

ABSTRACT

Roger Mais: The Evolution of a Novelist

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The literary career of Jamaican Roger Mais (1905-1955) spanned that period in which a West Indian literary tradition took root, from the literary awakening which came with the rise of nationalism in the English-speaking Caribbean in the 1930s to the appearance in the 1950s of a distinctively West Indian body of fiction. Through the three published novels, The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953), Brother Man (1954), and Black Lightning (1955), which are the culmination of his prolific literary strivings, Mais helped to establish that tradition.

This study traces the evolution of the novelist through an examination of his published and unpublished writings--verse, short stories, plays, and novels. Much of the material examined is preserved in the Roger Mais Collection in the University of the West Indies Library at Mona; an annotated bibliography of the Collection is appended to the study. The contention throughout is that the emergence of the novelist involves the reorientation of his sensibility. Although passionately committed to the nationalist cause, Mais was nevertheless a colonial by birth, education and upbringing. His early problems as a writer are intimately related to the fact of his colonial sensibility, a major obstacle to a creative response to the local language and culture.

Part I (Genesis) of the study gives an account of Mais's life and times and examines his early views on society and literature. In Parts II-IV, which treat of the imaginative work, the writer's development is traced through three phases: Early Apprenticeship (c.1935-c.1945), Late Apprenticeship (c.1945-c.1950), and the period of the Published Novels (c.1950-1955). The primary concern is with vision and form