tied it round her waist. When she reached the cow-pen, she avoided his eyes and walked up to him. He had spoken to her for the first time that morning.

'Elsa, gal, is what you got round you' waist, gal?' he had asked, laughing a jackal laugh. 'You got a knife? Well, if you want to kill me, here is you' chance!' He had torn open his shirt exposing a black chest with grey hairs growing between the pectorals. She pulled out the knife and held it poised to strike and he came so close to her that she could smell the fresh perspiration on him.

'Kill me, gal, kill me! Ha ha!' Her hand trembled and she dropped the knife. He picked it up. 'If you don't have the mind to do it then I will do it myself.' He raised the knife and she, without knowing what she was doing, seized the handle and begged him not to kill himself. He pushed her away and kept on laughing, and she grabbed her pail of milk and ran away sobbing. "

1

Elsa's ambivalent attitude to Doorne is sufficient to explain his seducing her and to account for her later hatred. However, the seduction is described in a way that leaves the question of occult power open. One night, during a thunderstorm, Elsa hears Doorne's voice calling her. She leaves her home and walks through the rain to his hut at the back of the village. On entering, she sees him seated before a pot from which smoke is rising. He explains that he was willing her to come to him. As Doorne begins to caress her, he explains that he needs her youth and that no other woman in the village can give him what she can. It is apparent that Elsa could not actually have heard Doorne's voice - his hut seems to be too far from her home. The explanation that the old man needs Elsa's youth suggests the need of a spirit or one possessed by a spirit to regain life and strength from the young although this need is supposed, usually, to be satisfied by vampirism. On the other hand, the voices may result from the imagination of an emotionally overwrought and sexually excited girl and Doorne may be a deluded old man with a predilection for young girls. The ambiguity enables Carew to convey Doorne's obeah as an experience through the mind of Elsa. Obeah, whether truth or fantasy, is seen and imaginatively experienced by the reader as fear and pain.

1 Carew (op. cit.) p.174

McKay's tendency to rationalise and evaluate obeah by reference to universal human superstition and creativity may owe something to his political opinions. Concessions to the claims of religion to be truth are hardly to be expected from a Marxist and McKay's Socialism was more concerned with social class than race or nationality. McKay's meeting with Bernard Shaw, whom he considered "the wisest and most penetrating intellectual alive", illustrates this. Cooper and Reinders tell us that "Shaw told McKay of a Chinaman who had come half way round the globe to talk to Shaw about Irish politics. Shaw admitted he couldn't understand why, though to McKay the reasons were fairly evident." 1 Yet the difference between the views of obeah in Banana Bottom and The Wild Coast may also be related to changing political opinions in the West Indies.

Growing up in societies which looked to their own notion of England as their highest ideal and educated in institutions that inspired impressionable pupils with acute Anglophilia, the intellectuals of the colonial West Indies often found a treacherous awe of "the mother country" undermining their rebellion in unexpected ways. In spite of McKay's disillusionment after his stay in England, Banana Bottom shows traces of the opinions of the "Black Englishman" who once visited, in the words of one of his poems, "de lone spot where in peaceful solitude / Rest de body of our Missis Queen Victoria the Good." 2

One of these traces is the saintly Englishman, Squire Gensir, whose fiat appears to bestow instant aesthetic value on the activities of the peasants. Banana Bottom belongs to an age when the folk-culture of the West Indies could not yet be valued for its own sake: the charge of "barbarism" against black people was too near. A review of McKay's poetry in "The Spectator" reminds us of the kind of attitude with which he had to deal :

"It was written by a pure-blooded Negro. Perhaps the ordinary reader's first impulse in realizing that the book is by an American Negro is to inquire into its good taste. Not until we are satisfied that his work does not overstep the barriers which a not quite explicable but deep instinct in us is ever alive to maintain can we judge it with genuine fairness. Mr. Claude McKay never offends our sensibilities. His love of poetry is clear of the hint which would put our racial instinct against him, whether we would or not" 3

1 Cooper & Reinders (op.cit.)p.14 Shaw asked McKay why he had chosen to be a poet rather than a boxer; the tactlessness of his idol increased McKay's disillusionment in England.

2 Cooper and Reinders (op. cit.) P.3

3 "The Spectator" of 23 October 1920 quoted by Cooper & Reinders (op.cit.)

It was entirely necessary for McKay to insist on the universality of the human creative instinct and of the human tendency to superstition partly because he had to deny white critics the right to an assumed moral superiority based on race. A West Indian author of McKay's generation was writing, primarily, for a British readership - he could not hope for a sympathetic hearing from the literate West Indian middle class and, in any case, his cultural ideal was, almost inevitably, his image of England. Thus there is a great deal of self-justification in McKay's treatment of folk culture in Banana Bottom and, in particular, of that aspect of it most associated with barbarism - obeah. He derives the cultural value of obeah from its origin in the same creative impulse that produced Norse and Graeco-Roman myth and answers the accusation of ignorance and superstition by referring, whenever possible, to "superstitions" prevalent in European society and, especially, English society. The object is to prove equality in both good and bad, culture and superstition, to the accepted criterion of Europe.

McKay was a Jamaican; Carew is a Guyanese. The Jamaican belonged to a deeply traditionalist, Anglophile society before the colonial attitudes began to decay. Guyana in 1958, the date of publication of The Wild Coast, had a thriving nationalist movement, all the more vigorous for being new and for being temporarily suppressed by Britain's suspension of the Constitution. One would not wish to read too much into the national origins of the authors but it is certainly no accident that the corrective view taken by the younger author depends far less on "universalising", an accepted European criteria, and far more on a recreation, in dramatic terms, of the West Indian experience of Caribbean culture.

This is not to suggest that The Wild Coast is a major West Indian literary achievement; it suffers from over-writing and an embarrassingly naive view of the relationship between those who have "the blood of both master and slave" and "the descendants of slaves." In representing the dilemma faced by the hero as the result of genetic inheritance rather than of upbringing and environment, Carew reduces a complex social and cultural problem to a simple-minded ethnic determinism. His emphasis on the racial differences puts Hector's participation in the shango ceremony - an individual's triumph over the constricting and false values he has learnt - in danger of appearing a temporary advantage of one half of his genes over the other half.

Nevertheless, as a deliberately corrective view of an imbalance in West Indian social attitudes, The Wild Coast is more successful. McKay's negative approach, a denial of the necessary superiority of European race and culture on the basis of common human creativity and gullibility, entails

a risk which he did not escape - the appearance of an over-riding imposed moral viewpoint in the novel. Carew presents obeah as experience, deliberately begging the question of the truth of religion and asserting, more positively, that the experience is properly that of West Indian and is worthy of pride. Since the reader's sympathy is gained by his imaginative participation rather than by his readiness to agree with the thinly disguised arguments of the author, The Wild Coast functions strictly as fiction and is never in danger of appearing a direct statement of Carew's political opinions. The difference is one of nationalism; McKay dignifies obeah by submerging it in the culture and superstition of the world and Carew does so by a sympathetic treatment of West Indian culture for its own sake.

In 'The Suffrage of Elvira' V.S. Naipaul's treatment of obeah and Christianity resembles that of McKay in Banana Bottom, at least superficially. Elvira is a Trinidadian constituency in which a local man, Harbans, is a candidate. Harbans is gradually cheated of his money as more and more bribes become necessary. Obeah, like everything else in Elvira, is satirised. Rumours are spread very quickly in the little village and it is said that obeah is being used against various candidates. Two American, Jehovah's Witnesses, have persuaded some of the voters that elections are sinful and it becomes necessary for Harbans to counter their influence. His agents do so simply by claiming that the Witnesses are practising obeah, a proposition which the voters readily accept. It is subtly implied (through the ease with which obeah and one form of Christianity become associated) that the difference between the two is not as great as might be supposed.

It is debatable whether any of Naipaul's novels can be said to take a "corrective" view of West Indian society although such a case can certainly be made. It cannot be argued that Naipaul's view of Trinidad in The Suffrage of Elvira is that of a West Indian nationalist. There are no positive qualities in Elvira; everything is engaged in chaos and greed. The author's view is close to that of Harbans:

"When Harbans had left Elvira and was in County Caroni, he stopped the lorry and shook his small fist at the dark countryside behind him. 'Elvira!' he shouted. 'You'is a bitch! A bitch! A bitch! ' " 1.

There is thus no sense in which Naipaul's equal deflation of the Witnesses and the believers in obeah is part of a corrective approach. It is rather

1. Naipaul (op.cit.) Penguin edition 1969 p.146

the result of an attitude that takes every belief and every value in Elvira as ultimately meaningless. Hindus, Christians and Moslems are concerned with the form rather than the substance of their faiths and so distinctions are no longer made :

"Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights.Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein." 1.

For different reasons, neither McKay nor Naipaul can be wholly identified with the mainstream of the Caribbean novel which has sought to define the meaning of West Indian identity and culture. Lamming, however, clearly does belong to that mainstream. The passages I have quoted from The Pleasure of Exile demonstrate his concern with the "true and original status of personality "of" the West Indian peasant." It is no coincidence that Season of Adventure suggests similarities with The Wild Coast rather than Banana Bottom. Of course, Lamming's novel is considerably more complex than Carew's and Fola's problem and her reactions are given much wider significance than the specific situation of the West Indies. Nevertheless, both Fola and Hector are made to face dilemmas of social and personal identity by encounters with obeah ceremonies. In Season of Adventure, as in The Wild Coast, the ceremony is presented throughout as an experience of one of the characters. The truth about "supernatural events" is left open and becomes unimportant; the significance of the events lies rather in the central character's struggle to come to terms with her own emotional reaction against them - a reaction which is part of a wider rejection of the life of the peasant people.

At one point, for example, as Fola and Charlot are in the tonelle, Fola senses an old woman staring at her and then hears the voice of a dead boy coming from the tent of the Houngan, telling of his past life before he can be released from his prison of water;

"The voices had wrought a gradual contamination of Fola's sense. Was she becoming part of their belief? Would they really hear the sound of dead voices in the tent? The questions were other than an interest to examine. She became aware of their contagion in her mind. The prayers were a conspiracy against her doubt..... She wanted to leave the tonelle. Each moment of her stay seemed to increase the fear that she might not be able to escape the contagion of their prayers.....She wanted Charlot to take her away; but she dared not move while the old woman's eyes blazed upon her, old and sure and purposeful in their scrutiny. If she tried to move, they would have thought their prayers had worked. Her fear was already a concession to their power.

But it was too late to move, too late to talk, too late to stop the slow hot, slow tautness of muscle under her thighs. Her muscles were giving way to a slow, hot trickle of water sliding down her legs. She was wetting

1. *ibid* p.66

her pants. Drip by drip, then free as a drizzle, her urine was making a noiseless puddle under the bench. Pimples hardened on Fola's arms. The old woman was snuffing the candles out and the voices faded into the silence of the tent. The wind stirred a noise like water tunneling dead leaves through the dark; but the noise didn't pass. It ceased its echo in one place repeating a tremor that circled within the orbit of the tent.

'You don't believe it, Charlot?' anchored to her humour, Fola cried. 'Do you?' 'There is no one else in the tent,' Charlot said dryly. Yet they could hear two voices: the Houngan speaking softly to identify one known dead presence in the tent..... Then the other voice rose, barely, audible at first, choked in a struggle to link its syllables; and the noise of the wind came down, nearer, more tremulous, like the suffocation of a tide breaking over firm sand....." 1.

The experience is being presented as such. The problem of belief is not intrinsically important for the reader; it is located in Fola's mind and derives its significance from the character's own problem of social and personal identity. Lamming and Carew gain sympathy for the participants in the obeah ceremony by involving the reader in the experience of the ritual. For different reasons, both McKay and Naipaul adopt a detached authorial voice and invite their readers to join them in judging. I suggest that the relevance of West Indian nationalism to Season of Adventure and The Wild Coast is that, within the period of nationalist feeling, it has become possible to portray obeah on its own terms as religion and culture. McKay could only derive its value from universal human creativity because he had to neutralise the prejudices of his likely readers against the race that produced it. As West Indian nationalism obviates the need for self-justification in the eyes of European readers, it ceases to be necessary to assert that black people are human and to adopt McKay's "universalising" tone.

Harris's criticism of Hearne for "imposing a moral directive on his situations" can also be applied to McKay in Banana Bottom. The passage is worth repeating:

".....a considerable creative shortcoming especially in a context such as the Caribbean and the Americas where the life of situation and person has an inarticulacy one must genuinely suffer with and experience if one is to acquire the capacity for a new relationship and understanding." 2.

As I pointed out in the introduction, for so long as the West Indian novel is involved in a process of national and personal self-definition, whenever value and significance are derived from an imaginative identification with the life and culture of the West Indian people and not

1. Lamming (op.cit.) pp 33, 34

2. Harris (op.cit.) p.41

and not from judgements based on external criteria, the national context of the novel is necessarily important for critic or reader. Conversely, as we have seen in the specific instance of the theme of obeah, the political and social development of the West Indies enables the main body of West Indian novels to move towards the "genuine experience". Harris advocates; it has moved away from the figure of the author who, as it were, stands between the material and his reader like a lawyer pleading for a client of dubious reputation and a shady past. There is a great distance between McKay's polemics and Lamming's re-creation of experience and the difference is simultaneously aesthetic and political. West Indian political development has made possible the kind of identification Harris suggests because it is making the defensive, self-justifying tone of McKay obsolete. It is no longer necessary for a mediating European character such as Gensir (or, to a lesser extent, Hearne's Stefan Mahler) to explain and justify so that European readers may be guided. Banana Bottom is directed at the European reader of the time reminding him of superstitions that had existed and still existed in his own society, demanding that he recognise the common creativity of humanity and lose his prejudice against that of the black race. Yet this approach is in danger of being self-denigratory even as it seeks to be corrective for by so obviously accepting his European critics as judges, McKay confirmed the superior status he sought to deny. In the nationalist phase, the vague doctrine of human creativity and the appeal to European culture as an accepted criterion (whether Mozart or the Norse Gods) become superfluous; the particular nature of the culture of the West Indies becomes more important than its place in the general scheme of human creation; differences become more important than similarities because a cultural identity is being defined. The culture of the West Indian masses has, now, to be sought within the terms of that culture. Therefore the corrective approach begins to depend on sympathy evoked by an imaginative involvement in the experience of West Indian culture, a technique which does not require the importations of external criteria and moralities and does not, therefore, lead to the frequent intrusion of the author to emphasise significant similarities and to score debating points. Since this technique makes use of possibilities which are truly those of literary art rather than polemic - the communication of experience, the revelation of moral complexities inherent in situations - the political development is intimately associated with an essential artistic advance.

This is but one of the many ways in which political and social developments in the West Indies and the artistic development of the West Indian novel are still closely associated. They will continue to be so, I suggest, until it is no longer possible to say that "the life of situation and person" is "inarticulate" - until, moreover, West Indian art has as secure a sense of cultural identity as Chekhov had in Russia and can transcend its immediate context as his art did.

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