



1985

The year that was

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The year that was

Abstract

Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore 1983/84, South Africa, West Indies

Authors

Diana Brydon, Simon Garrett, Alamgir Hashmi, Kirpal Singh, Michael Chapman, and Victor J. Ramraj

The Year That Was

CANADA

1984 was the year the Canadian short story came into its own. After years of critical acclaim, it has finally broken into the popular international market with four Penguin releases. Rosemary Sullivan has written the introduction to the reissue of a collection of Sara Jeannette Duncan's stories set in India, *The Pool in the Desert*, first published in 1903. The authors themselves introduce the other three collections. W.P. Kinsella's *The Thrill of the Grass* capitalises on the mix of baseball and magic that made *Shoeless Joe* such a success. Norman Levine's *Champagne Barn* covers the wider range of his work, while remaining in his own words largely 'autobiography written as fiction'. Duncan holds a special appeal for Commonwealth scholars with cross-cultural interests, Kinsella is a competent entertainer and Levine an elegant stylist. But none can compare with the extraordinarily fine writing of Timothy Findley in *Dinner Along the Amazon*.

These twelve stories, arranged chronologically, chart Findley's development in 'pursuit of an obsession through the act of writing' as he moves away from 'Cheeverland' into Findleyland. Besides the brilliant title story, my favourite is 'Out of the Silence', inspired by the lives of Tom (T.S.) and Vivienne Eliot. Here Findley dramatizes his 'thought that two people could live together so long, endure the same history and the same painful experience of marriage, and yet the same history and experience could produce madness in one of them and poetry in the other'.

These stories are dedicated to Marian Engel, whose death this year is a great loss to Canadian literature. Findley has published an appreciation of Engel's work in the Special Issue of the journal *Room of One's Own* (9, 2, June 1984) on Engel's life and work — along with articles by Alice Munro, Jane Rule and George Woodcock, several Engel stories, an interview and a bibliography. A fitting tribute to an important writer.

Leon Rooke's new collection, *Sing Me No Love Songs I'll Say You No Prayers* (Stoddart) contains eight stories previously published in Canadian collections and eight published in book form for the first time. Colloquial,

comic and character-centred, these are good value. Commonwealth readers may enjoy 'The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta', in particular, with its satiric look at misplaced imperial ambitions. In a different vein, Bill Schermbrucker's autobiographical *Chameleon and Other Stories* (Talonbooks) explores the Mau Mau uprising and the British response to it as filtered through his adopted Canadian perception. His approach to the ambiguities of his position deserves our attention: a native of Kenya, his skin is the colour of the colonizers; a Canadian writer, his memories are of growing up in Africa.

The emotional anguish of growing up in a rural Ontario town characterizes newcomer Isabel Huggan's *The Elizabeth Stories* (Oberon), while sketches of maritime life best describes Alden Nowlan's posthumously published *Will Ye Let the Mummies In?* (Irwin). Betty Bednarski has translated *Selected Tales of Jacques Ferron* (Anansi), thirty-five tales taken from the twenty-year writing career of Quebec's best known tale teller.

Anansi has also brought out a translation of Roch Carrier's novel *Lady with Chains* and McClelland & Stewart of Michel Tremblay's *Therese and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel*. With the exception of Findley's brilliant new novel, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, a re-writing of the story of Noah's Ark, that archetypal Canadian myth, the novel in English breaks little new ground this year. Matt Cohen's *The Spanish Doctor* turns away from his usual rural Ontario settings to focus on Jews in medieval Europe. Moving in the other direction, Josef Skvorecky turns away from his usual Czech settings to focus in *The Engineer of Human Souls* on contemporary Canada. Narrated by a middle-aged writer in exile who works as a professor of English at a Canadian college, as Skvorecky himself does, the novel functions as a vehicle for its author's impatience with North American liberalism. Guy Vanderhaeghe's *My Present Age* (his first novel and second book after winning the Governor General's Award for *Man Descending*, a short story collection, in 1982) develops the hackneyed male menopause theme so prominent in last year's list.

Atwood's latest book of poems *Interlunar* (Oxford) maintains familiar stance and themes. Other notable women's collections include Catherine Ahearn, *Luna-Verse* (Aya); Mary di Michele, *Necessary Sugar* (Oberon); Leona Gom, *Northbound* (Thistledown); Daphne Marlatt, *Touch to my Tongue* and Sharon Thesen, *Confabulations, poems for Malcolm Lowry*. The bilingual *Women and Words Anthology* (Harbour), following from the successful national conference in Vancouver, features the work of 81 writers. Other individual collections included Leonard Cohen's *Book of Mercy*, Douglas Barbour's *Visible Visions* and David Helwig's *Catchpenny Poems*, while Ken Norris edited the anthology *Canadian Poetry Now: 20*

Poets of the '80s (Anansi). Probably the best value for anyone trying to keep up to date in a hurry, it represents an intelligent and wide-ranging selection of poets and contains a biographical note and photograph for each.

On the critical scene, four lively if flawed books by younger critics, brought out by small presses, suggest that debate about our critical heritage is not quite as absent as their authors argue. Paul Stuewe, in *Clearing the Ground: English-Canadian Literature After Survival* (Proper Tales) attacks Frye and thematic criticism for encouraging simplistic literary analysis, while failing to escape it himself. B.W. Powe, in *A Climate Charged* (Mosaic) makes similar points in a more ambitious attempt to find an alternative. Arthur Kroker's *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (New World Perspectives) takes a more celebratory approach to our philosophical heritage, while Max Dorsinville places it most thoroughly in the comparative post-colonial context in *Le Pays Natal: Essais sur les Littératures du Tiers-Monde et du Quebec* (Nouvelles Editions Africaines).

DIANA BRYDON

NEW ZEALAND

The book of the year was undoubtedly Keri Hulme's awe-inspiring first novel *The Bone People* (Spiral). It is an immense, spiralling book that unwinds from the tower of isolated individuality that Kerewin Holmes has built herself, through the necessary, transforming pain which she and her two fellow voyagers (Simon, the beautiful, mute, European child found washed up on a West Coast shore, and Joe, the culturally adrift Maori who rescues and adopts the boy) endure as they forge a new social understanding. This process is described in terms of a mythic structure which covers huge areas of cultural and psychological ground; the result is a (limited) new society which embraces ideals of commitment and community.

In the *Australian Book Review* Peter Simpson argues that this novel might be 'not only ... a cultural document of immense significance to New Zealanders of all races and ... a major novel in its own right, but also ... an important advance in the development of New Zealand fiction, effecting a new synthesis of the previously distinct Maori and Pakeha fictional traditions'. He could well be right. The first edition sold out

almost instantly; it has been reprinted for world-wide distribution by Spiral in association with Hodder and Stoughton.

With this novel, her book of poetry, *The Silences Between (Moerakic Conversations)* (AUP, 1982) and her short stories (*The Windeater*, to be published later this year by Victoria University Press), Keri Hulme has established herself at the forefront of New Zealand writing. C.K. Stead has been there for some time. *All Visitors Ashore* (Collins) is his second novel (*Smith's Dream* (1971) was his first) and recalls youth (exuberance, naivety, loss), 1951, Auckland, the Waterfront Strike, from the perspective of a contemporary professor of English remembering his twenty-one year old self, Curl Skidmore. Like Hulme's protagonist, this one has a name which echoes its author's. But this is a novel which winds not into a vision of the future but into other people's autobiographies — especially Janet Frame's (here Cecelia Skyways) and Frank Sargeson's (Melior Farbro). Looked at as a whole, it's clear there is a mythologising process going on.

Stead provides accurate and entertaining social comedy as does Marilyn Duckworth with *Disorderly Conduct* (Hodder and Stoughton). She describes the trials of a woman facing the possibility of middle age, her past strewn with various semi-discarded lovers and her present beset by their lingering demands and their demanding offspring.

Philip Temple has written a semi-autobiographical account of an English childhood called *Sam* (Hodder and Stoughton), and other novels included three by first time novel writers: *Waiting for Einstein* (Benton Ross) by Nigel Cox, *High Country Weather* (Allen and Unwin) by Lauris Edmond, and *Ratatui* (Benton Ross) by Keith Overdon.

There were two fine collections of short fiction — *The Day Hemingway Died* (McIndoe) by Owen Marshall and *Real Illusions* (VUP) by Russell Haley. While these writers exercise their talents in different modes — Marshall is what is conventionally called a realist, Haley a post-modernist — reading these stories in tandem suggests that these are merely convenient categories for the critic rather than closed shops for the writer.

Both of these writers appear in *Some Other Country: New Zealand's best short stories* (Allan and Unwin), chosen by Marion McLeod and Bill Manhire, and so they should. Other selections among the twenty-two stories (each author represented only once) aren't so obvious but the provocative title is not undermined by any *foolish* choices. Look here for Keri Hulme's great story 'Hooks and Feelers'. Another anthology was *New Zealand Short Stories: fourth series* (Oxford) selected and with an introduction by Lydia Wevers, also successful. Short fiction here is clearly well able to come up with the goods: an appropriate place to note that

Antony Alpers has produced the definitive edition of *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (OUP).

There were a good number of verse collections. For me, the outstanding book was Ian Wedde's *Georgicon* (VUP). It demands, it gives, it exhilarates. The cover has a photograph of a child struggling to escape through the window of a car parked in front of a building crowned with the Kiwi Bacon kiwi (check *Kunapipi*, VI, 2) and the ride just takes off from there. Another Wedde collection also appeared — *Tales from Gothic City* (AUP/OUP). You can't get too much of a good thing.

The other notable collections were Bill Manhire's *Zoetropes, Poems 1972-82* (A&U/PNP), C.K. Stead's *Poems of a Decade* (Pilgrims South Press), both of which bring together previously published work with some new material, Stead's *Paris* (AUP/OUP), with lovely drawings by Gregory O'Brien, Leigh Davis's *Willy's Gazette* (Jack Books), his first collection, and Kevin Ireland's *Practice Night at the Drill Hall* (OUP).

Robin Hyde is an excellent writer — of poetry, fiction, journalism, autobiography — whose verse in particular has been somewhat overlooked. This should be remedied with the publication of Lydia Wever's edition of Hyde's *Selected Poems* (OUP) where the strength of her work (particularly her last book *Houses by the Sea* (1952)) is forcefully demonstrated. Hyde's autobiography *A Home in this World* (Longman Paul) with an introduction by her son Derek Challis and the autobiographical fragment 'A Night of Hell' has also appeared and other material is being reprinted including *Dragon Rampant* (1939), an account of her experience in China. Altogether, this adds up to a necessary rehabilitation for this extraordinary woman.

To continue the autobiographical theme, the Janet Frame trilogy continues with *An Angel at my Table* (Hutchinsons) which takes us through the experience of Dunedin Teachers' College, the rigours of hospitalization and the liberation into Frank Sargeson's bach at Takapuna. The final instalment will be out by the time this article is published. There has also been Alistair Campbell's *Island to Island* (Whitcoulls), a very interesting account of a man striving still to unravel the threads of a complex whakapapa, while Denys Trussel's biography *Fairburn* (AUP/OUP) is the long-awaited and welcome work on one of the first of our 'national' poets.

With the publication of Frank Sargeson's *Conversation in a Train and other critical writing* (AUP/OUP), selected and edited by Kevin Cunningham, the process of getting the bulk of the Sargeson oeuvre into book form seems almost complete (will there be a *Letters?*). The persona of Sargeson as critic is marked by generosity, magnanimity and encourage-

ment but beneath the surface there is plenty of evidence that there was a sharp and discerning critical intelligence at work. Cunningham, too, meets the highest standards as an editor.

Also out is *Introducing Witi Ihimaera* (Longman Paul) by Richard Corballis and Simon Garrett, the eighth in the series, while *New Zealand Drama 1930-1980: an illustrated history* (Oxford) by John Thompson further continues research into this area of our literature.

Finally, periodical activity. *Landfall* continues with a change of editorship: David Dowling now works with Hugh Lauder as Poetry Editor. *Islands* and editor Robin Dudding have resurfaced with two issues in a new series. *Pacific Quarterly Moana* had a general issue along with numbers devoted to specialized topics; *Rimu*, also from Waikato, demonstrated that a hard look at a particular region serves to polish a facet of the national literature. *And 3* continues strongly, joined (in Auckland and in format) by *Splash 1* and *2* which focusses on imaginative writing with a post-structuralist bent. *Splash* is edited by Wystan Curnow, Tony Green, Roger Horrocks and Judi Stout. Further south, Simon Garrett and John Newton edited *Untold 1* and *2*: fiction, verse, literature and art criticism.

Essentially, though, the book of 1984 was *The Bone People*.

SIMON GARRETT

PAKISTAN

From the standpoint of literature it was the most productive year in decades. As there was no new novel, I should mention first the four new volumes of poetry, comprising two individual collections and two anthologies. Mahmood Jamal, who migrated from Pakistan in 1967 and now lives in London, brought out *Silence Inside a Gun's Mouth* (Kala Press), a first book. The other collection was by Alamgir Hashmi, *Neither This Time/Nor That Place* (Vision), his fifth collection of poetry. Peter Dent's compilation, *The Blue Wind: Poems in English from Pakistan* (Interim Press), comprises work by five poets: Daud Kamal, Adrian A. Husain, Mansoor Y. Sheikh, Salman Tarik Kureshi and Alamgir Hashmi. It is the only anthology of Pakistani poetry to have been published in England. (For reviews of this book and Alamgir Hashmi's collection, see *Kunapipi*, Vol. VI, No 3, 1984.) *Next Moon: Five Pakistani Poets* (Quaid-e-Azam Library Publications), compiled by M. Athar Tahir, includes poems by Khwaja Shahid Hosain, Waqas Ahmad, Taufiq Rafat, Inam ul-Haq and M. Athar Tahir; again brought together in a volume for the first time.

No new novel, but paperback editions of recent novels by several Pakistani writers were published and these had a wide circulation. Zulfikar Ghose's *Don Bueno* and *A New History of Torments* were brought out by Black Swan (London), Salman Rushdie's *Shame* was issued by Pan Books (London), Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Bride* appeared as a Futura Macdonald paperback (London). Similarly, no new plays, but there was one reissue in drama: Hanif Kureishi's *Outskirts, The King and Me, and Tomorrow — Today!*, all in one volume, was brought out by Riverrun Press (Dallas/New York). The plays were published earlier by John Calder in England.

The English reader has access now to some more fiction and poetry originally written in the other Pakistani languages. Only a few selected titles can be mentioned: *Abdullah Hussein: Night and Other Stories* (Orient Longman/Sangam Books), translated from Urdu by Muhammad Umar Memon; *Fifty Poems of Khawaja Farid* (Bazm-e-Saqafat, Multan), introduced and translated from Siraiki by C. Shackle; *Faiz in English* (Pakistan Publishing House), selected poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, translated from Urdu by Daud Kamal; and the second edition of *Panjabi Lyrics and Proverbs* (Panjabi Adabi Laihr), translated by C.F. Usborne. Further items in English translation from Urdu may be seen in the *Annual of Urdu Studies* (Chicago) No 4, which also contains scholarly and critical material as well as the useful feature, 'Bibliographic News', pp. 117-9, about translations into English and criticism of Urdu literature.

There are at least four fine volumes of non-fiction. *Jawan to General: Recollections of a Pakistani Soldier* (East & West Publishing Co.) follows Mohammad Musa's book on the subject of the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965. But the present book is autobiographical, the fascinating life and career of the man who, recruited as a soldier in the British Indian Army, rose to be Pakistan Army's Commander-in-Chief. Mohammad Asghar Khan's *Generals in Politics* (Vikas) is of topical yet complementary interest as observation, by a man who retired as Chief of Pakistan Air Force and has been in active politics since. *Reflections on Islam* (Islamic Book Foundation/al-Maarif), by Hamoodur Rahman, is a collection of speeches and discursive, thoughtful essays by a former Chief Justice of Pakistan. Sher Ali Pataudi's *Quest of Identity* (Al-Kitab) is another volume mixing memoir with socio-political observation and reflection, by a former general-politician.

Scholarly and critical writing has numerous items of use. First, Zulfikar Ghose's *The Fiction of Reality* (Macmillan, UK/Salem House, USA). The Second Edition, revised and enlarged, of Muhammad Sadiq's *A History of Urdu Literature* (OUP) was published in Delhi and it

follows publication in 1983 of Sadiq's other supplementary volume, the First Edition of *Twentieth Century Urdu Literature* (Royal Book Co.). Two articles must be mentioned, which share certain themes and examine past and present literary developments: 'The British Raj: A Confrontation of Two Literary Sensibilities' by I.H. Batalvi, pp. 83-98, in *Adjoining Cultures as Reflected in Literature and Language*, ed. John X. Evans and Peter Horwath (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University); and 'The Literature of Pakistan' by Alamgir Hashmi, pp. 110-16, in *A Sense of Place: Essays in Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. Britta Olinder (Göteborg, Gothenburg University).

Among journals, *Explorations* published its biennial issue, with a sharp editorial by Professor Rafiq Mahmood about the place and teaching of English in Pakistan. *The Journal of the English Literary Club* also published a substantial issue (Session 1983-1984), edited by Ali Shehzad Zaidi. *Ariel* published its annual number. *Viewpoint* continued to publish original poetry, translations and critical comment on literary subjects. *The Ravi*, apart from its recent *Azad Number*, has hardly published anything of a literary nature, at least in English. The weekly magazines put out by the English dailies were rather general.

Finally, a bibliographic note. Readers will find 'A Select Bibliography of Pakistani Literature in English', with an introductory note, by Alamgir Hashmi, in *A Sense of Place: Essays in Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. Britta Olinder (Göteborg: Gothenburg University), pp. 111-16.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

SINGAPORE 1983/84

Singapore writers are certainly making their mark: Ho Min Fong in 1983 and Ovidia Yu in 1984 won the prestigious *Asiaweek* Short Story Competition. Ho, whose earlier novel *Singing to the Dawn* had gained recognition almost the moment it was published, had written a nostalgic story about the Singapore she knew but which no longer existed. In a fast-changing environment, nostalgic comment is bound to feature as a writer's lament. Yu — whose story 'A Dream of China' was commended by all the judges and till date has received the highest marks in the Competition — has publicly commented that she wrote to win: hence her story was written almost to a formula. It is a rich, evocative story, moving and sometimes very sad — the reader is left to wonder how a

twenty-year old actually managed it. Both Ho and Yu are not stopping either (unlike several other winners!) — they are busily writing yet more fiction (Ho, indeed, has finished another novel) and one hopes that their new works will reinforce the quality discerned in these prize-winning stories.

Another interesting event was the publication, in 1983, of James Villaneuva's *Space Encounters* — the first real science fiction to come out of Singapore. Though there exists an anthology of science-fiction stories from Singapore (*Singapore Science Fiction*, ed. K. Singh et al.), Villaneuva's is a novella with possibilities of continuation in the space opera genre. The novella is about the adventures of the spaceship *Ventura*, with its very human crew and its interesting mission. Written essentially for youngsters, the book should prove enjoyable to everyone. Imagination and skill combine to render *Ventura's* encounters suspenseful. If a little over-done the novella should, nevertheless, find a permanent place in Singapore's literature.

Catherine Lim, whose first book of short stories (*Little Ironies*) received rave reviews, published a collection of stories about the supernatural: *They Do Return*. Ghosts and preoccupations with the ghostly are common to Asia, and it is not surprising to find an author who has finally put in writing tales and anecdotes one becomes familiar with through word of mouth. The collection is meant to be read and enjoyed; there is little to recommend it for formal or academic analysis. The same has to be said of Sit Yin Fong's *Tales of Chinatown*, a witty collection dealing with saucy and spicy life styles. Sit used to write for a paper now defunct (*The Singapore Weekender*) and through his journalistic career was able to observe life in certain quarters more perceptively than most. His book is to be recommended; if only because it is so readable. Woo Keng Thye's *A Question of Time and Other Stories* is an unpretentious collection of eighteen stories that prove, on occasion, quite engaging because the author (perhaps because he is a medical consultant) cares little for such things as form, narrative skill, poetic justice. The stories are literally told in a straightforward way and the reader is not burdened with complexities of characterisation or of theme.

A major literary event in 1983 was the publication of *An Anthology of Singapore Chinese Literature*, edited by Wong Meng Woon and Wong Yoon Wah, two very well-known Singapore writers. This is an ambitious work, containing English translations of some 35 poems, 21 stories and 10 essays originally published in Chinese. For the first time there is now a fairly comprehensive anthology of Singapore Chinese literature available in English. It is hoped that the Malay and Tamil writers will follow this

lead and attempt to translate their works into English so that readers who do not know these languages but who want to familiarise themselves with the Singapore literature in these languages may be able to do so through the English translations. Translations are actively encouraged by the National Book Development Council of Singapore and by the Ministry of Community Development.

A good deal of controversy surrounded (and continues to surround) the publication of two anthologies by the Society of Singapore Writers. *Poets of Singapore* and *Stories from Singapore* (both edited by the Society's President, George Fernandez) received mixed reviews in both the Singapore and foreign press. While the aim was more than commendable, the achievement leaves a lot to be desired. For some reason the editor seems to have been harrassed by time and lack of professional support. Both anthologies feature the well-known names of Singapore literature but do not always contain the better works of these writers. Of the two, *Stories* is by far the more enjoyable because of the variety of the short stories included. *Poets* could have been deferred till a later date: as it stands the collection seems weak and not very well edited. However, no one who wishes to follow the literary scene of Singapore closely ought to miss out on these anthologies for they do represent a significant publishing event.

The literary highlight of 1984 was the publication of *Rice Bowl*. This novel, written by Christine Lim Su-Chen, bravely and provocatively documents some interesting events that occurred at the University of Singapore in the late sixties and early seventies. It is about a group of convent girls who meet with their former teacher at the University and get mixed up in her political and romantic involvements. Though presented as fiction (and some of the writing is very good) Singaporeans may well be able to connect the facts that produced this fiction. Precisely for this reason the book invites reading and then comment: no other novel published in Singapore by a Singaporean has so far succeeded in fictionalising reality so closely to the bone. Lim does not always display literary skill in her work (the style could be improved and the substance condensed) but she is certainly able to draw the reader into her world. We wonder what Lim's next work will be, for Singapore lacks works of candour.

Candour, however, is not usually lacking on stage. Clara Chua — newly returned from her studies in Australia — wrote a play called *The Life and Times of Mr X* which was staged as part of Singapore's twenty-five years of independence celebrations. The play was directed by well-known theatre personality Chandran Lingam. The play received plenty of media coverage because it dealt with 'Mr Average Singaporean' and tried,

through Mr X's history, to trace the history of post-independent Singapore. Chua is not a real playwright and the flaws were only too apparent — however, Chandran Lingam's excellent directing managed to bring the play alive and audiences went home feeling they had witnessed something worthwhile, if not brilliant.

Two articles that appeared in *Ariel* in 1984 might be of relevance to any critical study of Singapore literature: Kirpal Singh's 'An Approach to Singapore Writing' (Vol. 15, No 2) and Jan Gordon's 'The Second Tongue Myth' (Vol. 15, No 4). The first is both a critical survey of the literature produced to date as well as an attempt at methodology while the latter is an attack on the chief advocates of writing in English in Singapore. It is a shame that criticism lags so severely behind the literature that is being produced.

At the University a Seminar entitled 'The Writer's Sense of the Past' was held in October 1984. This drew scholars and writers from seven countries and some excellent papers were delivered. The undergraduate magazine *Focus* continues to come out annually with the odd poem and short story of literary merit. *Singa*, the official government literary magazine, struggles to survive amidst scarcity of worthwhile contributions as well as poverty of funds. It is distressing that *Singa* no longer publishes those wonderful art photos it did in its early issues. Literary-wise some newer contributions show a degree of experimentation not frequently noticed in the works of more established writers. *Singa*, because of its status, is potentially the most powerful magazine that Singapore has.

Thus 1983 and 1984 were mixed years for the literary scene in Singapore. While the economy forges ahead, the literary arts in Singapore continue to extract a precarious existence, relieved, every now and then, by blessings from unexpected quarters.

KIRPAL SINGH

SOUTH AFRICA

For only the second time in its history the premier South African literary prize, the CNA (Central News Agency) Award was given to a poet. Douglas Livingstone's *Selected Poems* (Johannesburg: Ad Donker) is a deserving winner, representing twenty-five years of poetry-making in southern Africa. Few have stamped the violence, beauty, fear and

terrible joys of Africa so memorably on the imagination as has this poet from Durban:

Under the baobab tree, treaded
death, stroked in by the musty cats,
scratches silver on fleshy earth.
Threaded flame has unstitched and sundered
hollow thickets of bearded branches
blanched by a milk-wired ivy. Choleric
thunder staggers raging overhead.
(‘Stormshelter’)

If one recent poet has rivalled Livingstone’s verbal magic it is Sydney Clouts, who passed away in London in 1983. His *Collected Poems* appeared from David Philip of Cape Town, while individual volumes by two established poets, Patrick Cullinan’s *The White Hail in the Orchard* (from David Philip) and Lionel Abrahams’ *Journal of a New Man* (from Donker), were reminders of the continuing richness and variety of poetry from this country. Siphso Sepamla’s *Selected Poems* also appeared under the Donker imprint, as did a first volume, *baptism of fire*, by 27-year old Dikobe wa Mogale, who is currently serving a 10-year sentence on political charges. In addition to the various volumes of poetry, two critical works appeared: the English translation of Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre’s study, *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa* (London: Heinemann) and Michael Chapman’s *South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective* (Donker).

Several other critical works were published during 1984. Brian Willan wrote a biography of the early twentieth-century author of *Mhudi*, Sol T. Plaatje (Johannesburg: Ravan Press) and Stephen Gray researched a neglected novelist of the first years of this century, Douglas Blackburn (Boston: Twayne). Similarly the black poet, dramatist and critic of the 1940s, H.I.E. Dhlomo, at last received his due, with the appearance of his *Collected Works* (ed. Tim Couzens and Nick Visser) and a biography by Couzens entitled *The New African* (both books are from Ravan Press). Other early writers were republished in David Philip’s valuable Africa-south Paperback Series, namely William Plomer (*Selected Stories* and the deflating biography *Rhodes*), Es’kia Mphahlele (*The Wanderers* — now unbanned), Peter Abrahams (*Path of Thunder*) and Ethelreda Lewis, whose novel *Wild Deer* first appeared in 1933 and tells the story of a black American singer who discovers his soul in South Africa.

Of particular note among new works were Es’kia Mphahlele’s second volume of autobiography, *Africa My Music* (Ravan), Nadine Gordimer’s collection of stories, *Something Out There* (Ravan), Bessie Head’s fiction-

alized history of Botswana, *A Bewitched Crossroad* (Donker), and Miriam Tlali's 'township' novel, *Mihloti* (meaning 'tears'), published by Skotaville Publishers (the new and only black publishing house in Johannesburg). Rose Zwi's novel *Exiles* (Donker) deals with Jewish South Africans in Israel, while Ann Millar's first novel is something of a *tour de force*, and one which will probably raise the question of the South African writer's 'right' to ignore the political immediacies of his or her situation. Utilizing modernist techniques of narration *Ariel Rose* explores a world of music, literature and art, as Millar traces the ambitions and fears of the Serineau family (the father, of French extraction, is the conductor of the Johannesburg symphony orchestra) in South Africa and Europe. More pointedly 'South African' are Christopher Hope's satire *Kruger's Alp* (London: Heinemann) and Breyten Breytenbach's *Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (Johannesburg: Taurus), the latter telling of this Afrikaans poet's experiences in a South African prison. (Hope and Breytenbach were runners-up to Livingstone in the CNA stakes.)

A perceptible trend on the literary scene has been towards the 'worker perspective', and Ravan Press' 'Worker Series' has offered several cheaply produced, simply written, non-fictional accounts of factory life, trade union activity and what are usually seen as the repressive responses of white Capital. With Black resistance increasingly being located outside of the cultural paradigms of Black Consciousness, it seems as if 'workers' literature' is about to become the next emotional and imaginative construct. In fact, a recent advertisement, placed by Ravan Press in a Labour bulletin, called for submissions by 'worker-poets'.

MICHAEL CHAPMAN

WEST INDIES

1984 saw more reissues than new works by the established novelists. V.S. Naipaul's *Finding The Centre: Two Narratives* (London: André Deutsch) is new, but only marginally so, since its two constituent essays, 'Prologue to an Autobiography' and 'The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro' were both previously published in journals (though the book version of 'Prologue' adds an extended account of a trip Naipaul made to Venezuela in search of the man on whom he based Bogart of *Miguel Street*). Naipaul's foreword to *Finding the Centre* makes clear that he intended 'Prologue' as a complete, integral essay, not — despite what the title had led many of us

to believe — as an introduction to a full autobiography. As it stands, the piece is nevertheless quite significant to students of Naipaul's work. It provides an intimate account of his relationship with his father and of his early days in London where he wrote *Miguel Street*. It enables us to confirm — what has always been suspected — that Naipaul draws heavily on his own personal experience for *A House for Mr Biswas*. And it allows us a glimpse of how Naipaul transforms this experience into art. The other essay also reveals Naipaul's creative process. It is an account of life in the Ivory Coast, one of the more 'progressive' African countries; however, as in most of Naipaul's travel pieces, it says much about the author. Naipaul states: 'The reader will see how the material was gathered' and how it 'could have served fiction or political journalism or a travelogue', but was used primarily to show the author's recollection and contemplation of his experience: 'However creatively one travels ... it takes thought (a sifting of impulses, ideas and references that become more multifarious as one grows older) to understand what one has lived through.'

Shiva Naipaul's *Beyond the Dragon's Mouth* is a collection of reports, memoirs, and stories previously published in magazines and journals over the last ten years. The introductory piece, a loose autobiographical sketch of his early years in the West Indies, conveys his consciousness of his lack of national and ethnic identity. 'Every day,' he says, 'I have to redefine myself.' His portrayal of the Trinidad of his youth is unfavourable, often sardonic. And so are his reports on other areas of the Third World, such as Puerto Rico, Iran, Africa, Seychelles, India, and Morocco. The sardonic tone in the journalism becomes sympathetic in the short stories, which are fine studies of domestic relationships in Trinidad.

Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* was reissued in Heinemann's Caribbean Writers Series, with an introduction by Mervyn Morris. (The sequel to this novel, *Moses Migrating*, published in 1983, won the Writer's Guild of Alberta Howard O'Hagan Award for best fiction in 1984.) *While Gods Are Falling*, Earl Lovelace's earliest novel (Collins, 1965), which describes a youth's crisis when faced with unemployment in Port of Spain, was reissued in the Longman Drumbeat series, and so was Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron*. George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* was reprinted by Allison and Busby. André Deutsch published Jean Rhys's *Letters, 1931-1966* and *Jean Rhys: The Early Novels*, which includes *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr MacKenzie* (1930) and *Good Morning Midnight* (1939). New Beacon reissued *Black Fauns*, Alfred Mendes's study of a Trinidad communal yard of the 1930s, with an

introduction by Rhonda Cobham. New Beacon published also an account of the experiences of a Jamaican who served in the Royal Air Force during World War II: *Jamaica Airman: A Black Airman in Britain 1943 and After* by E. Martin Noble.

The Guyanese novelist, Roy Heath (who is perhaps best known for *The Murderer*, winner of the 1978 Guardian Fiction Prize) published a new novel, *Orealla* (Allison and Busby), which was runner-up for the Whitbread Prize. Set in Georgetown, Guyana, the novel tells of the protagonist's relationships with two women of antithetical temperament and with an Amerindian whose hinterland village, Orealla, comes up against the alien forces of civilization. Three earlier works by Heath were reissued in paper: *From the Heat of the Day*, *Genetha*, and *One Generation* (London: Flamingo). Ralph De Boissière, of Trinidad and Australia, reissued his social realism novel *Rum and Coca-Cola* (Allison and Busby). The Guyanese writer, Grace Nichols (whose *I is a Long Remembered Woman* won the 1983 Commonwealth Poetry Prize), wrote *Leslyn in London* (Hodder and Stoughton), a collection of stories for children.

In poetry, Derek Walcott published another outstanding volume, *Midsummer* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux). The fifty-four poems are all set in midsummer, the heat and stasis of which Walcott captures brilliantly. But midsummer is also a pervasive metaphor for various conflicting attitudes and moods. Several poems examine the role of the poet caught between the metropolitan and the island worlds. Some portray him at mid-life wondering 'what if the lines I cast bulge into a book/ that has caught nothing?' Others show him in temporary exile experiencing the pull of family, friends, and island home.

Another remarkable volume of poetry is David Dabydeen's *Slave Song* (Denmark: Dangaroo), which was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. The fourteen poems — some of which won the Quiller-Couch Prize in 1978 at Cambridge University — explore the experience of the oppressed Guyanese peasants on the sugar-estates during the colonial days. This theme has been written about before, but Dabydeen's striking use of language, rhythm, and imagery makes this volume a powerful restatement. Moreover, he focuses not on the peasants' brutal treatment at the hands of their masters but on their coarsened lives, the consequence of their brutalized existence. The poems are written in authentic — not literary — dialect and needed the extensive annotation provided to make them accessible to the reader unfamiliar with the dialect. Dabydeen, in fact, gives full translations of the poems, which often can stand on their own as separate poems that are as good as the dialect versions.

Two other volumes should be noted: *Deadly Ending Season* (London: Akira) by the Jamaican poet, Desmond Johnson, and *Human Rites: Selected Poems* (London: Anvil) by the Montserrat poet, E. A. Markham. *AJS at 70* (Georgetown, Guyana), a volume in honour of A. J. Seymour's seventieth birthday, edited by Ian McDonald, has pieces by, among others, Mervyn Morris, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, and Edward Brathwaite, and includes some representative Seymour poems chosen by him. Two poetry anthologies for students were published: *Caribbean Poetry Then and Now* (Hodder and Stoughton) edited by Stewart Brown, and *The Chatto Book of West Indian-British Poetry*.

Earl Lovelace's *Jestina's Calypso and Other Plays* (Heinemann) has three plays, none of which is new. The title play was first performed in 1978. It has an absorbing dramatic situation. Jestina is expecting a pen-pal from the United States, who has proposed to her, having seen only a photograph of her. A warm-hearted but ugly woman, she has sent her pen-pal not her photograph but that of a beautiful friend. Lovelace focuses on Jestina's personal plight, but he uses it to reflect the social situations in post-colonial Trinidad. The second play, 'The New Hardware Store' (1980), examines the relationship between an uncaring employer and his dissatisfied staff; and 'My Name is Village', first performed in 1976, is a lively musical about village life.

In criticism, there was Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon), which has a bibliography of material available in print and on tape. Elgin W. Mellown has been working since the 1960s on *Jean Rhys: A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism* (N.Y. and London: Garland Publishing). This has been described as the definitive bibliography on Rhys. Ken Corsbie's *Theatre in the Caribbean* (Hodder and Stoughton) is an introduction, for students, to theatre in the Caribbean. Two significant critical studies were reissued in paper: Kenneth Ramchand's revised and updated 1983 edition of *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (Heinemann), and Lloyd Brown's *West Indian Poetry* (Heinemann) which was first published in the Twayne World Authors Series. *Critical Issues in West Indian Literature* (Parkersburg, IA: Caribbean Books), edited by E. Smilowitz and R. Knowles, has ten articles culled from papers presented at three conferences on West Indian Literature (1981-83), organized by the English Departments of the universities of the region. There are papers on regional criticism, women and theatre, creole socio-linguistics, Lamming, Heath, Naipaul, Lovelace, Selvon, and Marson.

Two journals brought out special issues on Caribbean literature. *Modern Fiction Journal* devoted Vol. 20, No 3 (Autumn 1984) to V.S. Naipaul. There are articles on the early and later novels and *Among the Believers*, and a lively sketch of Naipaul the man by Paul Theroux. A checklist of primary and secondary material is appended. *The Journal Caribbean Studies* (Vol. 4, Nos 2 & 3) is a special issue on the Afro World. There are short stories on black women in literature, West Indians in Canada, female slaves, African dance, the Jamaican church, and the fiction of Charles Chesnutt. Finally, there is a new scholarly journal, *Antilia*, produced by the Faculty of Arts, St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies (Trinidad). It is published twice yearly, focuses on Caribbean culture, and includes creative writing and reviews. The first issue (1983-84) has Selwyn Cudjoe interviewing Kenneth Ramchand about V.S. Naipaul. The second (1984) includes pieces on Carpentier and Cuban poetry.

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