

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is basically an argument about the extent to which creative writing in the West Indies has been determined by conceptions of West Indian history. It identifies history first as a summation of events and influences that have created values in the West Indies and secondly as a dialectic showing a particular writer's view of the meaning of history. Its introduction is a conceptual chapter giving an overview of existing scholarship on the West Indian writer's engagement with history and defining as well the approach and scope of this particular thesis. In its second section the introduction gives a critical account of the historical vision of George Lamming and Wilson Harris whose works do not feature in a major sense in the body of the thesis but whose ideas reverberate throughout the discussion of the selected writers. The account not only establishes their haunting presence and importance in the debate on history but also sets the tone of argument in anticipation of the more elaborate discussion in the various chapters of the thesis. In its main argument the thesis recognises the early historical novels of De Lisser, Mittelholzer and V.S. Reid as the beginnings of West Indian attempts at grappling with history and links them in the course of the discussion with the works of Naipaul, Walcott and Brathwaite in which history becomes a major preoccupation and force. The second and third chapters of the thesis mark the progress of the historical sense in West Indian Literature demonstrating how Naipaul moves from a vision of history as progress and possibility towards a cynically deterministic view of Caribbean history in his later novels. In its fourth and fifth chapters the thesis charts the shift from a conception of history as space and time towards a figurative and metaphysical

view of it, contrasting the historical preoccupations of Walcott and Brathwaite with the historical vision of Mittelholzer, Reid and Naipaul. Chapter four recreates and dramatises Walcott's tortuous progress towards a concept of history, showing the ways in which his developing sense of history influences and changes his conception of the imagination and of poetic style, and the final chapter broken up into four sub-sections, examines Brathwaite's The Arrivants as an exploration of history and as the product of a particular historical vision. It links and contrasts this vision of history with the sense of history expressed by Walcott, uncovering the usually blurred similarities between the two poets and revealing both as similar in a major sense but separated by differing conceptions of history and of the imagination. The Conclusion is another conceptual chapter summing up and examining the implications of the writer's confrontation with history, placing their various conceptualisations in relationships of comparison and contrast and highlighting the general problems which writers face when they subject imagination to the pursuit of ideas.