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THE TRINIDAD AWAKENING

West Indian Literature of the Nineteen-Thirties

REINHARD W. SANDER

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INTRODUCTION

Until fairly recently it was not uncommon for West Indian writers and critics to speak of their culture in the following terms:

> The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. . . . History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies.[1]

> For nearly three centuries the West Indian thought nothing, created nothing, explored nothing. If at any time between Columbus and the Second World War the British Caribbean islands had sunk beneath the sea, the world would have lost little that enriches the imagination of mankind.[2]

Both statements implicitly dismiss the existence of a rich folk culture in all the Caribbean islands, created during the period of slavery and sustained until the present day. Afro-Caribbean forms of dance, music, religion, philosophy, art, and oral literature appeared in response to the demands of the new environment and were used as weapons of protest against the European colonial establishment. Under cultural pressure from their rulers, the slaves and their descendants modified their customs and beliefs, syncretized European and neo-African forms, but hardly ever surrendered the core of their cultural expression. It is commonplace now to cite the example of Haitian Voodoo, in which Catholic saints and West African gods were merged to create a religion and world view that became the rallying point of the first black republic in the New World. The slaves also modified the European languages they were forced to learn, a process which affected the speech of the European colonists themselves.

Since the focus of this study is restricted to one aspect of West Indian culture—the written literature—a discussion of West Indian folk culture *per se* is impossible. However, the emergence of West Indian literature is intimately linked with the interest which the early writers took in the folk culture, and a number of the cultural features which attracted them will be touched upon in the course of this study.

To return to the opening quotations, the second statement also implies that the West Indies have begun to "enrich the imagination of mankind" since the Second World War. The author of this statement, John Hearne, belongs to a group of writers which includes V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Samuel Selvon, Andrew Salkey, Edward Brathwaite, and Derek Walcott, all of whom contributed to the outpouring of West Indian creative writing in the 1950s. They were all born in the late 1920s or early 1930s and grew up during one of the most turbulent periods in West Indian history, when dramatic changes were taking place in the political and social structure of their region. George Lamming has drawn attention to the profound significance of these pre–World War II social upheavals for the writers of his generation:

> I remember as a boy, a very young boy, Barbados being thought of as a very orderly, very conventional, very conservative society. But in July 1937 nobody could have had those illusions when those barefooted men marched on Government House with the demand to see the Governor. And in the town, whites fleeing, cars overturned into the harbour, stores being smashed.
>
> In Trinidad there was the very sinister episode of the policeman who was actually soaked in paraffin and set alight by Butlerite sympathisers. These were very, very violent moments, but more important than the violence was the creation of a confidence in very ordinary people that they could and should be heard by those who were called authority. And I think there is a connection between the political character of many of the early novels which were then published in the fifties and the events of the late 1930s.[3]

Lamming goes on to comment on the emergence of three of the region's most important literary magazines, all of which were launched during the war years: Frank Collymore's *Bim* (1942–) in Barbados; Edna Manley's occasional *Focus*, which first appeared in Jamaica in 1943; and *Kyk-over-al*, edited in Guyana by A. J. Seymour between 1945 and 1961. Before they became established overseas, many aspiring writers used these magazines as outlets for their early creative writing. The regional approach of *Bim* and *Kyk-over-al* in particular, together with the BBC *Caribbean Voices Programme*, helped foster an awareness among the writers in different islands of creative developments taking place in neighboring territories, and encouraged them to see their work as part of a new regional phenomenon.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the writers and critics of the 1950s

came to regard the Second World War as the watershed of West Indian creative writing. Apart from their increased awareness of what was taking place in other islands contemporaneously, they would have known very little of the region's literary past, as their Anglocentric education would hardly have encouraged them to ask whether any significant West Indian literature had appeared before their time. The years immediately preceding the Second World War had been particularly lean ones for West Indian fiction, and the fact that they were followed by a period of intense political activity tended to obscure the links between the young writers of the 1950s and those of the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century. In the last few years, West Indian literature has been given a place within the West Indian school syllabus and a pattern of continuity has begun to emerge. Future West Indian writers are likely to be aware of the significance of the creative writers of Lamming's generation and be influenced by their precedents.

To date, however, no comprehensive history of West Indian literature has been compiled, although certain groundwork has been covered. Louis James's early collection of critical essays, *The Islands in Between* (1968), was published before the appearance of many major West Indian literary works, at a time when it was still too early to predict or analyze regional trends. Bruce King's more recent collection, *West Indian Literature* (1979), devotes separate chapters to important decades in the development of West Indian literature, but lacks the scope and the space to develop this historical perspective. A genuinely comprehensive historical perspective depends on specialist studies of specific eras or genres or themes, and these have only recently begun to become available: Kenneth Ramchand's pioneering *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (1970) was followed by Michael Gilkes' *The West Indian Novel* (1981). Poetry and drama have been treated in Lloyd W. Brown's survey of *West Indian Poetry* (1978), Kole Omotoso's *The Theatrical into Theatre: A Study of the Drama and Theatre of the English-Speaking Caribbean* (1982), and Ken Corsbie's *Theatre in the Caribbean* (1984). Thematic approaches to West Indian writing have been used in Gerald Moore's *The Chosen Tongue* (1969), Selwyn R. Cudjoe's *Resistance and the Caribbean Novel* (1979) and O. R. Dathorne's *Dark Ancestor* (1981). In the related field of cultural history, a start has been made in Jamaica with Ivy Baxter's *The Arts of an Island* (1970), which includes a history of Jamaican literature extending from historical times to the present day; and for Trinidad, with Keith Q. Warner's *The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature* (1983). Before a truly comprehensive study of West Indian literary history can be compiled, however, it would seem essential that the literary histories of each of the English-speaking territories be established. So far the emphasis has been on individual authors, especially those who first came into prominence after World War II. At the last count there were at least half a dozen full-length

critical studies of V. S. Naipaul as well as several theses and major publications on George Lamming, Roger Mais, Wilson Harris, Jean Rhys, Derek Walcott, and Edgar Mittelholzer. In most cases the writers have done careful research on the individual backgrounds of each of these authors, but even their work remains incomplete without a fuller understanding of groups and creative writers who preceded the postwar generation and contributed directly or indirectly to the sociocultural milieu of the late 1940s and the 1950s.

Lloyd Brown traces half a dozen poets of the period 1760 to 1900 in his survey of *West Indian Poetry*. They include Francis Williams (1700-1770) whose "Ode to Governor Haldane," written in Latin, appeared in 1759; James Grainger (1723-1767), author of a pastoral epic on Caribbean plantation life, *The Sugar-Cane* (1764); M. J. Chapman, an antiabolitionist who in *Barbadoes and Other Poems* (1833) put forward in verse his arguments against the freeing of the slaves; and the Guyanese poet, Egbert Martin (1859-1887), who published two collections of poetry, *Poetical Works* (1883) and *Lyrics* (1886), under the pseudonym "Leo."[4] However, it was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that a recognizable West Indian literary genre began to take shape. In this respect Jamaica clearly emerges as the center of literary activity during the first three decades of the twentieth century. As early as 1929 the president of the Jamaica Poetry League, J. E. Clare McFarlane (1894-1966), was able to produce a wide-ranging anthology of local poetry, and some twenty years before that an attempt had been made by Thomas MacDermot (1870-1933) to establish an indigenous publishing house. The All Jamaica Library published four works of fiction: MacDermot's *Becka's Buckra Baby* (1904) and *One Brown Girl And—* (1909); E. A. Dodd's *Maroon Medicine* (1905); and W. A. Campbell's *Marguerite: A Story of the Earthquake* (1907). In the foreword to *Becka's Buckra Baby*, MacDermot explained the rationale behind the enterprise:

> In "The All Jamaica Library" we are presenting, to a Jamaican public at a price so small as to make each publication generally purchasable, a literary embodiment of Jamaican subjects. Poetry, Fiction, History and Essays, will be included, all dealing directly with Jamaica and Jamaicans, and written by Jamaicans.[5]

Like many subsequent attempts to set up a West Indian publishing house, the All Jamaica Library did not survive for very long, but as editor of *The Jamaica Times* MacDermot continued to give sincere support and encouragement to local writers until the end of his active life. Had he lived longer or been born later, he might have become the Jamaican equivalent of Barbados's Frank Collymore, whose contribution to the development of West Indian writing as liberal editor of *Bim*, and friend and mentor of many aspiring creative writers has become a symbol of all the selfless dedication

which went into the nurture and development of creative writing after World War II. MacDermot was posthumously declared Jamaica's first poet laureate.

Overshadowing all other Jamaican writers and dominating the cultural scene well into the thirties was H. G. de Lisser (1878-1944). As secretary of the Jamaica Imperial Association, Chairman of the Board at the Institute of Jamaica, and the influential opinion-making editor of *The Daily Gleaner*, de Lisser consistently defended the position of the colonial ruling class and was opposed to any moves to give political rights to the black majority. He was a talented and intelligent individual, fully aware of the new ideas and aspirations which challenged the *status quo* after the First World War, but determined not to relinquish any of the power he had acquired under the old colonial system. De Lisser put forward his reactionary views in novels which made clever use of familiar features of Jamaican life. His first novel, *Jane's Career* (1914), is an early precursor of the barrack-yard story and is as entertaining and realistic as anything the *Beacon* group in Trinidad ever produced. Although later works such as *Triumphant Squalitone* (1917), *Revenge* (1919), and *Under the Sun* (1937) were more overtly reactionary, they are thematically the natural ancestors of the West Indian historical novel and the social and political satire. V. S. Reid's *New Day* (1949), in which Reid attempts to reinterpret the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, may even have been conceived as an attempt to counter de Lisser's unfavorable interpretation of the rebellion in *Revenge*.

De Lisser and MacDermot were both men of some standing in the Jamaican community. It is not surprising therefore that on the whole Jamaican writers were generally accorded a degree of respect in their own country and were often patronized by the ruling class.[6] This was certainly not the case in Trinidad, where the pioneering writers of the late 1920s were ostracized socially. One of the Trinidad writers, Ralph de Boissière, has suggested that the difference between the attitudes to local talent in the two islands was the result of their different social and political histories:

> [Trinidadian] whites and near-whites were doing their best to purge themselves of any taint of local culture, the folk arts, which survived despite suppression by law. They rejected these links with the people, regarding them as "niggers' amusements." They attached themselves to British culture without becoming cultured. British education was designed to black out Negro culture and inculcate a deep sense of one's inferiority to foreign whites, with whom culture was supposed to originate. But did the middle class really absorb this British culture? Is it possible to absorb completely the culture of a country in which you have never lived? Dickens, Galsworthy, Fielding; snow, fog, springtime, white Christmases; Parliament, public school ethics, the nobility—do you *absorb* all that? It lies on you like an ill-fitting, oversize coat, a ridiculous disguise, a cast-off garment given a poor orphan. A coloured man, Ralph Vignale, used to write novels which were serialised in the *Port-of-Spain Gazette* in the 20's—all about the English upper class, riding

to hounds and all that. How pathetic! What a commentary on British rule! The slow emergence of literature arose from this one-sided British education and the barriers of colour set up between us for . . . historical reasons. . . . If it was not the same in Jamaica this was because that island had had its own House of Assembly and controlled its affairs until 1865. They had time to feel that Jamaica was their country. But in Trinidad we did not feel this, we felt we were owned and controlled.[7]

The difference between the two islands, however, was merely one of degree. The Jamaican upper class may certainly have felt more equal to the British ruling class than the white creoles of Trinidad: They were more powerful as a class and had deeper roots in Jamaica and stronger links with the mother country. De Lisser may have had the cultural assurance to give his novels Jamaican settings, but the lifestyle he describes in many of them bears more resemblance to Vignale's fantasies on the English upper class riding to hounds than the reality of Jamaican life outside of the privileged plantocracy. While MacDermot was prepared to encourage writing in creole, there were nevertheless limits beyond which it was impossible for Jamaican writers of the early twentieth century to take their interest in local culture and still remain acceptable in polite society. For every Jamaican writer who stayed in the island and established a modest reputation as a man of letters, there was one who became frustrated with the cultural restrictions of colonial society and stopped writing, or went abroad.

The Trinidad writers of the 1930s have more in common with the Jamaicans Claude McKay (1889-1948) and Walter Adolphe Roberts (1886-1962), both of whom left Jamaica when they were in their early twenties. Claude McKay's poetry collections *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, both published in 1912, represent a completely different line of development to that encouraged by the Jamaican literary establishment. McKay never returned to Jamaica and became instead one of the foremost writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance in the United States. Walter Adolphe Roberts, a near-white Jamaican creole, had a background and intellectual stature comparable to that of de Lisser, but he was firmly opposed to Crown Colony government and was unable to get the opportunities in his journalistic career in Jamaica that de Lisser obtained. He left Jamaica to work as a journalist in New York and Paris during the First World War and developed a life-long interest in French culture and republican ideals. His best known novels are a trilogy dealing nostalgically with the decline of French culture in Louisiana after the American Civil War. He joined the bohemian set of Greenwich Village in the 1920s and, though his work is uneven in quality, he produced some fine individual poems and a number of historical and political treatises on Jamaica. His only novel with a Caribbean setting is *The Single Star*, a romance dealing with the involvement of an idealistic young Jamaican creole in the Cuban War of Independence at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1936 Roberts formed the Jamaica Progressive League in New York to fight for Jamaican self-government and he returned to Jamaica in the 1940s to participate in the political and cultural changes that followed the Second World War.

Until the late 1920s the literary scene in Trinidad, by contrast, seems to have produced nothing very remarkable. In a first survey of Trinidad writing entitled *Self-Discovery Through Literature* (1972), Anson Gonzalez mentions two plays by L. O. Inniss written in the late 1890s; a book of poems called *Legends of the Bocas* (1922) by A. D. Russell; and the occasional work of fiction: Michel Maxwell Philip's *Emmanuel Appadocca or Blighted Life: A Tale of Buccaneers* (1854), George H. Masson's *Her Nurse's Vengeance* (1898), and S. N. Cobham's *Rupert Gray: A Tale of Black and White* (1907). In addition, two important nonfictional works by the black Trinidadian schoolteacher J. J. Thomas should be noted: *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (1869),. the first attempt to examine the French creole spoken in Trinidad at the time as a legitimate linguistic development, and *Froudacity* (1889), in which Thomas makes a spirited defence of West Indian society against the scathing remarks of the negrophobe James Anthony Froude's assessment of the region in *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses* (1888). The sporadic nature of literary output in the island before the late 1920s can partly be explained as the consequence of the island's linguistic diversity and its rapidly changing patterns of settlement. Trinidad had been a Spanish colony until 1797 with a large proportion of French-speaking inhabitants. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that English replaced French and Spanish as the *lingua franca*. One of the island's earliest historians under British rule, P. G. Borde, wrote *Histoire de l'ile de la Trinidad sous le gouvernement espagnol* in French, and had it published in Paris in 1876. It is possible that such poetry and fiction as was written or published has now passed into the annals of France and Spain and bears little relationship to twentieth–century writing in English. Among the lower classes the situation was further complicated by the widespread use of French creole and the influx of indentured laborers from China, India, and Madeira to work on the sugar plantations after the abolition of slavery in 1838. Unlike most of the English colonies of the region, Trinidad was underpopulated, which made it attractive for migrants from other, more crowded areas. The flood of linguistically and culturally diverse immigrants into the colony tended to retard the spread of the English language and undermine the patterns of social and racial stratification which in Barbados and Jamaica had led to the creation of a powerful and self-assured indigenous leisured class. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the tide had begun to turn, and though there was still a massive movement of immigrants into the island, they were mostly workers from the English-speaking West Indies who flocked to the country to work in the oil fields and on the prosperous wharves as other outlets of migration to Panama, Cuba, Brazil, and North America began to fail. Their

presence helped stabilize the island's social and linguistic character though Trinidad for a long time remained a society in a state of flux.

The burst of creative activity in the late 1920s was in a sense related to this new ascendancy of English and the fact that the society had begun to resolve itself into well-defined racial and social groupings, based on a series of shared assumptions which the new intellectuals could discuss, support, analyze or attack in their work. Chapter 1 of this study deals with the development of Trinidad society during the interwar years and the spread of antiestablishment ideas during this period. By the end of the 1920s, the middle classes (black, colored, and creole elements)[8] were clamoring for a greater say in the country's administration and for constitutional reforms to the Crown Colony system. The working class, based in Trinidad's oil fields and docks, had also begun to agitate for labor representation within industry and a greater share in the country's wealth. The approach of the middle class was reformist and nationalist; the approach of the working class was militant and socialist. However, most of the pioneering Trinidad writers were middle-class intellectuals who, to a greater or lesser degree, sympathized with the aspirations of the working class. As Daniel Guérin has observed in *The West Indies and Their Future*:

> A Caribbean culture only started to come into being when . . . a minority split away from the middle classes and made contact with the people, turned its attentions to their problems, studied their customs, their beliefs, what of the African inheritance the people have kept alive, and voiced the people's aspirations and anger.[9]

Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral have both attempted to elucidate this process, which was triggered off in the Third World after the First World War. Cabral, from the outset, debunks the elitist notion implicit in Guérin's evaluation by reminding us that "when . . . the pre-independence movement is launched, the masses have no need to assert or reassert their [cultural] identity, which they have never confused nor would have known how to confuse with that of the colonial power. This need is felt only by the indigenous petite bourgeoisie which finds itself obliged to take up a position in the struggle which opposes the masses to the colonial power."[10] Although Cabral's assessment is based on the African experience of cultural nationalism, it seems relevant to the Caribbean experience and should help guard against the confusion of the cultural efforts of the middle class, with which this study is concerned, and the birth of culture implied in Guérin's analysis. Throughout the history of the Caribbean it has been the masses of the people who created an indigenous culture and successfully defended it against the inroads of imperialist hegemony. As Cabral affirms, they are "the repository of culture and at the same time the only social sector who

can preserve and build it up and *make history*."[11] Within the educated middle class, where the values of the European colonizers had been most emulated, cultural suppression and assimilation had combined to alienate the individual from the rest of his community. As a result of these processes the "rebel" fraction of the middle class had first to question its own cultural assumptions before it could begin to rediscover its cultural roots. This process of cultural resistance has often preceded the struggle for national liberation. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* has described it as the phase during which the educated native begins to set "a high value on the customs, traditions and the appearances of his people." It usually follows a period during which the native has done his best to show that he can beat his superiors at their own game, by perfecting his knowledge of the language, culture and manners of the colonizer. Finally, Fanon adds:

> In the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people. Instead of according the people's lethargy an honoured place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature.[12]

Most of the literature produced by the Trinidad writers of the early 1930s did not reach Fanon's third phase. This was partly because that nationalist struggle was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and subsequently it never developed into an armed liberation struggle.

The early Trinidad writers published their work in two magazines, *Trinidad* (1929-1930) and *The Beacon* (1931-1933, 1939). Chapters 2 and 3 of this study discuss a selected number of the nonfictional contributions in the magazines as well as the poetry and short stories produced by the group. The poetry is only of historical interest, but the short stories are generally of a very high standard. In choosing the subjects for their short fiction, the writers put into practice their theoretical demands that West Indian writing should utilize West Indian settings, speech, characters, and conflicts. Their stories cover all aspects of Trinidad life, though a significant proportion of these were concerned exclusively with the lifestyle and culture of the lower classes, especially the urban proletariat living in the slums or barrack-yards of the city. The writers laid great stress on the independence and vitality of the women who lived in these yards and tried to reproduce their creole speech.

The piquancy of some of the political articles and editorials in *The Beacon* are reminiscent of the satiric thrust of the calypso songs of the period. At times the "eavesdropping" narrator of the short stories also seems to borrow his narrative stance from the calypsonian:

The calypsonian would usually adopt the pose of a disinterested listener, or of a newspaper reporter who is always on the spot, or of one who had been told hot news by a reliable source or a barrack-room dweller who cannot help but overhear what is going on in bed next door.[13]

In addition, both the calypsos and the short stories of the 1930s frequently have the same element of ironic reversal in their surprise endings. Unfortunately, at the time when the research for this study was carried out, it was not possible to gain access to a sufficient number of early calypsos to provide further support for the relationship which seems to exist between the two genres. It is, however, intriguing to speculate on the extent to which Trinidad fiction over the years has been influenced by this vital art form. Anson Gonzalez implies the existence of just such a link when he remarks in *Trinidad and Tobago Literature on Air:* "It is only to be expected that in the land of 'ole talk,' Polycar, robbertalk, grandcharge, mamaguy, nancy stories and half a million politicians that short fiction should be one of the more popular modes of creative writing."[14]

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, three of the most important literary figures to have emerged from the *Beacon* group are singled out for special attention. Alfred H. Mendes, C. L. R. James and Ralph de Boissière were the only members of the group who went on to write full-length novels. Although they wrote on similar themes, their work reflects the different perspectives from which they viewed colonial society. Two of their novels, James's *Minty Alley* (1936) and Mendes's *Black Fauns* (1935), are set in barrack-yards. They indicate some of the strengths and limitations of early Trinidad writing. The writers' self-conscious approach to the lower class produced a perspective which emphasized rather than bridged the social gap between the classes. The middle-class protagonist who controls the narrative perspective in *Minty Alley* observes and records events with sympathy but at the same time feels separate from and superior to the yard-dwellers. James later became aware of the fundamental alienation of the educated black members of the colonial middle class from the masses. In his play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1936) he tried to correct the perspective of the earlier novel by taking a more critical view of the relationship between the educated Haitian leader and his followers. Mendes's *Black Fauns* makes no attempt to examine the relationship between the middle-class writer and his proletarian subjects. Instead he tries to interpret the barrack-yard for his reader by reproducing the creole conversations of his lower-class characters and exploring the economic and emotional tensions of the yard community. Conversely, in *Pitch Lake* (1934) Mendes succeeds in making the reader inhabit the consciousness of his protagonist, who is a member of the Portuguese middle class in Trinidad, so that we begin to understand the deep-rooted feelings of insecurity which make the prejudices of this class against the black masses so virulent.

Unlike Mendes and James, Ralph de Boissière remained in Trinidad throughout the 1930s and early 1940s and witnessed the development of the working class from a vulnerable and dependent sector of the society to a class with a definite political voice of its own. His novels, *Crown Jewel* (1952) and *Rum and Coca-Cola* (1956), record this development and present members of the working class as the moral and intellectual equals of the middle-class characters. His novels are committed to a radical analysis of Trinidad society between 1935 and 1945, and they explore the limitations and achievements of the political alliance between the classes which brought an end to the more overt forms of colonial domination in the English-speaking Caribbean.

In conclusion, this study attempts to put the work produced by these early writers into perspective in relation to the post–World War II Trinidad novelists and short-story writers. The group may be regarded as the direct literary ancestors of Samuel Selvon and V. S. Naipaul, both of whom take up the Trinidad story at the point in the Second World War where de Boissière's second novel leaves off. The polished narrative technique of both of the later authors lives up to the precedent set by the early short-story writers, and there is even a line of physical continuity between the younger writers and some members of the *Beacon* group who continued to meet and discuss their writing within other informal gatherings well into the 1940s.

NOTES

1. V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 29.
2. John Hearne, "Foreword" in *The Artist in West Indian Society: A Symposium*, ed. Errol Hill (Trinidad: University of the West Indies, Dept. of Extra-Mural Studies [1963]), p. 5.
3. George Lamming, "Caribbean Politics from 1930s to Tense 70s," *Caribbean Contact*, 5, 11 (March, 1978), 10.
4. See chapter 1, "The Beginning: 1760-1940," in Lloyd Brown, *West Indian Poetry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), pp. 19–38. See also Anthony Boxill, "The Beginnings to 1929," in *West Indian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 30-44.
5. Quoted in Mervyn Morris, "The All Jamaica Library," *Jamaica Journal*, 6, 1 (March, 1972), 47-49.
6. See Rhonda Cobham-Sander, *The Creative Writer and West Indian Society: Jamaica 1900-1950* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1982).
7. Ralph de Boissière, personal communication, January 2, 1979.
8. Trinidadian writers are inconsistent in the usage of the terms "black," "colored," and "creole." In this study, these terms have been used as follows: "black" signifies a person of predominantly African descent; "colored" signifies a person who is a mixture of any of the major races—a mulatto (Afro-European), but also a "dougla" (Afro-Indian); "creole" means a person born in the Caribbean (usually used to describe locals of predominantly European descent, e.g., French creole,

Portuguese creole). The term "creole" also refers to the languages which developed in the Caribbean as a result of the contact between African and European languages. In Trinidad, two creoles coexist—a French-based creole (on the wane) and an English-based creole.

9. Daniel Guérin, *The West Indies and Their Future* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1961), p. 80.

10. Amilcar Cabral, "Identity and Dignity in the Context of the National Liberation Struggle," in *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, ed. Africa Information Service (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 67.

11. Ibid., p. 61.

12. Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 178 and 179.

13. See Gordon Rohlehr, "The Development of the Calypso: 1900-1940" (Unpublished cyclostyled paper, 1972), p. 33.

14. Anson Gonzalez, *Trinidad and Tobago Literature on Air* (Port of Spain: The National Cultural Council, 1974), p. 61.

CHAPTER 1

THE BACKGROUND: TRINIDAD 1919-1938

The literary awakening in Trinidad came as a response to specific political and cultural developments that had their parallels throughout the colonial world and in black America. Not the least of these was the global extent of involvement in the First World War and the political and social upheavals that came in its aftermath. Trinidadians of all social classes were strongly influenced by their wartime experiences. The writer Alfred H. Mendes, who served with a British regiment, remembers:

> I went through the First World War from almost start to finish in France. . . . As you may well imagine it stirred up a revolutionary change in my whole outlook on life. Even before that I was tending towards the left, very much to the left, and the War sort of crystallised the changes that were taking place inside of me. I emerged from all its horror . . . a very different human being. However, that experience, placed against the background of Imperialism, the Crown Colony form of government that we were working under here in Trinidad, *and* the Bolshevik Revolution, completely opened our eyes to the evils inherent in the imperialist concept of domination.[1]

Mendes, as a white West Indian, was allowed to serve in a British regiment, but most of the 15,000 black West Indians who volunteered to fight for King and Empire were excluded from enlisting in the regular British Army because of their color. Unlike the French, the British were reluctant to use black troops against white forces. One battalion of the permanent West India Regiment which had been used in the Ashanti wars of 1873-1874 remained in Jamaica throughout the war, while the other battalion was sent to East Africa where it was engaged in very limited action against

the Germans. It was only in mid-1915 that the British Colonial Office, which was concerned that the continued rejection of black West Indians would have an adverse effect on their loyalty to the Crown, was able to persuade the War Office to change its policy. As a result of this change, the British West Indies Regiment was formed under the command of white West Indian officers. However, the regiment was seldom allowed to function as a body. Sections of it were deployed to provide work units for white battalions. The nearest that these West Indians came to participation in active combat was when they were used as ammunition carriers in France and Egypt—a job that entailed heavy casualties but little honor. Instances of personal discrimination were often encountered and matters reached a head in Italy after the war, when Allied troops were assembled to await demobilization. C. L. Joseph in an article on "The British West Indies Regiment: 1914-1918" describes how the 15,000 West Indians assembled at Taranto were given all the menial duties including cleaning the latrines of prisoners of war.[2] When the South African general in charge of the camp was reminded of an earlier promise made to the West Indians by the War Office that they would be given the same privileges as British troops, he replied "that he was perfectly aware of the promise and intended to take no notice of it; that the men were only niggers, and that no such treatment should ever have been promised to them; that they were better fed and treated than any nigger had a right to expect."[3]

Black West Indians returned from the war with the slogan, "If we can die for the white man against his German brother, we can die better for ourselves."[4] While awaiting demobilization in Italy in December 1918, the sergeants of the British West Indies Regiment met secretly and formed an organization called the Caribbean League for the promotion of closer union among the West Indian islands after the war. In meetings of the league, many of the political issues which would be taken up during the interwar years were raised and discussed. Among these was "the demand that the black man should have freedom to govern himself and that force should be used if necessary to attain that object."[5] All West Indian governors were informed of the formation of the Caribbean League and a warship was kept ready in the vicinity of Jamaica should any major trouble arise on the regiment's return.[6] As it turned out, the expected social explosions were relatively mild. Many of the ex-servicemen were unable to find jobs in their home territories, consequently they joined the exodus of workers to Cuba, the United States, and Latin America. It was only in the late 1920s when these outlets were closed as a result of the Great Depression that these migrant workers were forced to return.

The war brought West Indians into contact with new ideas. In Egypt especially, West Indians came into contact with troops from Australia and New Zealand, countries which had achieved a degree of self-government within the British Empire. To many West Indians, their inferior status as soldiers became associated with their inferior status as colonies. Many of the soldiers stationed in Egypt had worked on the Panama Canal before the war. In the Canal Zone they had come to appreciate the necessity and value of organized industrial action. The war experience added a note of militancy to this stance. It is not surprising therefore that one of the most prominent labor leaders of the interwar years, Captain Arthur Cipriani, was a member of the British West Indies Regiment. Cipriani, a white Trinidadian of French descent, had been instrumental in organizing the Trinidad contingent within the regiment. During the war he was often called upon to defend the rights of soldiers charged with various military offences. After the war he led the criticism of the failure of both the colonial and British governments to honor their promises of payment of arrears, war allowances, and pensions.

The labor movement of the 1930s was part of the expression of the new nationalist sentiments which emerged after the war. It had become clear that in matters relating to their own labor and government the majority of West Indians had no representation. This was particularly true of Trinidad, which, since its capture from the Spanish in 1797, had been administered as a Crown Colony. Under Crown Colony rule all power was vested in the governor who was responsible only to the Colonial Office in Britain. In Trinidad the governor was assisted by a Legislative Council which consisted of equal numbers of official and nominated unofficial members. The Legislative Council was little more than an advisory body. Matters of government policy were put to a vote but the governor held a casting vote and the official members were required by law to vote with the government. Unlike Jamaica which occasionally attracted well-known British administrators, Trinidad often found itself saddled with incompetent or mediocre governors. As C. L. R. James has remarked, "Now and then among the officials one finds a really brilliant man, although not often, because brilliant men would stay at home, and even if they do come out, quickly pass on elsewhere to occupy the highest positions in more important colonies."[7] Before the discovery of oil, Trinidad was certainly not considered an important colony.

Historically the group which resented the imposition of Crown Colony government in Trinidad most was the French planter class. In 1783, in an effort to boost the population of the island, the Spanish had encouraged French planters, French free people of color, and their slaves to settle in the island. It was this group which established the island's prosperous cocoa industry. However, with the British occupation of the island, the plantation system of sugar production was expanded, and for a whole century French cocoa interests clashed with British sugar interests. By the beginning of the twentieth century the French creoles had lost much of their land to the large, new sugar combines. On the cultural level it was a battle between two religions, two languages (and their related creole variants),

and two ways of life. C. L. R. James has suggested that the French creoles were the early pioneers of the cultural resistance to British Crown Colony government:

> They were, some of them, men of great culture, and fully able to stand up against the domination of sugar planters and colonial officials. They had a language of their own, in addition to their economic independence. . . . They were Roman Catholic and therefore were able to feel a differentiation between their religion and the Protestant religion of the British domination. Therefore, while they shared to some degree the superior status and opportunities that all local whites had, they were constantly aware of themselves as a body of people distinct from, and even opposed at times to the British colonial caste.[8]

During the interwar years, some of the younger generation of French creoles whose families had declined began to gravitate toward the opposition movements of the day: Captain Cipriani, whose championship of West Indian soldiers has already been noted, was one of the most outspoken members of the French creole community. Other French creoles chose to express their dissatisfaction with Trinidad society by patronizing the much despised calypso tents which were organized for the first time during the 1920s. Gordon Rohlehr comments on this form of protest within the French creole community in an article on the calypso:

> Early in the [twentieth] century, the Calypso had provided French Creole young men with something to defend against the inroads which a Puritan and Anglo-Saxon administrative elite were making into the waning French Creole culture in Trinidad. By the 1920's frustrated young colonials of various backgrounds were realising that in order to liberate themselves, they would have to liberate the barefoot man, and that in order to find themselves they would have to come to terms with the so-called "Jamette" class.[9]

Another group of young French creoles turned to literature and journalism. The two best known of this group were Jean de Boissière, a notoriously eccentric bohemian who was considered the *enfant terrible* of the *Beacon* group, and Ralph de Boissière, a near-white creole who was distantly related to the well-known de Boissière clan of which Jean was a part. Jean, or Tony as he was called by his friends, published two magazines, *Picong* and *Callaloo*, in the late thirties and forties, in which he inveighed against the establishment in a mixture of invective and ridicule. Ralph de Boissière published short stories in *The Beacon* and later developed into one of the group's most militant writers in his novel *Crown Jewel*.

Other elements within Trinidad society also found themselves at odds with the establishment. Trinidad had been underpopulated in the nineteenth century and the abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1807 had

limited the increase of the black population by direct importation. After emancipation in 1838, Trinidad more than most of the other English islands was faced with a labor shortage, as those freed slaves who wanted to leave the plantations had little difficulty in finding unoccupied Crown land on which to start small farms. Other ex-slaves drifted into the towns to join the already substantial free colored population there. The gap created by this exodus of labor was filled by a new supply of indentured laborers from India, Madeira, and China. The Indian workers came in the largest numbers. In *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*, Eric Williams estimates that of the 145,000 East Indians introduced into the colony between 1838 and 1917, only about one in every six took up their contractual option of returning to India at the end of their indenture.[10] Of those who remained, some continued to work on the sugar estates. Others accepted grants of Crown land in lieu of their return passage to India and became small cane farmers themselves or grew cash crops or vegetables for local consumption. After oil was discovered in commercial quantities in the island in 1910, many of these farmers were cheated out of their land by local and English companies who bought up the leaseholdings at exploitative prices and proceeded to make fortunes in oil. Those who had the presence of mind not to sell, were able to collect oil royalties from the wells drilled on their property, and overnight found themselves catapulted into the ranks of the middle classes. After a wild period of indiscriminate spending, members of this new class found themselves up against the harsh realities of maintaining their position in a society where commerce and government were monopolized by British companies and French creole families. They found difficulties put in their way when they tried to obtain credit from the foreign-owned banks; they were excluded from the higher circles of government where policies relating to commerce were framed. During the 1930s however, the first wave of Indian businessmen began to move into politics using as the base of their support the large mass of East Indian peasants whom they were able to rally on the basis of mutual cultural and religious interests. Their antiestablishment position was heightened by the growing opposition to colonialism in India itself. In 1932, five issues of *The Beacon* were devoted to cultural and political topics of importance to the local East Indian community. Some of the articles were contributed by leaders of the Muslim and Hindu communities in the island. Others were produced by liberal British expatriates residing in Trinidad who had formerly lived in India. One of *The Beacon*'s younger East Indian contributors, Adrian Cola Rienzi, went on to become a leading figure in the trade union movement in Trinidad after the social upheavals of 1937.

The notion of a group identity (however superficial) which transcended class barriers was a characteristic that was seldom encountered within other sectors of the Trinidad middle class, who were for the most part anxious to

put as much distance as possible between their present status and their humble origins. The Portuguese middle class in particular was extremely sensitive to issues which threatened its racial or social prestige. The Portuguese had come to Trinidad as indentured laborers in two small waves of immigration in 1840 and at the end of the nineteenth century. They were quick to grasp the advantages which a white skin bestowed in colonies such as Trinidad and moved rapidly through the social ranks from indentured laborers to petty merchants and rumshop keepers and ultimately into commerce. Socially however, they were never fully accepted in local British or French creole society. Like the Indian middle class, they also turned inward and made a virtue of their exclusion by forming a self-contained clique, but they still aspired to the social heights occupied by other Europeans in Trinidad. Some of the descendants of the first group of Portuguese immigrants eventually managed to enter this upper circle. Though the Portuguese, like the French creoles, resented the superior status of the British administrative caste, they were too small as a group and culturally too insecure to challenge its position effectively. By the 1920s, however, the more progressive young creoles had become impatient with the limited social ambitions of their group. Some of the rebels were prominent members of the *Beacon* group: Mendes, whose commentary on the war experience has been quoted above, was one of the best and most controversial writers in *Trinidad* and *The Beacon;* Albert Gomes, editor of *The Beacon,* was also of Portuguese descent though he did not come from as privileged a background as Mendes.

Similar patterns of protest and sycophancy were also typical of the colored middle class, within which distinctions of shade and social status were rigidly enforced. The end result of this development was that socially and economically it was almost impossible for black Trinidadians to reach middle-class status. The world of commerce was virtually closed to them. The color of their skin made it impossible for them to shed their association with slavery with the same ease with which the Portuguese middle class dispensed with their early history of indentured labor, and they lacked the shared memory of an earlier culture which sustained and unified the Indian community. The only means by which they could achieve a measure of economic independence and social respectabililty within the colonial system was through education. Black parents who had worked their way up in the system to the position of clerks or primary school teachers made great sacrifices to prepare their children for entry into secondary school. C. L. R. James recalls:

> This was the battleground. The Trinidad Government offered yearly free exhibitions from the elementary schools of the island to either of the two secondary schools, the Government Queen's Royal College and the Catholic College, St. Mary's. The number today is over four hundred, but in those days it was only four. Through this narrow gate boys, poor but bright, could get a secondary education and in the end a Cambridge Senior Certificate, a useful passport to a good job. There were even more glittering prizes. Every year the two schools competed for three island scholarships worth £600 each. With one of these a boy could study law or medicine and return to the island with a profession and therefore independence.[11]

Both C. L. R. James and Eric Williams, who grew up in the interwar years, have written about their parents' relentless efforts to secure a better future for them. James's father was a schoolmaster himself, and could coach young C. L. R. for the exhibition exams. Eric Williams's father, a junior civil servant, had to hire a private tutor:

> The third step which my father thought necessary for the attainment of the goal he had marked out for me involved only his purse and not his soul. It was the "private lessons," one of the principal articles of the educational faith of the Trinidad parent, then as now. It was a system of cramming, designed to supplement the formal training given in the school. A financial sacrifice was involved; private tuition in the primary school cost a dollar a month. But my father paid cheerfully.[12]

A formidable collection of hurdles, financial and otherwise, ensured that only the fittest survived. Those who made it to secondary school under these conditions were usually more gifted than the average child from a privileged background whose parents could afford to pay fees, but in any academic year only one of them could win the coveted scholarship to university which alone provided a passport to privilege. Many who missed this chance spent years trying to save enough to further their education. Others settled for jobs which may have paid more than those held by their parents, but which were just as intellectually frustrating and seemed at the time to hold as few prospects of advancement. It was from backgrounds such as these that the black members of the *Beacon* group were drawn. C. L. R. James, C. A. Thomasos, and Ernest A. Carr were schoolteachers. Joseph Belgrave was a lawyer's clerk. Ralph Mentor was a reporter and James Cummings was a printer's apprentice. In the years to come, James and Cummings would emigrate, and James would become a leading left-wing intellectual of international stature. Thomasos was to become a politician, Carr a senior civil servant, and Mentor a leading trade unionist. In Trinidad in the late 1920s such careers would have been inconceivable for individuals with their backgrounds, however, and their prospects must have seemed relatively grim. Young men such as these would have had every reason to attack a system which for them was very limiting. Within the protection of the *Beacon* group they did so with impunity.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Port of Spain had become a major trans-shipment port and was attracting laborers from the interior of Trinidad and from smaller islands further north. These laborers formed the

nucleus of a modern urban working class. During the late 1920s when the oil industry began to develop, a second concentration of workers began to build up in the south of the island. There was no legislation at the time to protect the rights of workers: They were ill-paid, badly housed, and could be dismissed at random. Moreover, there were no provisions for workers' representation in industrial matters. Once the workers began to appreciate the importance of their skills to the efficient running of these major commercial enterprises, it was only a matter of time before they took action to improve their lot. The first confrontations occurred on the Port of Spain waterfront in November 1919, only months after the ex-servicemen had returned from the war. Stevedores, lightermen, warehouse workers, and bargemen went on strike and demanded increased wages, pay for overtime, and shorter working hours. Similar strikes occurred in British Honduras, St. Lucia, British Guiana, St. Kitts, and Anguilla. In Trinidad the waterfront strike developed into an island-wide general strike and a British warship was called in to restore order.

The working class seems to have acted spontaneously in 1919: There was little organization and no leadership to speak of. After the strike, however, the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) emerged as the organization in control of the new antiestablishment mass movement. It was neither a trade union nor a political party. Under Captain Cipriani's middle-class leadership it initially combined two broad aims: constitutional reform and new measures to improve the standard of living of Trinidad's working class. The TWA achieved a number of important reforms during the 1920s, among them the introduction of the eight-hour working day and the Workmen's Compensation Law. On the constitutional side its agitation resulted in the introduction of an elective element within the Legislative Council following the recommendations of the Wood Commission of 1921. As of 1925 the number of unofficial members in the Legislative Council was increased to thirteen by the introduction of seven new elected positions. The number of official members was also increased to twelve, however, so that the old balance between the government side and the unofficial side was maintained. As Arthur Calder-Marshall, the English novelist and journalist who visited Trinidad shortly after the disturbances in 1937, points out:

> The fact that there are twelve official members apart from the Governor, and thirteen unofficial members, does not mean that the unofficial members have a majority. The Governor has an original and casting vote which gives the Government a final majority of one. This means that the business of the Legislative Council is in fact a farce since Government is able to carry any measure that it wants. It is an elaborate game in which the opposition is allowed from time to time to win a point or two so that they may not feel too sore.[13]

It is hard to believe that Captain Cipriani and several other TWA leaders, who were among the first elected members, did not realize that they were merely being co-opted by a system that had hardly changed at all. The Great Depression of 1929 and his decision in 1932 to turn the TWA into the Trinidad Labour Party (TLP) marked the end of Cipriani's career as Trinidad's first mass leader. He would remain an elected member of the Legislative Council and continue "to propose and oppose legislation" until 1945, but the Trinidad working class began to bypass him and his organization in their fight for better conditions. In fact, Cipriani and the middle-class TLP leadership became more and more identified with the *status quo*.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s the *Beacon* group led the criticism of Cipriani's brand of socialism within the middle class. Within the working class a number of organizations sprang up to replace the gap in leadership that Cipriani's defection had created. This was the period of Garvey's greatest influence in America and the Caribbean, and a strong chapter of the U.N.I.A. was established in Trinidad. In the tents the calypsos became increasingly concerned with political satire. In the political field the two most important new organizations were the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association in the north and the British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party in the south. The Negro Welfare Association (NWA) began as the National Unemployment Movement in Port of Spain. It was led by militant working-class people such as Jim Barrette, Elma François, Clement Payne, Bertie Percival, and Jim Headley. In his *History of the Working Class*, Bukka Rennie decribes the NWA as a "revolutionary" organization. It combined a strong ethnic position with radical socialist ideas and sought to link its struggle for the Trinidad working class with the world-wide socialist movement of that period. The NWA attacked Cipriani for his betrayal of the working class, advocated the formation of trade unions, led hunger marches, and held regular political rallies. Its members also became members of other working-class organizations where they attempted to disseminate their ideas and encourage the discussion of international issues which they felt were relevant for the future of the Trinidad working class. Like the U.N.I.A. they drew attention to the implications of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia for the future of black people throughout the world. The failure of the League of Nations to go to Selassie's aid was widely criticized by common people throughout the West Indies and added to their cynicism about the concept of Empire.

By 1937 the NWA had virtually destroyed Cipriani's credibility within the working class, but the organization was too small and its sphere of influence too limited outside of Port of Spain to gain the leadership of the national labor movement. Cipriani's place was therefore taken by Uriah Butler, whose British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party had its base in the oil belt of South Trinidad. Butler was a flamboyant, charismatic figure, sincerely devoted to the interests of the workers, but though he was able to articulate the discontent of the masses he had only vague

ideas of how their situation could be remedied. The name of his party reflected this limitation of his vision: For him the most radical solution was home rule within the British Empire. He failed to identify the problems of the workers as the predictable consequences of an imperial system which concentrated power in the hands of a few remote groups. His failure to understand the nature of imperialism would later enable opportunist, middle-class leaders to step in and take control of the mass movement, turning it away from its earlier militancy and back to the path of compromise it had rejected during the latter part of Cipriani's leadership. One result of this development was that much of the work accomplished by the NWA was forgotten or reversed. As Bukka Rennie has pointed out:

> The inability of the NWA, a serious organisation with an extraordinarily capable working-class leadership, by far the most capable leadership seen so far in our history, to foresee this drastic shift in the objective conditions, together with the inability of Butler to provide capable keen leadership and build an efficient organisation, especially in light of the increased middle-class manoeuvrings and intrigue, was the tragedy of the period 1935-47. Sad, because as the years went by, NWA was forgotten and Butler revered despite the fact that the history of Trinidad and Tobago remains incomplete, loses its continuity, and is almost meaningless without the history of the NWA.[14]

One of the earliest attempts to provide this continuity was made at a literary level by Ralph de Boissière, one of the only members of the *Beacon* group who remained in Trinidad and continued to write after the magazine ceased publication. His novels *Crown Jewel* (1952) and *Rum and Coca-Cola* (1956) reconstruct the events of the period 1935-1947 as they affected the lives of a group of representative characters, drawn from all walks of Trinidad life. Though most of his major characters are fictitious, the novels capture the spirit of the period accurately. Indeed, it is easy to forget that they were written years before any serious attempt at historical reconstruction of the period had been made.

On June 19, 1937, an attempt was made by the Trinidad authorities to arrest Butler on charges of sedition. The oil belt exploded: Within days the whole island was engulfed in a general strike. Once more, in the absence of any clear leadership, the Trinidad masses acted spontaneously and rioted until the upheaval was suppressed by British intervention. Similar events had occurred in St. Kitts, Jamaica, British Guiana and St. Vincent in 1935, and the Trinidad upheavals sparked off another wave of unrest in Barbados, Jamaica, and British Guiana. The British Government reacted in its usual manner and appointed a Royal Commission, chaired by Lord Moyne, but "such was the ugliness of [the Commission's] exposures about the British Colonial record in the British West Indies that the War Cabinet decided against publication of its contents until the war had ended."[15] In the interim, Butler and most of the leaders of the NWA were interned for the duration of the war, and the government made every effort to see that the newly established trade unions developed along lines which were acceptable to the establishment. It was into this vacuum of leadership that the middle class stepped to take control of the labor movement. It is one of the ultimate ironies of this period that many of the very people who had criticized Cipriani so fiercely in the pages of *The Beacon* were the first to adopt his style of politics when they entered the political arena. In his autobiography *Through a Maze of Colour*, Albert Gomes, editor of *The Beacon*, dismissed the protest politics of Captain Cipriani in the following terms:

> Although in the personal sense loud and angry, [his opposition] was in reality no more than a medium of ritual protest in that club-gathering of smug bureaucrats and gaudy sycophants.[16]

Gomes's comments on Cipriani provide a fitting epitaph to his own political career, which began shortly after the disturbances in 1937 and ended when he left Trinidad in 1962 on the eve of the island's independence from Britain. During this period he moved through all the same stages of promises, protest, compromise, and co-option into the ranks of the ruling class which distinguished Cipriani's career. Gomes has left us his own comment on his career in the words of Ernesto Montales, one of the autobiographical figures in his only published novel to date, *All Papa's Children*. Ernesto, like Gomes, is Portuguese, and enters politics as a "stowaway" when the winds of change take Trinidad out of the "political doldrums" in 1937. Looking back on his career, Ernesto muses:

> Think of all the impossible things I promised them to get their votes. And I really believed, at the time, that I would be able to do everything as promised. It's like that with ideals before they're tested.
>
> Think of the times I told them I stood for "the people," carried away by my own eloquence and sense of mission. I ask myself now, what the hell did it mean? And all those other woolly abstractions like "freedom from want" etc., borrowed from Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter-what did they mean? I suppose they rolled well on the tongue and made good rhetoric. And they did bring in the votes. Mine was a pretty impressive win.[17]

Gomes was not the only member of the *Beacon* group to betray earlier ideals. Adrian Cola Rienzi's career as a trade unionist has left him open to similar criticism; Mendes, though he never really forsook his socialist ideals was ultimately forced to abandon his attempts at becoming a novelist in order to support his family. He joined the Civil Service and rose to the

position of General Manager of the Port Services Department, a position which placed him repeatedly on the receiving end of attacks on the establishment by militant dock workers. With the two notable exceptions of C. L. R. James and Ralph de Boissière, few of the original *Beacon* group were able to sustain their early radicalism. In this respect the literary movement in Trinidad during the thirties differs little from contemporaneous intellectual movements thoughout the Western world. The success of the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the disillusionment with Western democracy which followed the First World War propelled a whole generation of Western intellectuals toward radical politics. The thirties have become known as the Red Decade, but of the intellectuals who became Marxists, socialists, and fellow travellers during this period, only the most committed survived the wave of disillusionment with the new ideology that followed the advent of Stalinism, the fiasco of the Spanish Civil War, and the creation of the Stalin-Hitler pact.

The Trinidad intellectuals of the 1930s were no exception to the rule, but the idealism with which they responded to the social upheavals and political changes which characterized their era has left us with a body of literature which marks an important turning point in the cultural history of the West Indies.

NOTES

1. "The Turbulent Thirties in Trinidad: An Interview with Alfred H. Mendes," ed. R. W. Sander, *World Literature Written in English*, 12, 1 (April, 1973), 67-68.
2. See C. L. Joseph,"The British West Indies Regiment: 1914-1918," *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 2 (May, 1971), 94-124.
3. C. L. R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Nelson, Lancs.: The author, 1932), pp. 33-34.
4. See Bukka Rennie, *The History of the Working Class in the 20th Century (1919-1956): The Trinidad and Tobago Experience* (Toronto and Trinidad: New Beginning Movement, 1973), p. 19.
5. Joseph, "The British West Indies Regiment," 120.
6. Social unrest was expected everywhere in the West Indies. Fitz A. Baptiste opens his pamphlet *The United States and West Indian Unrest: 1918-1939*, Working Paper No. 18 (Jamaica: U.W.I., Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1978) with a quotation from a report by the Acting American Consul in Port of Spain in late 1919: "There are serious indications from many directions that Trinidad, and perhaps the British West Indies, are on a social volcano . . . liable to burst into eruption at any time."
7. James, *Life of Cipriani*, p. 54.
8. C. L. R. James, *The Making of the Caribbean Peoples* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, 1968), p. 16.
9. Gordon Rohlehr, "The Development of the Calypso: 1900-1940" (Unpublished cyclostyled paper, 1972), pp. 27-28.

10. See Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969* (London: André Deutsch, 1970), pp. 348 and 352.
11. C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 31.
12. Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister* (London: André Deutsch, 1969), p. 31.
13. Arthur Calder-Marshall, *Glory Dead* (London: Michael Joseph, 1939), p. 277.
14. Rennie, *History of the Working Class*, pp. 60-61.
15. Baptiste, *The United States and West Indian Unrest*, p. 45.
16. Albert Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour* (Port of Spain: Key Caribbean Publications, 1974), p. 16.
17. Albert Gomes, *All Papa's Children* (Surrey: Cairi Publishing House, 1978), p. 99.

10. Merle Hodge, "Peeping Tom in the Nigger Yard," *Tapia*, 25 (Sunday, April 2, 1972), 11–12. This article is a review of the 1971 republication of *Minty Alley*.
11. Ibid., p. 11.
12. See ibid.
13. James, personal communication, January 24, 1979.
14. James interview, *Kas-Kas*, p. 33.
15. C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 149. Among James's studies in Marxist theory and practice are: *World Revolution 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937), *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950), *Modern Politics* (1960), *Marxism and the Intellectuals* (1962), and *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (1977).
16. *The Beacon*, 1, 5 (August, 1931), 10.
17. James, personal communication, January 5, 1979.
18. See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp. 397–399.
19. In this section of the chapter all page references in parentheses are to C. L. R. James, "The Black Jacobins," in *A Time . . . and a Season: 8 Caribbean Plays*, ed. Errol Hill (Trinidad: University of the West Indies, Extra-Mural Studies, 1976).
20. James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 25.
21. Ibid., p. 288.
22. See ibid., pp. 289–292.
23. Ibid., p. 371.
24. James, personal communication, January 26, 1979.
25. For a discussion of the literary quality of James's nonfictional writing, see F. M. Birbalsingh, "The Literary Achievement of C. L. R. James," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 19, 1 (1984), 108–121.
26. Several other works by James are important in this respect. They include literary criticism: *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (1953), *Wilson Harris: A Philosophical Approach* (1965); and historical works: *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938), *Party Politics in the West Indies* (1962).

CHAPTER 6

RALPH DE BOISSIÈRE: THE COMMITTED PARTICIPANT

Ralph de Boissière was born in Trinidad on October 6, 1907. His father, a solicitor, was a descendant of the unofficial colored line of a well-known French creole family. De Boissière's mother died of yellow fever three weeks after his birth and the author recalls a lonely, unhappy childhood in Trinidad, enlivened by occasional visits to Grenada, where his stepmother's parents lived. In the course of his education, at Tranquillity Boys Intermediate School and Queen's Royal College, de Boissière encountered the typical colonial syllabus:

> We learned English history, which seemed to consist mostly of England's military and naval conquests. In geography you had to know what was made in Sheffield and Birmingham. You were required to draw maps of England showing its principal towns and seaports.[1]

Music was de Boissière's first passion, especially the piano, and he dreamt of a career as a performer. When this failed to materialize, he turned to creative writing. To secure a livelihood, however, he underwent training as a typist/bookkeeper and worked in this capacity for various English and American firms until he left the island in 1947.

In the mid-1920s de Boissière was drawn into the literary group around Mendes and James, who encouraged him to write, and his first short stories were published in *Trinidad* and *The Beacon*. At around this time he became an ardent admirer of the work of such nineteenth-century Russian writers as Turgenev and Tolstoy. He felt an immediate affinity with the social situations which they described and came to the conclusion that "life

in colonial Trinidad was not at all unlike life in the towns and countryside of tsarist Russia."[2] He was to emulate the Russians' realistic style and social vision in his Caribbean novels, *Crown Jewel* (1952) and *Rum and Coca-Cola* (1956), but it was his first-hand experience of everyday life at all levels in Trinidad society that provided him with his raw material. For several years one of his jobs entailed the delivery of bakers' supplies all over Trinidad: "Every day found me in little shops and hovels and stinking alleys among Chinese, Indians, Blacks, Portuguese and mixtures of all the races."[3] When Trinidad's oilfield workers went on strike in 1937 and the island was engulfed in major social upheavals, de Boissière was not only a keen observer but subsequently became involved in radical trade unionism. He was especially attracted to the Marxist-oriented Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association, whose leaders included Bertie Percival, Clem Payne, Jim Barrette and Elma François.

De Boissière's political sympathies were anathema to his employers and led to a nine-month period of unemployment for him in 1939. During the commercial boom that followed the establishment of an American military base on the island during World War II he was again able to find a job, but by now it had become evident that a secure existence would not be possible in Trinidad, given the social conditions and his political views. In 1947 he took a six-month course in motor mechanics in Chicago, then migrated to Australia, where his family joined him. His first job was on the assembly line at General Motors in Melbourne, an experience which deepened his understanding of the working-class issues he was exploring in writing *Crown Jewel*, and which provided the subject matter for his third novel, *No Saddles For Kangaroos* (1964). In Australia de Boissière moved more and more to the left. He began to study Marxist literature and literary criticism, became a member of the Realist Writers Group, and finally joined the Communist Party in 1951, remaining a member until 1967. It was a left-wing publishing house, the Australasian Book Society, that published his novels—in fact *Crown Jewel* was its very first title—and both *Crown Jewel* and *Rum and Coca-Cola* appeared in translation in several East-bloc countries.[4] In 1955 he rewrote a section of *Rum and Coca-Cola* as a musical, which he called "Calypso Isle." He himself composed the songs and calypsos and played the part of Charlie the shoemaker in several successful performances of the show at the Melbourne New Theater. In 1957/1958 de Boissière went on a seven-month tour of China, with a brief visit to the Soviet Union. On his return to Australia he remembers feeling that he "had stepped, it seemed, from the future back into the present, which ought to be the past."[5] He nevertheless applied for Australian citizenship some years later and became an Australian citizen in 1969.

De Boissière is the type of writer who continuously rewrites his work: Both the 1981 republication of *Crown Jewel* and the 1984 edition of *Rum and Coca-Cola* differ significantly from the original 1950s editions, which

themselves were developed in a long process of rewriting. In the case of *Crown Jewel* this process goes back as far as 1935. De Boissière has rationalized the continuous changes with the remark, "My life was my novel, and the novel my life."[6] He is still working on a novel he began in the early 1970s entitled *Homeless in Paradise*, which is set in Australia and Trinidad. To refresh his memory of the Caribbean he visited Trinidad in 1976—assisted by a travel and research grant from the Australian Literature Board—and spent several months there.

In his early short stories, de Boissière followed the trend set by Mendes and James, and tried to reproduce the customs, speech, and unique cultural features of the lower classes as a means of registering his dissatisfaction with the culture of the middle class, to which he belonged. For example, in "A Trip to Town," a short story which was published in *Trinidad*, he attempts to recreate the initial response of a youth from South Trinidad to the glamor of Port of Spain city life and the excitement of Carnival:

> An' tailors, now! Boy, de second day—you ain' know somet'ing?—I dress up in tailor! . . . I put on waistcoat and gloves an' mas', and I take me tape measure an' meself an' another feller we goin' all about measurin' pipple an' geurls an' enjoyin' we self. . . . An' all de time de bands and dem passin' and playin' dey music, and if you see colours! De second day I join a band. I dress up in millionaire, boy, an' I pick up me little geurl and I dancin' wid she, and de white pipple lookin' on an' clappin' dey hands.[7]

The country youth thinks at this point that the first nineteen years of his life have been wasted "digging drains in the cocoa fields, or picking pods . . . felling trees in the hot sun . . . digging cassava and yam,"[8] until he is robbed of his money by some strangers in the city and involved in a fight. Helped by two women, he eventually makes his way to his aunt's house. After some initial difficulties he manages to find a job and immediately begins "to put by every cent for a six-dollar mask, a costume, and the joy of being primitive in the streets on the two days of Carnival."[9]

Clifford Sealy in "A Note on Ralph de Boissière," has drawn attention to two other short stories by de Boissière in the early magazines which touch on deeper issues involving the lower class that are more fully developed in his novels.[10] Both "The Woman on the Pavement" and "Miss Winter" tentatively explore the author's own social predicament as a near-white member of the colored middle class. The introspection of the protagonists in both stories, and their identification of some of the negative attitudes presented in the stories as their own, suggest a sense of self-recognition on the author's part that is missing in some of the other *Beacon* group short stories which satirize middle-class attitudes. In "Miss Winter," Alex Bentley's infatuation with the pretty, fair, Gerry Winter comes to an end when he gets an insight into her attitude toward blacks. During a fishing expe-

dition, one of Alex's friends playfully rocks their boat while they are buying bait from some black fishermen, causing Gerry to fall overboard in an undignified manner:

> The fishermen's sense of humour, as with most negroes, was strong, and their outlook being simple, their expression of it was naturally cruel. They burst into laughter that became more loud and vulgar as it was given rein. . . .
>
> Gerry's eyes were flashing, her cheeks were pink. "You niggers; you damned stinking niggers! What are you laughing at?" She waved an oar at them. "Alex, row home!" she commanded.[11]

Alex does as he is bid, but the narrator comments that he "felt that he had looked into her soul."

In "The Woman on the Pavement," two incidents are contrasted. The first involves a middle-class gentleman who is run over by a cyclist and is immediately given assistance by nearby shop owners and passers-by. In the second, a black peasant woman goes into a fit on the pavement and everyone looks on passively, including Mr. Edgehill, the gentlemen involved in the first incident. When finally some lower-class people take charge of the woman, Mr. Edgehill feels ashamed: "He knew that this was what he should have done, but what he had been unable to do, because of the people looking on, people of the middle classes like himself."[12] Clifford Sealy has pointed to the crisis of conscience and the quest for identity which are the underlying themes of both stories, and which must both have been especially painful for sensitive members of the colored middle class.[13] Being neither black nor white, the colored person was alienated from both sections of Trinidad society. Culturally and socially he hankered after European values, only to discover that he was never fully accepted within the white community. The other alternative of identification with the masses, however, involved breaking through the suspicions held by the black working class about the sincerity of his intentions. More drastic than this, it meant risking rejection by the rest of the colored population and abandoning his class.

It is against this background that Ralph de Boissière's encounter with the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association has to be seen. Already disillusioned with the racial and social attitudes of his class, the NWA provided him with an ideological perspective from which he could analyze the society's ills, and pointed to a solution for his personal crisis. From a mere observer and recorder of lower-class life, he became a committed participant in the working-class struggle during the post-1935 period. He realized that in order to portray this class seriously he would have to engage in its struggle. By the time of the 1937 social upheavals, he was equipped to

interpret these events in what Clifford Sealy has described as Trinidad's "most important political novel . . . the fundamental work of fiction in our society."[14] *Crown Jewel* and its sequel *Rum and Coca-Cola* possess the scope and canvas that Mendes had continually aimed for but could never achieve. They dramatize the ten crucial years in Trinidad's history, 1935–1945, during which the island's working-class movement was formed. In order to achieve a vast social and historical canvas and to suggest the continuous sweep of political events, de Boissière builds up a series of interlocking life histories which develop and reiterate specific motifs that he considers central to his ideological perspective. Thus the patterns of exploitation during the war, for example, are given a personal dimension within the patterns of experiences which the major and minor characters undergo, and each personal choice provides a further permutation of the types of alternatives open to the individual within the society portrayed. Our attention is constantly being shifted from one character to another; from an aspect of the political crisis to a corresponding aspect of an individual's crisis.

De Boissière's semiautobiographical figure André de Coudray is one of the characters who receive the fullest treatment in *Crown Jewel*. We follow his progress from an insecure, guilt-ridden member of the colored middle class to an observer of and finally a participant in the working-class movement. Following an analogous line of development but moving away from committed participation is the character of Joe Elias, while the life of Cassie, the timid barrack-yarder and domestic servant, is documented as she develops into a politically aware and self-assertive member of the working-class movement. The careers of André and Cassie represent the intellectual and political awakening among all sectors of Trinidad society during the late 1930s, while the career of Joe Elias points to the possible ways in which the new awareness could be diverted to opportunistic ends. In *Rum and Coca-Cola* we continue to follow André's and Cassie's development, but two new major characters, Mopsy and Indra Goodman, are introduced. They bear the full brunt of the author's embodiment of the theme of corruption and disintegration which follows the American invasion of Trinidad society.

André's quest for identity is introduced early in *Crown Jewel*:

> The de Coudrays belonged to one of those numerous cliques of island "society." André had been unable to find in this set any but people of limited understanding and petty social ambitions. This had obliged him to look among the "lower classes" for men and women who could match his own interest in life and the arts. He had found many such among Joe's friends, who were almost all Negroes. On the one hand, he knew that to mix with black workers meant to suffer economic damnation. On the other hand he knew that to mix only with his set meant that intellectually, spiritually, morally, he would stifle. André had not yet made up his mind which side to take. (p. 3)[15]

On the autobiographical level, André's intellectual involvement with people outside his class is a clear reconstruction of the social interaction within the original *Beacon* group, transposed in time to the years immediately preceding the labor unrest of the late 1930s. The protagonist's ambivalence, his secret fear of getting mixed up with people outside his social and racial group, are clearly expressed. Like Haynes in James's *Minty Alley*, André in spite of his social inhibitions feels the need to break out of the stifling atmosphere of his own class. However, whereas Haynes, after his encounter with the barrack-yarders, returns to his middle-class environment a bit wiser, a bit more liberated from the values of his own class, André's quest is a journey of no return.

For more than half of the novel André remains undecided and plagued by contradictory feelings. He is particularly conscious of his family history and the carefully suppressed knowledge that one of his ancestors was a black slave. He is well aware that, though to the non–West Indian he seems white, to the sharp eye of the shade-conscious Trinidadian the fact that he is colored is easily apparent, and he is merely tolerated in local white society. His association with blacks, by emphasizing this unspoken "disability," could tip the social scales against him and expose him to social ostracism which, as a colonial, he dreads. As the narrator informs us:

> Having lived since childhood in an atmosphere of slavish respect for the English, André found it hard to consider himself their equal. Even though in recent years he had been mixing in wider circles and drawing away from the family . . . his attitude to the English had little changed. He felt hatred of them because they looked down on him; but in his secret heart he looked up to them, feared them, and despised himself for it. (p. 133)

The dilemma that André faces in his social and political choices is dramatized in the novel by his attraction to two women who come from different ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic sectors of the community. Gwenneth Osborne is the daughter of an expatriate English judge, and Elena Henriques is the colored daughter of a dressmaker of Venezuelan descent. Both women are part of the network of major and minor characters in the novel whose contrasting developments and interlapping relationships give the novel coherence and structure. André gets to know Elena through her uncle, Popito Luna, who is a clerk at the business-place where André also works. Elena's mother can barely make a living from her work and is constantly harassed by bailiffs and debt-collectors. Though she has managed to preserve herself and her daughter from the worst consequences of poverty, her status is only slightly higher than that of a barrack-yarder. Her only ambition is that her daughter will be able to escape from the poverty and sordidness of their present life and she saves every penny she earns to give her child a secondary education. The attractive, near-white André presents

the same temptation to Elena to compromise her standards and ruin her chances of success as the elegant prestigious Gwenneth presents to André to compromise his principles and succumb to his family's slavish admiration of all things English, for although he is strongly attracted to Elena because of her youth, prettiness and intelligence, his deeply engrained prejudices make it impossible for him to see her in a more serious light than Haynes in *Minty Alley* saw Maisie, or Joe da Costa in *Pitch Lake* saw Stella:

> As they strolled along the Pitch Walk André passed several people he knew, in motor cars. They looked at the young couple curiously—André de Coudray with a coloured girl. André avoided their eyes and while he hated himself for it, he could not help feeling relieved when at last they reached her home. (pp. 144–145)

After this experience he "understood it was impossible to uproot himself from his class, go into Elena's and make her friends his" (p. 152), but this does not immediately stop him from monopolizing her attentions and engaging her affections.

As with Joe de Costa in *Pitch Lake*, it is André's new attraction to a wealthy and socially acceptable girl that eventually forces him to cut ties with Elena. André's relationship with Gwenneth acts as a catalyst in his personal and political development. At first it alienates him completely from the friends he has made among the lower classes, and he attains the pinnacle of his family's ambitions when it becomes apparent that Gwenneth is in love with him and a marriage seems to be imminent. However, on account of his dubious racial background he is considered *persona non grata* by Gwenneth's parents. Apart from giving in to family pressure, Gwenneth is essentially a flirt who has been attracted to André because of her bohemian and exotic fascination with creole men. André gets his first shock when, like Alex Bentley in the short story "Miss Winter," he discovers the English girl's deep-seated racial prejudices towards black people. When, in recounting to André a story of their former garden boy who she claims had tried to attack her, she refers to the boy as a "nigger," the narrator comments that "the word hit André like a lash" (p. 218). It is his rejection by Gwenneth's English family that gives André the push he needs to overcome his fascination with the English elite. In keeping with his parallel development of personal and political themes, de Boissière makes a direct connection between André's encounter with the Osborne family and his increasingly critical perspective on the colonial establishment:

> During Gwenneth's absence André had written for Joe's magazine an article on the City Council. He took up the view that certain Government circles resented the existence of the Council as a vestige of people's self-rule and felt its authority an affront to them; that English residents resented control of their water, sewerage and streets by a black shoemaker, a singer of calypsoes, an Indian of "doubtful

reputation" and sundry black members of the Workers' Party; and that this attitude was responsible for the everlasting tirades in the capitalist press against the Council as well as the niggardliness of the Government grant to municipal funds. André had written this article at the time when he saw with what ease important English officials were drawing Gwenneth away from him into their closed and august social circle. (p. 219)

Even after writing this article, André's break with Gwenneth is not complete. He immediately regrets having submitted it but does not have the courage to ask the editor, Joe Elias, to let him have it back. The publication of this article finally ruins his chances with Gwenneth and her family, and prompts a decisive turning point in André's political development. He refuses to become a strikebreaker during a bakers' strike organized by the Workers' Welfare. The change takes even André's boss unaware and again the author links it directly to his personal experiences:

[André's boss] was incapable of understanding André's feelings of humiliation over that visit to the Osbornes. He could not sense André's wounded pride, his desperate need to salvage the integrity he felt he had sullied. It was impossible for him to believe that the barrier built up by birth and breeding between André and the workers had been breached, and that André had "come out of his shell" at last. (pp. 251–252)

De Boissière's insistence on the importance of small, even trivial personal experiences in strengthening the political resolve of his characters underscores his presentation of a progressive, socialist-oriented ideological position as the natural response of a sensitive and thoughtful person to the incidents and experiences which he encounters on a day-to-day basis, rather than a purely cerebral form of assent to an interesting but impractical ideology.

In the same way that André's political involvement comes as the result of personal experiences, his new personal relationships are now influenced by his new political awareness. On business trips to South Trinidad he becomes friendly with the oil-belt labor leader Ben Le Maître. Le Maître is at first puzzled by André's sympathetic political views and becomes suspicious of his motives when he observes that André has struck up a friendship with a young black schoolteacher who "despite the fact that she has received a classical education . . . is with the workers" (p. 340). When Le Maître challenges him one day about his relations with the establishment and the Country Club set back in Port of Spain, André is able to give him a simple and truthful answer:

Look here: that set don't want me. My own coloured set want me only on certain terms. Neither have anything to offer me. And how can one come in contact with the masses without understanding that they have a right to our leisure and luxury, which rests on their backs? (p. 340)

The assurance and conviction with which André is able to satisfy Le Maître's doubts about his interest in the young schoolteacher and the sincerity of his social transformation contrast sharply with his earlier inability to admit even to himself the true nature of his intentions towards Elena and his narrow social aspirations.

Through his friendship with Betsy Solomon, the schoolteacher, André is able to rediscover his relationship with Elena. By opting to marry Elena, André puts everything on the line as far as his family and future are concerned. His father disinherits him and expels him from the family home; Le Maître's predictions about the consequences of aligning himself with the working class begin to come true: "They will hate you for life. They will hound you down. They will try to take your job from you. If you are sincere, you are forever an outcast" (p. 340). For André, however, the act has a positive significance as he realizes: "Only now do I dare to acknowledge their blood is mine. *These* are my people! I want to live, I want to help them fight for the new life they want . . . !" (p. 431). André's marriage underlies the extent to which he has thrown in his lot on the side of the workers rather than the establishment. It contrasts sharply with the attitude of Manny Camacho, one of the young lions of the intellectual circle around Joe Elias's magazine. Manny was a civil servant whose support for the bakers' strike had been dramatic and vociferous within the privacy of the group where he had declared, "Sooner or later we will have to man the barricades! . . . It will come to that. Some of us will die, but we will not run when the police bring their rifles" (p. 202). The political adventurism of this armchair revolutionary is deftly satirized when he is caught up in the confusion of the street battle in San Fernando. Instead of "manning the barricades," he runs for dear life and catches the first train back to Port of Spain.

Joe Elias's development is diametrically opposed to that of André, though at first their actions seem to spring from identical motives and move along similar lines: Like André, Joe feels stifled by his limited social sphere, but he sees alignment with the working class as a chance to achieve fame rather than an opportunity for involvement.

He was the Trinidad-born son of a Syrian merchant, and therefore socially of little account. But he felt that with his intellectual gifts and his personality he should be playing a dominating role in the political life of the island instead of wasting his time in Dollard's lumber yard. (p. 2)

De Boissière prepares the reader from early in the novel for Joe's opportunistic relationship with the Workers' Welfare so as to gain support for his

candidacy as a member of the City Council. In his political wranglings with André and the rest of the circle, for instance, we are told that "today he defended the working-class. Tomorrow he scorned the working-class and defended Nietzsche" (p. 6). Joe's obsessive preoccupation with leaving his mark on the world propels him further into his career as an opportunist politician when he inherits the family business after his father's death, and another of Le Maître's insights into human nature is proved correct: As he had once said of Joe, "people like him turn against the workers and support their masters when any real struggles arise" (p. 101). Joe does not succeed in founding his projected Socialist Party, and instead opts for a career in local politics, feeling "courageous in attacking the workers" and asserting "that what was required to pull the island out of the bog of acute depression was not the ascendancy of workers over employers, but reasonable co-operation" (pp. 400–401).

The development of both Joe and André is paralleled, and in a sense overshadowed, by the author's treatment of Cassie, who is Judge Osborne's maid at the beginning of the novel and lives in a barrack-yard next door to the Henriques family. In the course of the novel she develops into one of the most militant members of the Workers' Welfare and finally marries Le Maître. Their marriage is as symbolic as that of André and Elena and emphasizes the degree to which the radical politicization of the working class embraced both its male and female members. As suggested in previous chapters, Cassie is the direct descendant of characters such as Maisie in *Minty Alley* and Ethelrida in *Black Fauns*. Like them she is a product of the world of the barrack-yard. Both her father, an oilfield worker, and her mother have died, and she is struggling to make a livelihood, when she is first introduced:

> Cassie had to live, found it impossible to do so on eight dollars a month. Like all young girls she dreamt of love, romance, a measure of security. Along came a policeman who had been a playmate of hers. The importance of a policeman, the uniform, appealed to her. Soon he was keeping her, providing her with furniture on the installment plan. But now he had tired of her. Two weeks ago he had beaten her. (pp. 47–48)

Like her sisters in the short stories, she also has access to a typical *confidante* figure—in this case, the cook at Judge Osborne's house—who advises her to keep her policeman faithful "by putting certain things in his food" (p. 104). However, Cassie belongs to the Shango cult and instead asks the *Orisha*—Shango, Damballa and Ogoun—for help, when the policeman abandons her and all her personal possessions are confiscated by the bailiff because of her arrears on the rent. Soon afterwards Elena's uncle Popito Luna takes an interest in her, and a relationship develops between them that becomes much more serious than the usual kept woman/keeper arrangement. For one thing, Popito, who has become a member of the Workers' Welfare, introduces her to this organization. Although she displays the typical barrack-yard cynicism about any organization which claims to have the welfare of her class at heart, she participates in their activities because they seem to be of importance to Popito. Once involved however, her political awareness develops rapidly and her relationship with Popito becomes that of an equal partner. She even takes him to task for his involvement in opium smuggling, to which he turns after being fired from his job as a clerk because of his militant attitude.

> Popi . . . it's not honest labour, man. If it is opium, he not smokin' it himself. It's you helpin' to ruin the lives of Chinee workers. How you could say you fightin' for workers and yet you doin' this thing to them? . . . Get a next job, Popi, Uh beg you! (p. 125)

Popito is also severely admonished by Le Maître and soon abandons his anti–working-class activities, but the police are already on his trail.

Once Cassie has overcome her initial cynicism about the movement, she begins to display an intuitive sense for justice as far as working-class issues are concerned. Her rapid political development is depicted within the context of her personal experiences and as reactions to specific events. Like André, she does not come to her final position merely on account of propaganda that she reads or hears, but because she suffers personal injustices. In keeping with de Boissière's technique of placing his characters in situations typically encountered by members of a certain class, Cassie's hardships are of a much more devastating and violent nature than those André has to face. She is arrested and beaten by a police detective, Duke, in an attempt to make her reveal details of Popito's former opium-smuggling activities, with the result that she loses her unborn child. Later she witnesses the same detective beat Popito to death after they have been together to the *Orisha* to invoke their aid on Popito's behalf. This shatters her belief in the power of the *Orisha* and evokes her own resources and political understanding in the fight against oppression. She becomes one of the most dedicated members of the Workers' Welfare and in particular is able to rally the support of other women for the movement. Her speeches are among the best presented in the novel and are frequently more effective in raising support at public meetings than those of the Welfare's stalwarts, Percy French, Clem Payne and even Le Maître himself. One example of her addresses will have to suffice:

> Some of you 'fraid to join the Workers' Welfare, others feel it have no sense in that, you believe Indian and nigger kean't help one another to make life good for all of us. I say, comrades, put that foolish idea out of you' minds. You have chil-

dren. They will grow up naked, their belly big, their navel swell up. Those who don't go to jail and get the "cat" will have a fight to make eight or nine cents an hour to feed more children to grow up and get the "cat." You never try to work out hummuch servants gettin', but I could tell you. It's three cents an hour. Who that benefitin'? It ain't no benefit to you an' those children. The benefit is for the capitalists. Plenty children, cheap labour! If some dead, what they have to do with that? Plenty more comin' out you' belly. We have to fight for trade unions, fight for higher wages, shorter hours—yes, less work for more money! Make them pay us! You ever see white people children with swell-up belly and big navel, and goin' about naked? No! Our wages payin' to keep them from that. (p. 261)

Cassie's graphic images and grim sarcasm recall the repartee of the barrack-yard characters of the short stories, but instead of using it to score cheap points against a rival in the yard, she puts all the passion and pragmatic wisdom of the yard to the service of the political struggle of her class.

During the deliberations over one of the first strikes in the oilfields, Cassie sides with the most militant members of the movement for immediate action against Le Maître's more cautious approach, and the dramatic tensions between these two strong characters are highlighted. The growth of the relationship between Cassie and Le Maître provides some of the most human, moving passages in *Crown Jewel*. Le Maître, we are told, had been married before, but had lost his wife and children in a typhoid epidemic. Since then he has remained single and unattached because he feels that a married worker "loses all his militancy." As he recalls, "I was married for a short while, and all I could think about was how not to offend the boss, and how many times a night I could have my wife" (p. 78). It is Cassie who breaks down this almost puritanical inflexibility. Initially Le Maître regards Cassie as a fellow worker and comrade, but he begins to appreciate her womanly qualities through a series of shared experiences, especially those which take place during a gruelling hunger march from the southern part of the island to Port of Spain. Their mutual respect for each other turns into a deep feeling of shared emotional need. Perhaps de Boissière's greatest achievement in presenting this relationship is the way in which he avoids using Cassie as the traditional feminine foil to expose Le Maître's human weakness and then undermine his devotion to the cause. The fact that Cassie, in spite of her limited education, is his intellectual equal in matters concerning the struggle of the working class, means that Le Maître can show his Achilles heel without fear of losing the battle. The trust within their relationship is well captured in this exchange:

"Cassie, I wouldn't confess this to anyone but you, but sometimes I wonder if we are benefiting in any way at all from this struggle. When I see how frightened so many of us are, how our spirits are crushed, I wonder what is the good. That is the most terrible thing, that our spirits are crushed!"

"What you sayin', man-hush! Nigger people not so. I never see people wid so much fight as now. It's no time to old talk so. If we don't live to see a change, our children will see it."

"Yours and mine?" he asked softly.

"Eh-eh! I didn't say so, nuh?" She laughed. "Well, I never! . . . Look the moon," she added, breaking off, a note of joy coming into her voice. (p. 354)

Cassie's strength and optimism are shown again at the end of the novel when Le Maître, in hiding from the police after the upheavals in the oil belt, becomes depressed at the prospect of being hunted and trapped and feels like giving up. Cassie merely responds, "You kean't give up! . . . It's to you the workers lookin'. Who else they have to teach them?" (p. 408). By this time she is married to Le Maître, and when he is forced to go underground, she takes over the leadership of the march into the center of San Fernando. Cassie is also involved in the killing of the detective Duke, the symbol of all the oppression and injustice in the island. In the 1981 revised edition of *Crown Jewel*, de Boissière has taken pains to reinforce the symbolism of Duke's death which occurs when he is drenched in kerosene oil and set alight. In the 1952 version of the text, which has been used throughout this discussion, Cassie's involvement in the act is implied. The reader is tempted to see the action as one of personal revenge, however justifiable, for the murder of her former husband and her unborn child. In the new version the initiative is taken out of Cassie's hands and Duke's death becomes a purely symbolic event of poetic justice.

Cassie's development from a kept, barrack-yard woman to a liberated and liberating working-class leader constitutes a major departure in de Boissière's work from the earlier yard literature of such *Beacon* writers as Alfred Mendes and C. L .R. James. This departure is also apparent in de Boissière's treatment of other aspects of lower-class life and customs. In particular, the author of *Crown Jewel* does not share the earlier writers' occasional tendency to romanticize certain aspects of the barrack-yard environment of their uncritical attitude to all folk beliefs. His description of the barrack-yard is closer to that contained in James Cummings's article discussed in chapter 2. Towards the beginning of the novel, Popito goes to visit an acquaintance who lives in a yard "struggling to feed a family of eight on five dollars a week." At this stage Popito has a job as a clerk and as a member of the upper strata of the lower class is unaccustomed to seeing the dire poverty he encounters:

The barrack-yard in which Jacob lived was in Nelson Street. Popito went through a narrow passage between two walls. It was dark and stank of urine. At the end was the yard. Dirty shed-like structures divided into dens bordered three sides of the yard. The doors of the dens were open. Ragged bits of curtain guarded the dark barrenness of each from the gaze of the sun. Two women were washing clothes outside their doorsteps. A third was heating irons on a coal-pot. Each of them was

singing a different hymn in a dreary voice as she went about her work. The yard itself was barren as an old hag. Not a blade of grass sprouted. Some boulders, whitened by long use, were heaped about its middle. This was the bleach. On it a tattered pair of khaki pants spread its legs obscenely. Four men were silently playing cards in that part of the yard which the nine o'clock sun was not yet roasting. The stench, the overcrowding, the poverty of the dwellers in the yard oppressed Popito. Involuntarily he looked up at the breadfruit tree near the gamblers. Laden with green leaves and fruit bigger than cannon balls, it towered majestically into the hot sky. It was a symbol of that healthy and normal life that no one in the yard but itself enjoyed. "How the deuce did I get here?" it seemed to Popito to say. But he knew that many a day its fruit had given strength and courage to some empty-bellied worker. (pp. 49–50)

The reader of "Afternoon in Trinidad" or "Triumph" will easily recognize the physical setting of the yard, the arrangement of the rooms and the inevitable bleaching stones. However, these early barrack-yard stories will hardly have provided him with the overwhelming squalor of the total scene, and the lively and exotic kept women who give color to the drab surroundings in the barrack-yard stories are also absent. De Boissière portrays barrack-yard women working and singing in "a dreary voice," and the men "silently" playing cards. The visitor to the yard feels as oppressed by the environment as its inhabitants.

In *Crown Jewel*, the barrack-yarders' communal spirit, solidarity, and cultural resilience are depicted when they are engaged in political action. On such occasions de Boissière, as much as any of the barrack-yard writers, is capable of controlling the nuances of Trinidad lower-class language and of catching the wit and humor it expresses. One of the central political events in the novel before the actual upheavals in the oilfields is the hunger march organized by the Workers' Welfare. The dramatization of this arduous undertaking is effectively carried through, and calls to mind two similar marches in political novels by two African writers: Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*. The repartee of the marchers as they trudge through the gathering darkness gives a good example of de Boissière's success in recapturing the spirit of the occasion.

They left Claxton Bay at eight. Le Maître headed the column. French walked in its rear. On either side staunch comrades hemmed in the womenfolk, and the men who limped morally or physically, and halted the column for the stragglers.

"Hold up, Frederick!"

"Frank, ohi! Hold that, boy."

"What happen, flat tyre?"

"No, we stop for passengers."

"Right-o. All-you in front! Conductor say hold up."

"Well, B'Christ! This is the longest free ride I ever get. Quite from Fyzabad and I ehn't pay a cent."

"Who the hell legs so long in front there?"

Cheerful voices called to one another, halting the column; and then called out still more cheerfully, urging it forward.

"Walk like tourists! Watch the scenery. All-you ever see this part-a you' country yet?"

"In trut', i's no difference. Tourists look at scenery t'rough dark glasses, we look at it t'rough dark night."

"All-you start off bold to walk to town, as if you expect to take a taxi back home," a thin wag of a fellow said. (pp. 301–302)

Elsewhere, de Boissière draws attention to another folk custom, hardly ever mentioned in the barrack-yard stories, which has strong, positive associations. This is the *sou-sou* or communal purse, often utilized as a form of savings in the yard. Each member contributes a certain sum or "hand" every month and all contributors take turns at collecting the whole amount. The system provides evidence of a strong sense of communal responsibility and trust, as well as thrift. In the novel Elena's mother is able to use her "sou-sou hand . . . [to] repair the damages to respectability caused by time or the bailiff, buying clothes . . . or some piece of furniture to replace what had been seized" (p. 18).

De Boissière also deals with aspects of folk belief and superstition, some of which have been mentioned in the discussion of Cassie. However, he approaches these beliefs from a radical political perspective, and hence can avoid being trapped in the peculiar contradiction of other members of the *Beacon* group: on the one hand a rabid antiecclesiastical stance, seen especially in their rejection of popish superstition, and on the other a sympathetic treatment of African-derived religious beliefs. This is not to say that de Boissière does not treat the local beliefs with sympathy and careful attention to accurate detail. His description of the Shango ceremony at which Cassie is ridden by one of the *Orisha* is as powerful as any description of possession in French or English Caribbean literature. However, he implies that when such beliefs are used to compensate for social inequalities, they can be as potentially dangerous an opiate to the masses as the well-organized religions of the capitalist world.

When considering *Crown Jewel* as a dramatization of Trinidad history between 1935 and 1937, it is important to note that de Boissière in a brief "epic" introduction entitled "The Background" places these turbulent years in the context of the preceding four hundred and fifty years of discovery and colonization by the French, Spanish, and English. He highlights the claims of the imported non-European laborers to the land for which they had slaved. De Boissière's introduction takes us up to the year 1935 when

historical background to the events in the novel prepares the reader for the close correspondence between actual events and the fictional situations depicted. De Boissière has agreed that the novel is "a true social history of the period," but stipulates that it is "not a historical record of events."

> The events happened, but not necessarily in just that way or at just that time. Young people, not having lived in that time, will be apt to think of the book as a true historical record of events. Well, it won't do them any harm.[16]

Fiction, as de Boissière implies, has its own methods of structuring, selecting, and rearranging reality: In the absence of written historical accounts of the 1937 upheavals at the time that the novel was written, de Boissière had to rely on what he "saw and felt and was told." It is interesting to note, for example, how de Boissière got the idea of involving Cassie in the burning of Detective Duke. Having much later read Bukka Rennie's account of the event in *The History of the Working-Class in the 20th Century (1919–1956): The Trinidad and Tobago Experience*, he comments:

> Rennie says someone dropped a lighted lantern on Charlie King as he lay crippled on the ground. On the other hand a man told me . . . that a woman dashed into the shop (not a house) and demanded kerosene. It doesn't really matter which version is right. The main thing was the hatred of the people for King and what he represented.[17]

De Boissière does not alter the basic event that a police detective was burnt to death during the upheavals, but as a writer of fiction he invests the event with a particular significance within the development of his fictional situation and fictional characters. Except for one named character, Clem Payne, who in real life was not present during the Trinidad disturbances but was indirectly responsible for sparking off similar events in Barbados, de Boissière has changed the names of all recognizable historical characters. Through their descriptions and actions however, at least two major political figures can be identified. One is Captain Cipriani, whose career as a labor leader has been referred to, and on whom de Boissière's fictional labor leader Maurice Boisson is closely modelled. The other is Albert Gomes, whose political beginnings are satirized in the description of the Syrian magazine editor, Joe Elias.

The Workers' Welfare, Le Maître, and Cassie have a much more complicated and interesting relationship to the actual events of the 1930s. The Workers' Welfare is apparently based on the Negro Welfare Association which has been described in the background chapter and which was politically active in the north of Trinidad. However, in the novel the range of the association's activities is extended to include Southern Trinidad as well. This purely fictional decision allows de Boissière to avoid dealing with the historical fact of the existence in the South of Butler's British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party, which had a wider mass support than the NWA but a relatively limited ideological framework, differences that would only have unnecessarily complicated de Boissière's attempts to suggest the grand sweep of events. However, in responding to questions about these parallels de Boissière does not acknowledge any clear debt to the actual leaders of either of the two historical parties in his creation of Le Maître, in spite of the numerous incidental details of his presentation of the labor leader which seem to tally with the lives of Jim Barrette and Uriah Butler. De Boissière insists that "Le Maître came out of two trade unionists, men who supported socialism, who had no connection with the strike and were never in the South."[18] Cassie, however, is undoubtedly the author's own creation but, paradoxically, the development of her character and political ideas is so convincingly motivated that she gives us a real notion of what the militant working-class women who took part in the 1937 uprising must have been like, and indeed her story calls to mind the documented history of the Trinidad washerwoman and labor leader, Elma François. De Boissière seems not to have known Elma François or to have heard her speak, a circumstance which makes his portrayal of Cassie all the more convincing. Perhaps *Crown Jewel* may well become, as de Boissière has suggested, for "young people, not having lived in that time . . . a true historical record of events"—events which to date have not received adequate historical treatment.

Crown Jewel does not merely reconstruct Trinidad history during the late 1930s: It interprets this history from a militant, working-class perspective. Ralph de Boissière's involvement with the Negro Welfare Association provided him with the first ideological tools to evaluate the nature of social and economic contradictions in colonial society. However, in the author's note to *Crown Jewel*, de Boissière has pointed out that he only came to appreciate the full significance of the 1937 upheavals after he left Trinidad for Australia; as he recalls:

> I worked for a year at the biggest motor manufacturing plant in Melbourne. . . . To remain unaffected by the struggles of the militant Australian workers was impossible. These struggles profoundly affected my outlook, causing me to re-write *Crown Jewel* and make it a better, truer picture of my country and my people.[19]

De Boissière's progression from an ideological supporter of the working-class movement in Trinidad to an actual worker in Australia sharpened his understanding of working-class aspirations and characters. The experience also gave him an insight into the nature of the class struggle in a more

advanced capitalist system. In the absence of copies of the earlier versions of de Boissière's *Crown Jewel* manuscript, one has only the author's words to rely on for a description of the way that each of these changes affected his work. However, they suggest a familiar pattern: The very first version, according to de Boissière, was written in Trinidad before the 1937 upheavals and seems to have focussed almost exclusively on André's quest for social and racial identity in purely personal terms. "It included the André-Elena-Gwenneth triangle but in a less developed form. It was not yet linked to the basic social realities that came to light in the second version."[20] The second version, which was completed in 1944, apparently linked André's story with that of Cassie and Le Maître against the background of the sociopolitical developments in Trinidad between 1935 and 1937. The third and fourth revisions to the novel in Australia produced a clearer presentation and development of these two major working-class figures.

In this respect it is important to note that by the third revision (the 1952 edition) de Boissière had begun to employ a technique of writing which the Marxist critic Georg Lukács has called "critical realism." This technique is distinguished from social realism by its commitment to a progressive political perspective, and is distinct from socialist realism because of the author's membership of a class-bound society in the capitalist world, which makes it necessary for him to depict reality in terms of class conflict.[21] De Boissière refers to one aspect of critical realism when he says, "As far as I am concerned, a novel should be not only about what people *are* but what they *can be*."[22] The traditional social realist contents himself with minutely observing and recording characters and events from a seemingly neutral or at most sympathetic perspective: In the context of early Trinidad literature, the short stories and novels of both C. L. R. James and Alfred H. Mendes are examples of this approach. The critical realist, because of his forward-looking and ultimately optimistic perspective, perceives of characters and events as meaningful in terms of underlying movements towards a specific goal. Although his work is as strongly based on objective reality as that of the social realist, the critical realist is frequently able to transcend given aspects of reality by drawing attention to their inherent potentialities. This, for example, would explain why de Boissière did not base his working-class leader Ben Le Maître on either Jim Barrette, the leader of Trinidad's Negro Welfare Association, or Uriah Butler, the leader of the British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party. Instead he creates a figure that draws on the positive potential of both Butler and Barrette: on Butler's mass leadership and confrontation with the establishment, and Barrette's Marxist ideology and program of workers' education.[23]

In *Rum and Coca-Cola*, Ralph de Boissière was able to sustain the broad spectrum of *Crown Jewel*. As a sequel to the first novel it focusses on the

period immediately following the 1937 upheavals and depicts the changes that Trinidad society underwent during the Second World War when the island was overrun with American troops posted to the military bases at Chaguaramas and Waller Field. De Boissière had originally intended to call his novel "The Invaders," but the present title is taken from a calypso by Lord Invader which was made popular in America by the Andrews Sisters in the 1940s:

> Rum and Coca Cola
> Way down Point Cumana
> Both mother and daughter
> Working for the Yankee dollar.[24]

The calypso hints at some of the more dubious methods by which Trinidad society earned its American dollars. The building of the American bases required the use of local labor and temporarily eased the unemployment problems of the 1930s, bringing with it a degree of prosperity never witnessed before for the workers, contractors and prostitutes of the island. Like the calypsonian, de Boissière examines the positive and negative effects of this sudden prosperity and the means through which it is achieved, symbolized in the image of the local rum, diluted but made effervescent by the addition of the all-American commercial soft drink, Coca-Cola. Paradoxically de Boissière makes use of a member of the island's old elite class, Henri de Coudray, to voice his criticisms of the effect that the new order had on the lower classes, which extended as far as the calypso tents, formerly one of the most crucial sources of support for the militant working-class struggle in the 1930s. Henri de Coudray, André's father, describes the changes he observes:

> Almost every night the new [American] neighbours had some nigger in to make an unseemly racket singing calypsoes. "And what calypsoes!" Mr. de Coudray once remarked. "All slavishly praising the Americans." He was not completely divorced from the people; he understood that calypso, with its power to lampoon personalities, ridicule and criticize the social order, had been a weapon in the workers' resistance to exploitation. He had not approved too much of that sort of thing; but now he approved even less of what was happening: these young calypsonians were singing the praises of the American way of life, wearing garish American "sports" shirts outside their trousers, wearing dark glasses like tourists, smoking cigars they bummed—making themselves regular apes! Put tails on them and they'd swing upside down for the edification of the Americans, no doubt! (p. 97)[25]

Henri de Coudray's criticism of the slavish imitation of American ways among Trinidad's lower classes is an odd mixture of reactionary attitudes to changing fashions, a sense of personal outrage at the impropriety of work-

ers indulging in tourist luxuries, and a perverse sense of cultural betrayal. This last reflects his sense of the impotence of his own class in the face of the American invasion. The French creole elite had not been seriously affected by the workers' uprisings of the late 1930s. As the narrator comments in the last chapter of *Crown Jewel*, "Whatever upheavals may have been caused in various parts of the island, whatever new springs of thought and desire may have arisen among the workers, the tranquil life of St. Clair remained quiescent." André's father Henri de Coudray is faced with demands for higher wages on his estate and "red, frowning, yet calm, he compromised, and the labourers returned to work."[26] Until the advent of the Americans his position and that of the other long-established creole families had remained unchallenged. The decline and death of Henri de Coudray in *Rum and Coca-Cola* epitomizes the way in which the old feudal order, based on landed property and the *droit de seigneur*, is brought to an abrupt end by the advent of more advanced forms of capitalist organization introduced by the Americans.

Henri de Coudray's estate is seized by the Americans since it falls within the area designated for the American naval base; his cook leaves to work for the higher wages offered by his American neighbors and one of his daughters has an affair with an American officer whom he does not consider socially acceptable. Routed at every turn, he decides to retire to his Manzanilla beach house in the North Eastern part of the island only to discover that this property too has been requisitioned for military purposes. This is the final straw for old de Coudray, who becomes convinced that the world he knows is caving in around him. The last hours of his life are disturbed by the sounds of the new progress brought by the Americans as they drill trenches in the road outside his house to put down new telephone cables:

> He dreamed of the Americans laying telephone cables. Their machine was digging a trench that entered his yard by the back garden. In a terrible rage he ordered them out. But his voice was so weak they did not hear him. They did not even see him. They were going to attach their telephone cable to his telephone, and he realised with dread and a feeling of impotence that he would not have a shred of privacy or independence any more. The machine was devouring the earth, spewing it out and advancing into the yard as fast as a man could walk. He saw that its operator was the young sentry from Manzanilla. "I'll show you!" he heard the sentry think vindictively. The trench digger came straight at him. He tried to run, but could not, he was too weak. "I'm going to die—going to die!" he cried out. (pp. 106–107)

Before he dies, his last thoughts are of his son André, and he finally admits to himself that he has done wrong in expelling him from the family for his marriage to Elena. Having had a glimpse of what the future could hold for Trinidad under the influence of the Americans and their heightened materialistic values, he comes to admire his son's identification with the working class and opposition to foreign domination: "he has such courage . . . defies us all . . . such high ideals. Yes, that's it . . . high ideals, noble ideals!" (p. 108).

Old de Coudray passes away before he can change his will, and André and Elena are spared the "temptation" which unexpected wealth might have brought with it. André, Elena, Cassie, and Le Maître all reappear in *Rum and Coca-Cola*, but they do not hold the center of the stage as often as they did in *Crown Jewel*. Le Maître, for a start, is in internment for most of the novel. Briefly released, he is again arrested after leading a successful strike of truck drivers in spite of wartime restrictions on political and trade union activities. During her husband's imprisonment Cassie emerges as one of the leaders of the Workers' Welfare which spearheads the protest against the widespread displacement of workers and peasants from their homes by the development of the areas surrounding and connecting the American bases. The association supports or organizes various forms of industrial action against the Americans and the local City Council and exposes the violence and racial discrimination which characterize the Americans' treatment of the host population. Cassie is portrayed as a full-fledged Marxist with a radical understanding of the issues at stake for the workers in the Second World War. While the rank and file of Trinidad's working class are divided between feelings of loyalty to Britain and a vicarious pleasure at seeing their imperial enemy trounced by Germany during the early stages of the war, Cassie reminds them:

> In the last war you went to fight to help England win. Well, England win and what she do for you? To-day you haven't a place to lay you' head. Worker must speak to worker—English worker to German worker, West Indian worker to American worker—they must fight for us and we for them, and all against the boss. This country is ours! . . . [T]he English not givin' us anything, the Americans not goin' to give us anything, nor the Germans. It's we who must get together and fight for the right to work, the right to eat every day, the right to sleep with a roof over our heads. Indians, Negroes, Chinese—what difference it makes? We are all sufferin' workers. (p. 35)

André, like Cassie, has also become a fervent Marxist and a valued member of Workers' Welfare. In their political study groups he shares the insights he has gained from his reading of revolutionary literature with the workers. In addition he becomes editor of *People's Age*, a working-class magazine that spreads the opinions of the Workers' Welfare on all current wartime issues to a wider Trinidadian audience. The real test for him comes later in the novel when he is called upon to make political decisions that could affect the welfare of his wife and child. After the truck drivers' strike when almost all of the leaders of Workers' Welfare are interned and *Peo-*

ple's Age is banned, André is left as the only member of the group's leadership free to speak out on behalf of the group in the press. For hours, we are told, he "weighed his duty as member of Workers' Welfare against his desire to preserve his job, his marital happiness and his comforts. Unable to come to a decision, he grew paralysed with fear and shame" (pp. 242–243). Our knowledge of André's earlier ambivalence and the deeply engrained weaknesses of his racial and class origins make it easy for us to appreciate the difficulty of the decision with which he is faced. His wife, Elena, who lacks as full a grasp of the political principles involved as either Cassie or André, reminds him initially that he is not compelled to write something that will put him into prison. Finally, out of a sense of loyalty, she is able to give him the crucial moral support he needs to do what he thinks best. He writes the article, publishes it, and is promptly interned.

Elena's own political development is also recorded. Though she is deeply religious and never reaches the political stature of Cassie, the author allows her to achieve the full potential of her abilities. During her husband's internment she is asked by some of the workers to take his place in their political study group. At first Elena is amazed at their request and frightened by her lack of knowledge of political concepts. She nevertheless agrees to help and soon finds herself "reading with the workers and holding discussions with them." Rather than instructing them, she finds that she is learning from them and finding new ways of dealing with the issues that are of particular importance to her:

> Her doubts were many, and [the workers] struggled to clear them up for her. It never occurred to her to forget God or abandon him. On the contrary, what she was now doing seemed fully in accord with her concept of His love for mankind. (p. 246)

One major character in *Crown Jewel* who does not reappear in *Rum and Coca-Cola* is Joe Elias. Asked about this significant omission Ralph de Boissière has explained: "Joe Elias had already disgraced himself by his treachery. He had displayed his great limitations. To bring him in again would have been superfluous."[27] However, Joe Elias's spirit is very much in evidence in the second novel, as a number of new, middle-class politicians of his calibre are introduced. This departure from one typical character to several representative characters may have been an attempt on the author's part to reflect the increasingly dominant role of opportunist middle-class politicians spouting socialist rhetoric during the war years. The consequence of the new political interest within the middle class in the novel is the formation of a "West Indian Socialist Party," which embodies the kind of limited reformist policies which Joe Elias in *Crown Jewel* had envisaged himself fighting for in the Legislative Council. From the description which de Boissière gives us of its members and their aspirations, it is clear that he sees them as a group diametrically opposed to the Workers' Welfare:

> Coloured lawyers and doctors, and oppressed owners of petty businesses like Arty Goodman, were its leaders. In their wake followed clerks, who were attracted by the "respectability" of the Party's leadership, and some of the better paid workers. (p. 117)

Arty Goodman, who is mentioned in the above passage, is the father of Indra Goodman, one of the two new characters who are fully developed in *Rum and Coca-Cola*. Mr. Goodman is a small-businessman and a Port of Spain City Councillor. He belongs to the inner circle of the new nationalist party, but is beaten to the winning post for its leadership by the lawyer, La Roche. De Boissière sums up La Roche through the use of a familiar West Indian image in the first description of his physical appearance:

> [La Roche] was a tall, stoop-shouldered Negro whose hair had receded from his shining forehead. His jumpy step and his stooped shoulders gave him the appearance of a *corbeau* hop-stepping over a carcase. His enemies referred to him as "King Corbeau." (p. 136)

The image of La Roche as a scavenging bird underlines his attitudes to politics as a source of easy financial pickings and his parasitical attitude in business matters. It is this characteristic of moving in for the feast where others have killed that explains why, having espoused a socialist rhetoric to gain political power, he is among the first of the new nationalist politicians to start "warning of extremists."

> He and other politicians were urging that every method be employed to encourage American capital into the island. La Roche had linked his fortunes with those of Arnold Walker. Arnold had invested a great deal of money in an American oil company that was seeking concessions in Trinidad. La Roche was insisting that measures be taken against "subversive elements": the Americans would not invest their money in Trinidad unless they could be assured that our labour forces were not at the mercy of a foreign ideology. (p. 309)

Arnold Walker, an establishment figure who also features in *Crown Jewel*, is only one of a host of minor characters drawn from all walks of life in *Rum and Coca-Cola*: There are old and new members of Workers' Welfare whose development within the party we are allowed to follow. One new member, Charlie, a veteran of the First World War, goes through a series of successively more oppressive personal and economic setbacks which strengthen his political understanding and resolve. Charlie starts off as a poor shoe-

maker, seemingly secure from the worst effects of the depression at the beginning of the war, until the abandoned wreck of a car in which he lives is bulldozed to make room for the Americans. He then loses one job after another and is cruelly beaten by an American guardsman for distributing left-wing literature on the naval base. Above all, there are the "Invaders," the American soldiers and civilians whose presence places the inhabitants of the island under a state of virtual siege.

Some aspects of the American impact on Trinidad society as presented in the novel have already been noted in this chapter, among them their undermining of the old creole elite class; the political sycophancy they brought out in the new middle-class politicians; and their detrimental effect on certain aspects of the working-class struggle. As the war progresses, the incidence of racially motivated violence increases, and many such incidents are narrated or dramatized in the novel. Even Tom, the fittingly named pro-American worker who acts as a scab during the truck drivers' strike, finds it difficult to justify the way in which a group of Americans punish a Trinidadian man who is working on the roof of one of their houses and is accused of peeping at an American girl: "they tied him by his wrists to a jeep and made him run behind it. When they put on speed he fell, of course. They dragged that man over the earth on his knees. When they cut him loose he was unconscious" (p. 217). The first strike is triggered by the way that the Americans treat Fred Collingwood, one of the new leaders of the Workers' Welfare, who is beaten up, then fired by the Americans because a white Amerian woman in a fit of pique accuses him of having molested her. The strike is organized around the issue of Fred's reinstatement but quickly grows to embrace the issue of differential salary scales for American and native truck drivers. The second strike is also called in response to American brutality, when two Trinidadian fishermen drift too close to some military installations and are shot in cold blood by American soldiers.

De Boissière also shows how the crudeness and violence of American activities and racial discrimination have repercussions in the wider society: In her efforts to make her American lodger comfortable, Arty's wife, Mrs. Goodman, makes her black husband feel like a social outcast in his own home, while even the American lodger is appalled by her treatment of her mother-in-law, Miss Henny, who is abandoned in the servants' quarters of the house and left to do all the heavy, dirty domestic chores. Miss Henny finally meets her death standing in line for the scarce supplies of rationed rice so that the lodger may be given a taste of the local dish *pélau*. The riot for rice in which she is trampled to death is the crowd's spontaneously violent reaction to the sight of a white man blatantly jumping the queue and obtaining his supplies before the doors of the shop have even been opened to the other customers waiting patiently outside. Side by side with the rising levels of racial tension and violence in the community, however,

de Boissière portrays the effect these developments have on increasing the dedication and militancy of those workers who are politically conscious.

On the other hand, *Rum and Coca-Cola* leaves the reader in no doubt that a significant proportion of the lower class, unlike the creole elite, were able to profit financially from the American presence:

> There was no one in Trinidad who was not either thankful for, or irritated and angered by, the presence of the Americans. Those who were thankful were for the most part workers. Servants ceased working for Madame, or compelled her to double and treble their wages. Clerks out of work for years went to work on the bases, or got jobs with Trinidadian firms which had lost employees to the Yanks with their higher wages. In every home there was now more money than before. (p. 93)

Though the sudden prosperity has the effect of making some of the workers less careful about their industrial rights, the ubiquity of the American dollars and American GIs reduces the local respect for wealth and a white skin. The colonial awe of the Briton is replaced by scorn for his relative lack of money and power in comparison with the Americans. On shore leave, for example, the British soldiers are even snubbed by the city's prostitutes. The pro-American feelings fuel the anti-imperialist sentiments at all levels of Trinidad society, a state of affairs recognized by the English business tycoon William Dollard in his relation of the following incident:

> While the English Governor was dancing an American officer had tapped him on the shoulder. "You know the Yankee style," said Dollard. "I tap you on the shoulder, you give up your partner to me. His Excellency ignored the fellow, of course. The next minute he gets a slap in the face from this tuppeny-ha'penny Yankee officer. Well, I mean to say! What kind of position are we faced with?" (p. 119)

Dollard's anecdote hints at one possible reply to his question, just as Henri de Coudray's dream related earlier had hinted at another. While the dream symbolizes the replacement of feudalism by capitalism, the incident on the dance floor anticipates the passage from carefully discreet patterns of British cultural imperialism to the more overt forms of American domination of the Caribbean archipelago through military and economic force. Ironically, Dollard himself is one of the members of the old order who is able to foresee this economic transformation and align himself with American capital in time to avoid being edged out of the commercial field.

The working class also shows a healthy respect for the power and industrial organization which make the Americans such formidable opponents. At the beginning of the novel, when their homes are bulldozed to make room for the Americans, they are angry and bitter, but they appreciate the ingenuity of the huge saws and machines which tear down trees and houses

and sense an affinity between themselves and the American workers who man the machines:

> Three white Americans drove a jeep on to the land. One was a middle-aged man naked to the waist and wearing a peaked white jockey cap. His companions were youngsters: one wore blue jeans; the other, a tall fair-haired lad, was screwing up his eyes in the sunlight and lazily chewing gum. The tenants were unaccustomed to see white men go half-naked in public. They came to the conclusion that these men were workers, men of their own class, and looked at them with curious but friendly smiles. (pp. 66–67)

From his working-class perspective, Ralph de Boissière makes a clear distinction between the American presence *per se* and the individual, especially the individual working-class American. He emphasizes this distinction by small points in the novel such as the sympathy among some of the American base workers with the truck drivers' strike which is expressed through the frequent arrival of mysterious food supplies when conditions become critical among the striking drivers and their families.

De Boissière does use one individual American figure, however, to epitomize all that he considers ultimately destructive about the American presence in the island. Wal Brown is an American civilian employed at the naval base. During his stay in Trinidad he marries two different Trinidadian women, even though he has a wife back home in America. The two women, Councillor Goodman's dougla daughter, Indra, and the colored prostitute, Mopsy, are the characters who receive the fullest treatment in *Rum and Coca-Cola*. Mopsy's story illustrates the typical uncritical attitude of the average Trinidadian vis-à-vis the American invaders: She sees in them a lucrative source of income and a way of lifting herself out of the dire poverty in which she is depicted at the beginning of the novel. Her function as a prostitute becomes a symbol for the general prostitution that de Boissière perceived at all levels of Trinidadian society in response to the American presence. It is important to note the way in which Mopsy departs from the ethics of the barrack-yard in her dealings with the Americans. Her personal acquisitiveness precedes her encounter with the Americans, as we are shown at the beginning of the novel, when she robs a Swedish captain who picks her up. However, the Mopsy we first meet has all the typical generosity and sense of community spirit that are traditionally associated with the barrack-yard. When at the beginning of the novel the yard in which she, Miss Henny, and Charlie the shoemaker live is threatened by the American bulldozers, she uses her sex appeal to buy time for the yard's inhabitants to clear out their belongings:

> Gladys ran into Miss Henny's shack and said to Mopsy:"Speak to him for us, nuh, Miss Mopsy? He goin' to listen to you."

> "Yes, yes, she goin' to talk to him!" Miss Henny said. "Go, Mopsy, see what you could do to help us."
>
> "So all of you dependin' on me now, chn?" Mopsy said. "Uh tell you, if it wasn't for Miss Henny . . . !"
>
> She went out, Miss Henny and Gladys following hopefully.
>
> "Now, listen," Mopsy said harshly to Mat. "If you want to come and see me, give these people a chance to find a shelter. Even if it is only for to-night 'self. Look that ole woman in the rockin' chair—you goin' to kill her! What harm one more night will do?"
>
> "We'll talk about that when yew git back from town, honey."
>
> "No, decide now. If when I come back I find more houses break down, you needn't come near me at all." . . .
>
> Mat stayed his hand. That night the tenants sought and found temporary accommodation at the homes of friends, and even strangers.
>
> Miss Henny was reluctantly taken in by her son, Councillor Goodman. (pp. 73–74)

Once Mopsy goes to live with Mat, the bulldozer driver, she becomes progressively more dehumanized, and in spite of the lavish life Mat provides for her, she becomes greedier and more selfish, unwilling to share even with her housemate, Baby, what she would generously have given to her neighbors in the barrack-yard in leaner years. Eventually Mopsy leaves Mat for an older, less attractive American who can give her twice as much. While living with him she gets one further opportunity of reasserting the positive side of her nature when she becomes friendly with her next-door neighbor Mrs. Henriques, who is Elena de Coudray's mother. The kindly older woman brings out in her some of the warmth and love she had felt for old Miss Henny, the mother figure in the yard she has now left behind. These feelings, however, last only temporarily, and though she continues to see Mrs. Henriques and make use of her help, the author tells us that "Mopsy now counted her favours, expecting one in return for every one performed" (p. 192). Mopsy's financial fortunes continue to rise; she saves enough to open a restaurant and begin to build a house. However, she experiences a tragic reversal when towards the end of the novel she meets Wal Brown, who swindles her out of her money by marrying her and promising to take her to America with him and then leaving her pregnant and penniless when he goes back to America. Faced with the prospect of returning to prostitution, she goes out of her mind. Mopsy's development in the novel illustrates de Boissière's premise that the Americans were giving with one hand and taking away with the other. In particular it points to the relative value of the two sides of the exchange: The Americans give money and excitement, but they take financial control of the island at a personal and industrial level and they corrupt the generosity and commu-

nity spirit of the lower classes. The crude materialism which their wealth elicits from Trinidadians threatens all feelings of solidarity and community within the working-class movement.

Indra Goodman is a middle-class sympathizer of the Workers' Welfare. At the beginning of the novel she has reached, intellectually and politically, approximately the same level of development as André had achieved at the end of *Crown Jewel*. Like André, she has broken through the racial and social barriers of her class: She is the only member of her family who acknowledges and is proud of her black, lower-class grandmother, Miss Henny, whose role in the barrack-yard had been the traditional one of obeah practitioner and *confidante* to the younger women of the yard. At the beginning of the novel, Indra is engaged to Fred Collingwood, one of the new leaders in the Workers' Welfare. Fred is also a calypsonian and does not come up to the social status which Indra's family wishes to maintain. For Indra, like many of the other politically progressive characters in the novel, working with the Americans marks the beginning of a series of tests, which are crucial to her ideological development. De Boissière utilizes the same strategy of a love triangle which he used with André in *Crown Jewel* to portray the conflicts in which Indra becomes involved. She finds herself vacillating between her commitment to her black fiancé, Fred, and her attraction to the white American, Wal Brown. De Boissière's description of Indra's changing attitude to Fred as her attraction to the American develops is one of the novel's most successful passages. One of their last encounters before Indra breaks off their engagement takes place in Fred's room:

> Worn out by his long hours of work, he had only woken when she knocked. He stood before her red-eyed, yawning, in a dirty old dressing-gown. Dismayed by her feelings, she went up and kissed him. "Good Lord! What broad nostrils he has!" flashed through her mind as his bristly cheek rubbed hers. He apologised for oversleeping, and hurried to the bath. She sat on his untidy bed, that smelled of sleep and soiled clothes. She was seized by a feeling of pique at having been forgotten, and by a depressing feeling of dissatisfaction with him, his room and with herself. What was it she had expected? Wasn't he just the same as ever? . . . She took up a book, read a few sentences without understanding them, put it aside. (pp. 170–171)

When Indra leaves Fred for Wal, her association with the Workers' Welfare also ends. Lured into marriage with the American, she only returns to Fred when she discovers Wal's bigamy and is personally disillusioned. Like Mopsy, she also becomes pregnant for the American, but her child is stillborn soon after his departure for America.

The ending of *Rum and Coca-Cola* strikes an optimistic note, but it is a far less happy one than that struck at the end of *Crown Jewel*. The Second World War ends and all the leaders of the Workers' Welfare are released,

but a new nationalist party, dominated by opportunist, middle-class leaders, seems on the verge of taking power. The conclusion of *Rum and Coca-Cola* must have posed serious problems for the author, as the objective realities on which the plot is based did not offer the kind of material that could be used to reach the assured climax that the upheavals of 1937 provide in *Crown Jewel*. The author seems loath to end the novel with the emergence of the new nationalist party however, and is forced to go beyond the historical political situation in order to achieve some satisfactory resolution. He chooses to attempt a cultural apotheosis and ends the novel with a description of the celebration of Carnival, which is once more allowed to take place after the war is ended. The atmosphere is one of "wild gaiety in which old scores were forgotten and complete strangers chatted as if they were long-parted friends" (p. 310). With Ben Le Maître and Fred Collingwood, André looks on as the usually unaggressive girl who works for Elena in their home (recalling in her description the placid Mamitz of the barrack-yard stories) knocks a drunk American civilian out of the path of the oncoming bands with uncharacteristic vigor:

> "What people, what people!" said Le Maître.
>
> Fred laughed in his own quiet way, but his eyes reflected the admiration he had heard in Ben's tone and that shone in André's smile. They did not need to express the thought. They felt at that moment there were no heights their people could not scale. (p. 314)

This recourse to the celebration of Carnival is in keeping with de Boissière's larger preoccupation with the relationship between progressive politics and the culture of the masses. Here, however, it comes uneasily close to expressing a naive utopian vision of a cultural nationalist solution to Trinidad's problems, a solution which de Boissière's ideological perspective precludes. De Boissière may have sensed this weakness, as he allows an earlier comment from Le Maître to qualify the euphoria. As the autocratic Auditor General allows himself to be embarrassed by the antics of a masquerader, Le Maître remarks with a laugh, "Clever bastards! . . . For two days they slacken the ropes, and for three hundred and sixty-three they pull them in" (p. 312).

This discussion of *Rum and Coca-Cola* is based on the 1956 Australian edition of the novel, and the reader of the 1984 British edition will immediately be struck by several drastic revisions. Although the major thematic thrust of the novel has remained the same, there are numerous alterations in plot and focus in the revised version. For one thing, Mopsy becomes much more of a central character and her fate determines the new ending of the novel. In addition, Fred Collingwood plays a crucial role in the lives of both Mopsy and Indra Goodman. Their mutual American lover of the

1956 edition, Wal Brown, is replaced by two Americans: While the story of Mopsy's liaison with Wal Brown remains similar, Indra Goodman falls for a handsome womanizer called Wilbur Kemp, who leaves her when he discovers she is pregnant. The ease with which the interconnections between characters have been shifted and rearranged in the two versions is itself an indication of the relative episodic nature of *Rum and Coca-Cola* when compared to the inevitability with which relationships unfold in *Crown Jewel*.

De Boissière's third novel, *No Saddles for Kangaroos* (1964), is set in Australia, and though it still demonstrates the novelist's concern with political issues there is nothing Caribbean about its themes or subject matter. It is set in the early 1950s when the Australian labor movement was seriously debilitated by widespread anticommunist hysteria, and tells the story of an Australian working-class family who becomes involved in a series of industrial actions in an American-owned automobile factory, and in the peace movement aimed at ending Australian involvement in the Korean War.

Until the republication of *Crown Jewel* in 1981, Ralph de Boissière and his work were virtually unknown in the Caribbean, England, and the United States. However, judging from the enthusiastic reviews of the new edition of *Crown Jewel* on both sides of the Atlantic, de Boissière's novels seem finally set to receive the critical attention and acclaim which have so far eluded them because of the peculiar circumstances of their publication. Both *Crown Jewel* and its sequel, *Rum and Coca-Cola*, with their dramatic characterization of working-class leaders during the late 1930s, depict the type of cultural heroes whose attitudes and ideology are bound to find new admirers and supporters among today's politically conscious generation of West Indians.

NOTES

1. Ralph de Boissière, unpublished autobiography.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Translations of *Crown Jewel* appeared in Poland, East Germany, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, China, and the Soviet Union. Translations of *Rum and Coca-Cola* appeared in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, China, and the Soviet Union.
5. De Boissière, unpublished autobiography.
6. Ibid.
7. *Trinidad*, 1, 2 (Easter, 1930), 82–83.
8. Ibid, p. 84.
9. Ibid., p. 100.
10. Clifford Sealy, "*Crown Jewel*: A Note on Ralph de Boissière," *Voices*, 2, 3 March, 1973), 1–3.
11. *Trinidad*, 1, 1 (Christmas, 1929), 9.

12. *The Beacon*, 1, 8 (November, 1931), 5.
13. See Sealy, "*Crown Jewel*."
14. Ibid., p. 3.
15. In this section of the chapter all page references in parentheses are to Ralph de Boissière, *Crown Jewel* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1952).
16. De Boissière, personal communication, December 12, 1978.
17. Ibid.
18. De Boissière, personal communication, December 12, 1978.
19. See author's note to *Crown Jewel*, p. 432.
20. De Boissière, personal communication, December 15, 1978.
21. See Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1963).
22. De Boissière, personal communication, November 23, 1978.
23. Caribbean critic Vishnudat Singh in his otherwise interesting article on the 1981 edition of the novel, "Ralph de Boissière's *Crown Jewel* and Trinidad Society in the Turbulent Thirties," in *West Indian Literature and Its Social Context*, ed. Mark A. McWatt (Cave Hill, Barbados: U.W.I., Department of English, 1985), pp. 18–32, is unaware of the existence of the NWA and Jim Barrette and therefore sees in Le Maître only a "Butler-type leader."
24. Quoted in Keith Q. Warner, *The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 22.
25. In this section of the chapter all page references in parentheses are to Ralph de Boissière, *Rum and Coca-Cola* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1956).
26. De Boissière, *Crown Jewel*, pp. 422–423.
27. De Boissière, personal communication, January 16, 1979.