

A B S T R A C T

This investigation attempts an examination of the emergence of existentialist elements in the fiction of West Indian writers. It emphasizes that Existentialism is a peculiarly European philosophy which has had a tremendous impact on modern literature. Existentialism is a reaction to the doubt, scepticism and agnosticism created by two World Wars. Its essential messianic purpose is to help man cohere the disparate strains of his existence and finally achieve self-determinism. In the art of Western writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Edward Albee and Samuel Beckett who project their vision of the condition of modern man and the malaise which infects him, myriad dimensions of the existentialist aesthetic have emerged. It is in their "*creative reaction*" to the spiritual temper of this age that existentialist elements and postures are extant.

The specific dialectic of this investigation informs that existentialist elements have also emerged in the fiction of West Indian writers. Indigenous West Indian writing of quality appeared only at the beginning of this century. The West Indian writer does not belong

to any established literary and philosophical tradition like the Western writer. Moreover, the Western and West Indian writer belong to entirely different cultural milieus and yet, elements and complexes of existentialist thought have emerged in the art of West Indian writers.

The West Indies is dominated by European values and systems. Indeed it has retained a legacy of influence and close association with Europe. It is because of a long history of close association that the West Indies shares accordingly with Europe some of its underlying crises. But the West Indian's situation is exacerbated by the historical legacy of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. History has left him denuded and emasculated and this condition presages the need for reconstitution of self. In their response to the ills and crises of the historical legacy, V.S. Naipaul, Garth St. Omer, Orlando Patterson and Jean Rhys have identified conditions and issues which reproduce some of the fundamental elements of the thought of Western Existentialism in its classic form.