

ABSTRACT

This thesis treats that period of Haitian literature which spans the four decades between the American Occupation and the Revolution of 1946. The stimulus, which provoked the literary renaissance of this time was the spirit of nationalism aroused by the presence of white foreigners on Haitian soil, in their traditional (colonial) role as masters of the indigenous population. The sensitivity of the Haitians to such a phenomenon generated a collective awareness of the politico-cultural reality of the nation which profoundly affected every sphere of intellectual activity. Literature, in particular poetry, reflected this national 'crise de conscience.'

The effect of nationalism on Haitian writing can be traced back to 1804 and the chapter on the 19th century gives a resume of the changing attitudes to national identity before 1915. It also forms a background to the dissatisfaction of the generation of the Occupation with their literary forebears.

The literary revolution, first vaguely stated in the shortlived abstraction of Indigenism, was brought into sharper focus in the debate over the relevance of folk culture to the future of Haiti. Until the 1940's this debate remains manifestly internal with a sustained dialogue between the 'Marxists' and 'Africanists.'

However, soon, the notion of a universal black cultural homogeneity draws Haiti into the mainstream of the 'négritude' movement. But historically a misfit among those seeking

political autonomy, Haitian writers were among the first to question the validity of such a monolithic black culture. In this confrontation they resort to the distinctive complexity of their national culture which not only enables them to see the limitations of 'négritude' but once more to insist on the creative potential of the national experience.