

## A B S T R A C T

"CONSULTING THE ORACLE": AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN  
SELECTED WORKS OF WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

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In commenting on the creation of A House for Mr. Biswas V.S. Naipaul says that in writing the novel he experienced "the joy of allowing fantasy to play on stored experience."<sup>1</sup> This paper examines how fantasy is allowed to play on stored experience in this novel as well as in two other novels which draw substantially on the real life experiences of their authors: Voyage in the Dark by Jean Rhys and Banana Bottom by Claude McKay.

Chapter 1 presents some of the arguments advanced by some modern critical theorists who believe that critical analysis should not be concerned with inquiries into a novelist's background. The author concedes that there are dangers in placing too much emphasis on biographical information but believes, like William C. Spengemann, that everything that goes into

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1. V.S. Naipaul, Foreword, A House for Mr. Biswas.  
London: Andre Deutsch, 1984. p.6.

a work has a source somewhere in the novelist's life. The creative imagination transforms the real life experiences into art. Information about the novelist's life may illuminate aspects of the fiction.

The transformation of real life experiences into art is examined in Chapters 2,3 and 4. This examination reveals that the novelists have preserved the particularity and uniqueness of their experiences but that these experiences contain within them a wider relevance. Incidents become symbolic and characters become representative as the novelists alter facts, add material and reorder events in order to make statements about society or the human condition.