

Abstract.

So looking through a map
of the islands, you see
rocks, history's hot
lies, rot-
ting hulls, cannon
wheels, the sun's
slums: if you hate
us. Jewels,
if there is delight
in your eyes.

"Islands."

What does it mean to be a West Indian? Those who have seriously addressed themselves to this question, have often precipitated within themselves, a certain Anguish, an inner turmoil which has driven them to frame lengthy, or short, responses. These usually incline towards either a negative or a positive pole. Though none of our major writers has produced a totally negative picture of the West Indies, perhaps Naipaul has come the closest. It is equally true that none of these authors has produced a picture of unadulterated positiveness, but perhaps Brathwaite has been among the most optimistic. So that one question, or experience has produced a wide spectrum of perspectives.

This thesis surveys some of these responses, and enquires into the causes of such divergence. It is suggested that one of the reasons lies in ways of perceiving, and that those in this study who lean towards the purely negative pole, have been strongly influenced by the philosophy of the Absurd. These I call Existentialists. On the other hand, those who lean towards the positive pole are more interested in the interplay of forces, in dynamics. These I call the Dialectitians. In addition, it is suggested that the latter, because of their preoccupation, are more flexible and comprehensive in their perceptions.