

This study examines the child character in post-emancipation and colonial West-Indian fiction in order to determine his position in that society and his role as a literary agent. Our samples in this endeavour are six Caribbean novels namely: Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Michael Anthony's *The Year In San Fernando*, Jan Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation*, Ian McDonald's *The Humming Bird Tree*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Namba Roy's *No Black Sparrows*.

The study adopts the sociological literary and psychological approaches as the theoretical framework. These approaches enabled us to understand the development of the child within the Caribbean social experiences.

This study argues that the child characters in novels designed for adult readership are employed intentionally for concrete goals. Such children, particularly in West Indian novels, while essentially childlike, are not gullible and puerile. They are cogently perspicacious and active. Reasonable and cognizant of their surrounding, these children are invested with boundless potentials. Hence, although childhood is seen as a period when diverse influences impinge on the child, each child is endowed with the capacity to either withstand or succumb to negative influences. The genius of the child disregarding, owing to the psychic and physical stature of the child vis-à-vis that of their adult guardians, the position of the child is delineated as that of a gudgeon, a sacrifice to the adult world's benightedness, selfishness and savagery. The anatomic and intellectual vulnerability of children makes them easy prey to varied forms of victimization from adults.

The child's plight in a racially stratified and class society is seen as ghastly. The child from the subjugated race and class suffers triply. He is debased as a member of a disfavoured race, execrated class and also as a child. The girl child suffers additionally because of her gender. The child from the advantageous group is also seen as a victim of the ravages of her people's jaundiced eye. Made to feel the ultimate in perfection, such a child is obtuse, psychologically and ethically stunted since he becomes blinded to his own limitations. Such a child is impaired and is therefore incapable of moral advancement.

Subsequently, the child character emerges as a metaphor. It is therefore feasible to read the Caribbean childhood novels as allegories in which the child characters epitomize a breed of people at a particular moment in their history. The eminent non-white children embody the confidence and aspirations of their people. Together with the tolerant white children, such children seek to make sense out of the jumble of racism, colonialism, class and gender-oriented compartmentalization and thereby endeavour to construct structures of 'sanity' (and therefore 'stability') that tally with their ideals. As metaphors therefore, the child characters in Caribbean novels are employed to underscore an array of childhood idiosyncrasies that may restore the muddle of human relationships.

The thesis concludes the argument by reiterating that the child is an effective tool for inquiring into not only the plight of the child but also the racial, class and gender disparities and struggles in the Caribbean during the enfranchisement (post-slavery) and colonial periods. Through prudent exploration of a child's psychological makeup, the authors delineate the child as a powerful agent through which other themes such as: poverty, police brutality, alienation, religion and politics are surveyed. Generally, we

have established that the child has been employed by the West-Indian writers to express their humanism and consequently, the kind of society they espouse. The child has therefore been revealed as a beam of ethicalness through which the world can be humanized