

ABSTRACT

Born in New Amsterdam, British Guiana at the beginning of the century and belonging to one of the oldest families in the colony, Edgar Mittelholzer experienced from early childhood the indignities of the colonial situation. He rejected his bourgeoisie background because of its acceptance of the status quo and gave expression to his resentment in writing. He had published locally, without payment, more than a hundred articles and stories analysing the colonial predicament before his first novel appeared in 1941.

Subsequent novels were not published until he had gone to live in England at the age of thirtynine. His ambition to be known as a novelist without the qualification "West Indian" resulted in the publication of seven English-based books of inferior quality. The connection between the author's exile and the failure of these books is obscured by the fact that some of them were published prior to the appearance of works written at home.

Disorientation resulting from expatriate experience

is also seen in Mittelholzer's treatment of Guyanese material in his historical fiction and in his books on Barbadian life.

Mittelholzer's development as a writer cannot be traced without first establishing the order of composition of his works but, this having been done, the contrast between his West Indian compositions, as such, and the work he did in exile becomes evident.

The author's standing as a novelist and his place in the history of the new West Indian writing are be-
devilled by allegations of racialism--allegations which, on analysis of his work, cannot be sustained. A convinc-
ing, and a very necessary, refutation of these and kindred allegations leaves the way clear for assigning to Mittel-
holzer, as the author of five novels of considerable literary merit, a place of honour in the evolution of West Indian literature.