



1986

The Crisis of the Absurd in Orlando Patterson's *An Absence of Ruins*

Avis G. McDonald

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

McDonald, Avis G., The Crisis of the Absurd in Orlando Patterson's *An Absence of Ruins*, *Kunapipi*, 8(2), 1986.
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol8/iss2/15>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

The Crisis of the Absurd in Orlando Patterson's *An Absence of Ruins*

Abstract

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus states: 'In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home country or the hope of a promised land.' Orlando Patterson, in a sociological monograph, describes 'the modern crisis' as 'the problem of exile, alienation, rootlessness, being and identity'.[^] Patterson's fictional works, as well as his non-fictional studies in sociology and social philosophy, are explicitly and heavily indebted to the writings of Camus and Sartre.[^] Indeed, he finds in Existentialism the deepest analysis of the 'modern crisis' or, as he also terms it, the 'exilic crisis'.

NOTES

1. Walcott left Trinidad in 1981 to take up an appointment in Creative Writing at the University of Boston.
2. Michael Gilkes, review of *Midsummer*, *Caribbean Contact* Vol. 12, No 10 (March 1985), p. 15.
3. Terry Eagleton, review of *Midsummer*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 November 1984, p. 1290.
4. Walcott spends the summer months in the Caribbean each year.
5. Comment made in a portrait of the writer televised as part of a series entitled 'Literary Portraits'. Trinidad and Tobago Television aired the series 1-22 May 1985.

AVIS G. MCDONALD

The Crisis of the Absurd in Orlando Patterson's *An Absence of Ruins*

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus states: 'In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home country or the hope of a promised land.'¹ Orlando Patterson, in a sociological monograph, describes 'the modern crisis' as 'the problem of exile, alienation, rootlessness, being and identity'.² Patterson's fictional works, as well as his non-fictional studies in sociology and social philosophy, are explicitly and heavily indebted to the writings of Camus and Sartre.³ Indeed, he finds in Existentialism the deepest analysis of the 'modern crisis' or, as he also terms it, the 'exilic crisis'.

In the post-modernist, post-Sartrean, post-existentialist world of the 1980s, Sartre and Camus can be seen as representative figures of a dated ideology.⁴ But the fact that the Existentialist Absurd seemed for a time to

capture the post-modern crisis of alienation and powerlessness, remains a key to the understanding of Patterson's fictional account of a post-colonial society.

Obvious references to Camus' philosophical essay are recorded in the title of, and one of the epigraphs to, Orlando Patterson's first novel, *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964).⁵ This work depicts characters trapped in poverty in a 'shanty town' in Kingston. Dinah, a prostitute with 'ambition', tries to escape to a better life that will give her existence meaning, dignity, and a sense of belonging. However, her journey through the higher strata of the society is a journey into successive disillusionments. The Rastafarians wait in hope of a ship that never comes to take them out of their exile in the Babylon of established Jamaican society, to Ethiopia which is the Zion of their faith. Their condition is, at the same time, the dispossession and powerlessness of one segment of a post-colonial society, the 'exile, alienation, rootlessness' that constitutes the 'modern crisis', and the Existential Absurdity of the human condition.

Patterson's third published novel, *Die the Long Way* (1972),⁶ is a study of exile and bondage in its ultimate form: the total slave society of eighteenth-century Jamaica. The narrative develops a dialectic of bondage and freedom, submission and rebellion, degradation and dignity, again within an unmistakably Existentialist framework.

Whereas these two works give an account equally of the suffering of individuals and of the social conditions in which they are trapped, in Patterson's second novel, *An Absence of Ruins*,⁷ the balance is shifted. Here, the central concern is with a crisis in the psyche of the protagonist, Alexander Blackman, for which external events supply little more than an objective correlative. The novel can be read as a rather self-indulgent fantasy written primarily to work through an author's own problems of identity and direction and could be regarded as the least successful of Patterson's three novels. It is, however, not without interest as a philosophical exploration. My discussion will first treat Blackman's 'exilic crisis' and his quest for identity, meaning and direction in the Jamaican society to which he has returned from the metropolis. It will then be appropriate to compare briefly the treatment of the Absurd condition in Patterson's text with Sartre's and Camus' treatment of it.

Blackman's given name suggests a link to the conqueror of the ancient world. His surname speaks for itself. Formerly a Rhodes scholar, sociologist, university lecturer and a socially and politically active man, Blackman is portrayed at the beginning of the narrative as having given up all academic, social and political activity. He cannot commit himself to those pursuits, or to love, or indeed to anything. Yet he cannot in fact

manage to live a detached, uninvolved life. Suffering this ambivalence, he wanders restlessly around Kingston looking vainly for signs and symbols of meaning for his existence. Feeling trapped in an alien world, he longs for either a sense of belonging or for escape. Losing all hope, he attempts suicide but, unable to carry it out, he turns it into a fake suicide. The newspaper report of his 'death' leads to the actual death of his distressed mother and Blackman guiltily exiles himself in London.

Epigraphs in the text allude to problems of identity, exile and captivity and to the significance of history. The initial epigraph is a quotation from West Indian poet, Derek Walcott's 'The Royal Palms':

Here there are no heroic palaces
Nettled in sea-green vines or built
On maize savannahs the cat-thighed, stony faces
Of Egypt's cradle, easily unriddled;
If art is where the greatest ruins are,
Our art is in those ruins we became,
You will not find in these green, desert places
One stone that found us worthy of its name,
Nor how, lacking the skill to beat things over flame
We peopled archipelagoes by one star.

The epigraph interprets the title of the novel and indicates the concern of the text with the search for identity and direction specifically in a West Indian setting and in a post-colonial period.

Significant epigraphs also precede each of the four divisions of the novel. Part I, 'Consider the Beast', is preceded by an epigraph from Nietzsche: *The Use and Abuse of History*:

The beast lives unhistorically; for it 'goes into' the present, like a number, without leaving any curious remainder. It cannot dissimulate, it conceals nothing; at every moment it seems what it actually is, and thus can be nothing that is not honest. But man is always resisting the great and continually increasing weight of the past...

Blackman appears to be seeking to live his life in the present, like Nietzsche's conception of the beast. Trying to detach himself from commitment to his wife, Pauline, and to his friends and their political activism, he enters into an affair with Carmen, mistress of one of his friends, believing that there he can remain uncommitted. According to Blackman's diary which provides the narration at the beginning of Part I, he, much unlike a beast, is unable to experience either desire or the satisfaction of desire.

The title of Part II, 'Enter the Noble Coward', is based on its epigraph from *Pericles*:

I do shame
To think of what a noble strain you are,
And of how coward a spirit

Pericles, IV, iii.

This section of the narrative describes a series of events leading Blackman to an attempted suicide which quickly transforms itself into a pretence. To justify this, he explicitly invents for himself the role of the noble coward 'who refuses to be held responsible' (p. 127), a 'necessary recess from the too noble, too demanding, too lonely task of being totally responsible for himself' (p. 128). Part II begins with an unrealistically articulate confession from Pauline of her own cowardice in using Blackman as a shield against the world, and of her 'nakedness' without him, and of her wish to run away. From this point Blackman moves through a series of experiences to the decision to take his own life. First, a hurricane threatens and is averted; he senses in the crowd a 'delirious expectancy of ruin' (p. 89) and a regret of being condemned to the 'absence of all danger' (p. 91). Then, going to swim at a deserted beach, he experiences himself as a thing trapped at the centre of a closed universe whirling about him. The next day, walking the streets of Kingston, he wishes to find the ruins of an ancient culture around him, and tries to reject the story that beneath him lie the bones of tortured black slaves and murdered Arawak Indians. He meditates upon his real yet compelling links with English culture. He runs to his mother, intending to make her yield up to him a knowledge of his past, to sing him songs and tell him stories as a 'replanting of roots' (p. 113) but she misunderstands the reunion and he cannot tell her of his 'mad urge to make his past meaningful' (p. 117). Reaching a dead end in his diary he goes to the sea to drown himself. Quickly discovering that he loves life too much, he invents the role of noble coward and seeks 'the pleasures of suicide without suffering the un-human price of it' (p. 128).

The epigraph of Part III, 'Exit, the Second Adam', is an extract from Milton's account of original sin:

Ah, why should all Mankind,
For one man's fault, thus guiltless be condemned?
If guiltless!...

All my evasions vain
And reasonings, though through mazes, lead me still
But to my own conviction: first and last
On me, me only, as the source and spring
Of all corruption, all the blame lights due.

(Milton: *Paradise Lost*, Bk. 10)

The false report of Blackman's suicide causes the death of his mother by coronary thrombosis. Blackman (echoing Pauline's account, earlier) finds himself nakedly revealed as 'impotent, cowardly, abandoned and incongruous' (p. 155). He wishes to hide from the judgment of life, which has found him worthless. What previously was a sense of the meaninglessness and worthlessness of life, has become a sense of his own sin.

Part IV, 'The Epilogue', takes its epigraph from Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*:

It was not only that I could not become spiteful, I did not know how to become anything: neither spiteful nor kind, neither a rascal nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect. Now, I am living out my life in my corner, taunting myself with the spiteful and useless consolation that an intelligent man cannot become anything seriously, and it is only the fool who becomes anything.

This section consists of a brief encounter between an inquisitor and Blackman who is hiding in London and, at times, yes, in the Underground. We are left with the picture of Blackman forever hiding himself from judgment.

The function of the alternating narrative voices — the third-person narrative account of Blackman and the account he gives of himself through his diary — is not the most obvious one. The third-person point of view might seem appropriate for the exterior account of Blackman's actions and the diary for an account of his innermost thoughts and feelings. However, Blackman's thoughts are conveyed as effectively by passages in the third-person narrative voice as by the diary's first-person account. With the exception of one entry (pp. 119, 123), the diary is as much concerned with his actions and experiences as are the segments in the third-person narration. The changes in narrative voice are not accompanied by changes in narrative distance or perspective.

An examination of the sudden transitions from diary entries to third-person narrative voice yields an explanation of the narrative structure. In the first transition Blackman's writing is interrupted by his mother (p. 24) and the last entry in the diary, his recollection of an abortive encounter with a prostitute, carries over into a dream state in which he has an encounter with the copulative notion of the waves of the sea, culminating in a seminal emission.⁸ In the second transition — from the longest section of the novel in diary form — his reflections on his past lead him to close the diary in mid-sentence to go to talk with his mother about his childhood (p. 122). The third transition occurs at the end of a long philosophical exploration in Blackman's diary, in which he tries to make an abstract Sartrean summation on the predicament of his being.

The cogency of his summation sends him rushing out to kill himself (p. 123). Only the last transition takes place formally at the end of a chapter and indeed at the end of Part IV; that is, at the end of all except the brief epilogue. At this point, Blackman has determined to close the diary forever, and to go into exile (p. 155). Clearly, each diary segment acts as a spring to the action following it. That action is narrated in the third person. Further, each of the four transitions is an important element in the novel, the last three being turning points for Blackman.

Everything else in the text leads us back to Blackman's central preoccupation with himself: with his identity, with his life's meaning or lack of it; with his direction or lack of it; with his attempts at detachment and eventually with the act of cowardice that convicts him of sin and sends him into an exile that can be seen as a kind of psychological suicide. In short, at the heart of the novel is Blackman's crisis of the Absurd. The symptoms of his crisis appear at several levels: at the level of action and inaction, the level of dream, and the level of thought.

At the level of action, Blackman is described as physically unable to consummate at one time the desire for beer and at another the desire for sex. He is presented initially as having given up his interest in all intellectual activity. He avoids commitment; yet he cannot be detached and uninvolved. This is exemplified in his fruitless search for signs and symbols; in the end of his affair with Carmen; and in his restless wanderings. Finally it reveals itself in his sole consequential action — the abortive suicide attempt — and in his final exile.

In his diary entry at the beginning of the novel, Blackman describes himself as finding security in the barrenness of the parched earth and feeling a familiarity with, and a tenderness towards, the 'harsh, brown, dusty aridity' to the extent of wanting to wallow in it:

Vacantly, I stared down at the roots of the tree. It had been a dry, harsh August.... The earth was parched and cracked.... It was with difficulty that I prevented myself from falling to the ground and wallowing all over in it. Little dry lot of land hemmed in by thorny hedges, I thought to myself with tenderness. (p. 13)

Blackman turns away from the strong, secure roots of the mango tree to find his affinity with the barren, rootless earth. Thus the reader is offered an image that recalls 'The Waste Land': 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/ Out of this stony rubbish?'" Here, Blackman is caught in the crisis of the Absurd. He seeks to escape the severe aridity of the earth which is matched by the horrifying, stark, clear blue sky; the all-enclosing sense of barrenness he loves and hates at once. Since the barren earth is undemanding, and since he sees no sense of purpose in its

merely being there supporting little if any growth, he seeks escape from it.

It becomes clear that Blackman is able to relish a relationship with Carmen, with Elaine, an English girl in his past, and with Pauline, his wife, only when there is 'no expectancy, no hope, no possibility of non-fulfilment' (p. 76). Just as he found a security in the undemanding earth with which there could be no involvement, so he finds security in being detached, apart, separate.

Blackman's crisis of the Absurd is conveyed also at the level of what may conveniently be called 'dream'. His frustrated desires for beer and for the prostitute come together in a dream in which he floats on copulative waves whose foam tastes of beer. The often-recurring dream in which he finds himself at the top of a spiral staircase, afraid to step across the abyss that opens between him and a room which strangers going before him enter with easy stride, is recognizable as an archetypal existentialist nightmare. In a strange, dreamlike episode on the beach at Green Bay, he experiences a panic dread, as all things in nature — sky, sand and sea — seem to flow into each other forming a vast but narrowing circle at the centre of which he becomes a trapped thing. He is intensely alone at the centre of an alien and imprisoning universe.

At the level of thought, the text portrays Blackman — through his diary, and through dialogue with friends and lovers — as treading an eternal round of self-examination and caught between guilt and self-justification. He offers paradoxes that have the air of excuses as he faces his lack of identity, lack of roots, lack of commitment, lack of direction, and lack of meaning. Both Pauline and Blackman's committed friends suggest that he accept his identity as a Jamaican. He can identify himself with the crowd on Windward Road, for 'they were painted with the dazed subdued astonishment of the lost' (p. 18). Similarly, he shares the crowd's desire for the forecast hurricane to come and bring destruction.¹⁰ But he cannot identify with his friends' belief in political action, or with what he describes as the 'self-imposed ignorance ... of our soddy bourgeoisie' (p. 41).

In his imagination, Blackman tries to create a fantastic past:

I felt I was thrown back in time, walking alone on the streets of the relic of some ancient city.... What ancient civilisation flourished here long, long ago?... How great and ingenious they must have been to create a mosaic of streets such as these. And in the same grid patterns as the Romans, too.... There is a past here.... My city goes back a thousand years. If you dig deep you will find the relics of even more ancient times. (p. 104)

But the reality around him, the ugly, barren city, the poverty and squalid conditions are illuminated by the rising sun, and his fantastic ancient city of historical ruins and elaborate drainage system is replaced by filthy gutters and peasant houses made from 'the sides of empty cod-fish barrels' (p. 104). Rejecting the evidence around him, Blackman makes a proposition:

For it is not possible ... that all there ever was are the harsh sounds of the cracking of cartwhips, the vile curses of cruel, inhuman masters, the rhythm of steel hoes plunging into unyielding, virgin soil. And what they have done to my great immortal works of art?... I shall not believe them. One day I shall destroy those ... shelves of lies ... I, Alexander Blackman, shall redeem the truth of my heritage, of my great past, that lies hidden somewhere. (p. 105)

Preferring the peace that fantasy offers him he rejects the reality that sunrise reveals. The alternatives are to accept the facts and live with them, or escape if he can. But neither the sea nor a long white ship, promise of escape, now holds hope for him: the sea appears glacier-like and motionless (p. 106). Similarly, the alley into which he turns to spare himself the agony of facing reality presents him with a dead-end. Here he is trapped in a dilemma, and again finds an abyss stretching between wish and fulfilment.

Re-examining his relationship with British culture as represented for him by the formal laws of cricket, the 'William' stories of Richmal Crompton and the English songs of 'maidens and fair shepherdesses, of rolling hills and plains' (p. 111), he notes that in order to love them, 'meaning had to be deprived of all substance' (p. 111). If Blackman rejects his British heritage, he rejects his African heritage as well when he asks: 'What have Ashanti warriors with their golden stool and ceremonies and God knows what, got to do with me...?' (p. 122). But his ambivalence about this, his nostalgic attachment to Jamaica, his undeniable roots in England and in Africa, are also made clear.

Fundamental to Blackman's lack of identity, commitment and direction, is the lack of any meaning to his world. The text places his main philosophic statement, in the form of a diary entry, just before his suicide attempt. His crucial philosophical assertion is a Sartrean essay on being-for-itself, apart from the fact that it plays elementary paradoxical tricks with logic, as in: 'I am conscious ... of thought, so I do not think. Of consciousness, so I can hardly be said to be conscious' (p. 121). However, Blackman writes:

My awareness comes upon me as something having past, an ever-passing presence, always an agonizing step behind something else. I was. I wanted to be. To be anything — them next door, that wall, even. Yet my every effort wanting to be only throws me upon the thing I am, the active recollection which evades me: only intensified the immediate past that I was; only makes me more aware of the self that I am always loosing [sic] ... Something in me, something compelling, forces me to bridge the gap, to justify the separation of this thing which can only recollect, from everything else. (p. 121)

Blackman briefly examines and as quickly rejects race, society, history, culture, and his very birth as explanations for his existence. In doing so he declares: 'I come before race, I come before culture, I come before parents, I come before God' (p. 122). This is a fair dramatic translation of Sartre's assertion that being is prior to essence. Further, when Blackman declares that 'All I know is that I was, that I am ever passing, that I am always on the point of catching up with myself, the thing that lives, the moment now. But always it seems too late. Always I keep yearning to be what I am, but never was' (p. 123), he might be offering a definition of Sartre's concept of being-for-itself. The paradoxes that the text gives Blackman to utter do not bear close examination, but the general intent is clear.

Impelled by the logic of his argument, and unable to accept his being without explanations, without past or future, without meaning, Blackman seeks to terminate it by plunging into the sea, for 'some decision had to be made, some final plunge taken' (p. 123). On discovering that he lacks the courage for suicide, he quickly rationalizes his failure with the paradoxical conception of the noble coward, which 'implied the courage of refusing death as the solution to anything' (p. 127), and which allows him to be base; he says 'for him it was an essential part of being human' (p. 127). His theory also allows him to feign a suicide 'to make them all suffer' and 'make them all responsible' (p. 128). He succeeds in investing his prank with a high moral purpose, until the news comes of his mother's heart attack. Her death is given the appearance of a dramatic turning point in his understanding of himself. At this point in the narrative Blackman stands convicted of sin; but the sin of which he is guilty, again paradoxically, is that of not having experienced genuine guilt. He faces a crisis of the Absurd, considers suicide, commits instead a mischief, in the legal sense of the word, and consequently finds himself a second sinful Adam: he is hiding 'underground', in the anonymity of the London crowd, from the accusing eyes of life; that is, of God.

Blackman's crisis is riddled with paradox and contradiction. In his primal experience of the Absurd, at Green Bay, he feels trapped by the sea and sky — the least confining elements in nature. He experiences a loss of connection between desire and fulfilment, yet still has a desire for desire and for fulfilment. He lacks commitment, yet cannot achieve a detached life. He desperately searches for a sense of purpose, but convinces himself that there can be no purpose. Most particularly, his crisis is one of rootlessness. A Rastafarian in the market place points to an aspect of Blackman's predicament when he tells him: 'We are all Jews lost in the wilderness, brother, and we are all black men, according to the Word. And the Word, which is the Truth, say unto I: In this world, in this life, every man is a Jew searching for his Zion; every man is a black man lost in a white world of grief' (p. 96). This is recognizable as a metaphor for the 'modern crisis' which Patterson identifies with the 'exilic crisis'.

When Blackman later concludes that 'I come before race, I come before culture, I come before parents, I come before God', it is the force of this conclusion that leads him to attempt suicide. In his final exile in London, this phrase is echoed with a significant change, to 'standing as I do outside of race, outside of culture, outside of history...' (p. 60). Paradoxically, Blackman is, in the end, identified by his guilt, identified by his exile which is his penance, and identified by the fact that he 'stands outside of' those things that earlier in terms of his declaration that he came before them, could not define him. The ultimate paradox is that the guilty exile in the epilogue is described as 'a being deprived of essence' (p. 159).

The liberally sprinkled epigraphs and allusions through *An Absence of Ruins* encourage a hunt for sources and parallels. The epigraphs and the way in which they indicate the title and the structure of the novel have already been discussed. Blackman's 'lectures' on being-for-itself versus being-in-itself, and on the assertion that being is logically prior to essence are direct borrowings from Sartre's philosophy. Correspondingly, Blackman's affinity to Roquentin in Sartre's novel, *Nausea*,¹¹ is quite clear. It is not necessary to identify Blackman's mango tree roots with Roquentin's chestnut tree roots except, perhaps, as a deliberate mark of respect from the author to Sartre. The two trees are given quite different meanings. But Blackman and Roquentin are both unable to live with their experience of meaninglessness. Both suffer the nausea of contingent being. Roquentin escapes, through his project of writing a book, but in fact the escape, unlike the rest of the novel, is unconvincing. Hence, if Blackman

does not escape, in the sense of resolving his 'modern crisis', this is not a difference of great importance.

Whereas *The Children of Sisyphus* acknowledges an explicit debt to Camus, *An Absence of Ruins* does not. However, there is a parallel, though tenuous, between Blackman and Meursault of Camus' *The Outsider*.¹² Like Meursault, Blackman stands outside the conventions of society as he faces and responds to the meaninglessness of his life. But how very differently he responds. On the most likely reading of Meursault, he lives a life in the present without appeal, content to multiply experiences. He is interpretable as a type of pagan innocent reconciled to the sun and the sea of his Algeria, if not cosily at home in them. For Camus' Absurd man is aware that his world is incorrigibly alien; yet he accepts his relationship with it and makes it as satisfying as he can. Blackman is unable to put his detachment into practice, to go into the present without remainder, like a beast. His experiences are fraught with guilt, fear and impotence. He is no innocent of any type, and nature drives him into panic dread. At no point does he achieve acceptance of the Absurd, of 'exile without remedy' in a world 'divested of illusions and lights'.

A more modest parallel, again with notable differences, suggests itself in the relationships of these protagonists to their mothers. Meursault is executed, it is strongly suggested, because he did not cry at his mother's funeral, rather than because he murdered an Arab. Blackman's ultimate self-exile stems from his mother's death, and his consequent guilt. He lives unhappily in a meaningless world and, contrary to Camus' doctrine, concludes that suicide is a logical outcome of the meaninglessness of the world and of himself.¹³ Seemingly, only cowardice keeps him alive and it is guilt and a sense of worthlessness such as would be meaningless to Meursault that drives him to hide in the anonymity of an alien crowd.

Another parallel suggests itself in Camus' novel, *The Fall*.¹⁴ In the brief reply to the inquisitive London stranger given in the epilogue of *An Absence of Ruins*, Blackman irresistibly suggests the figure of Clamence, the judge-penitent who, out of guilt, is self-exiled from Paris, his home, to the seedy bars of Amsterdam. His guilt is not only over the woman he failed to save from drowning in the Seine, but for the pharisaic hypocrisy of his former successful life. And this parallel does seem a useful guide to the reading of *An Absence of Ruins*. It is not irrelevant that some critics have seen in *The Fall* a movement by Camus towards a theological position. If *The Fall* contains Jean-Baptiste Clamence — John the Baptist *clamans in deserto* — surely Camus' next novel, had he lived, must have

contained a Christ-figure. Or so it has been argued. *An Absence of Ruins* is certainly closer to *The Fall* than to *The Outsider*, in that its text, which constitutes an examination of the 'modern crisis' of a character in a meaningless world, ends as a recognizably theological examination of guilt and penance.

NOTES

1. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (1955; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 13.
2. Orlando Patterson, *Ethnic Chauvinism: The Reactionary Impulse* (New York: Stein & Day, 1977), p. 11.
3. Bridget Jones, in 'Some French Influences in the Fiction of Orlando Patterson', *Savacou* 11/12 (1975), 29, remarks: 'His [Patterson's] originality lay in looking for models outside the inherited British sources. Existentialist philosophy shares none of the complacency. It developed in Europe during a period of acute political crisis, and draws on the deep-seated self-questioning which a colonial readily recognizes. It moves from an experience of anguish to a call for human freedom which challenges all preconceived values, all absolutes and authorities.'
4. No attempt can be made here to allow for the complex nature of the contrasts between Sartre's and Camus' treatment of the Absurd and between the trajectories of their changing and developing thought. Germaine Bree, in *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment* (New York: Dell, 1972), gives an account of Sartre's movement into intellectual commitment to Marxism in its Leninist, even Stalinist form, contrasted with Camus' humanistic, democratic socialism. It is notable that Patterson's sociology and fiction, both of which draw a great deal from Sartre's Existentialism, draw little from his Marxism.
5. Orlando Patterson, *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964; Kingston: The Bolivar Press, 1971).
6. Orlando Patterson, *Die the Long Day* (New York: William Morrow, 1972).
7. Orlando Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson, 1967). All subsequent page references are to this edition.
8. The interruption is so severe that Alexander Blackman finds himself called 'Richard' by his mother. Presumably, this is an error that would be corrected in a further edition.
9. In T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 63.
10. See V.S. Naipaul, 'A Flag on the Island' in *A Flag on the Island* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) in which the islanders welcome a threatening hurricane: 'The world was ending and the cries that greeted the end were cries of joy' (p. 211). When the hurricane passes without destruction the people are disappointed to have to resume their 'life that had not been arrested' (p. 213).
11. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (1938; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).
12. Albert Camus, *The Outsider* (1942; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).
13. Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 54, exploring the idea of Absurd existence, concludes that revolt against the Absurd consists in continuing to live, not in suicide.
14. Albert Camus, *The Fall* (1956; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).