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Anna Rutherford

University of Aarhus, Denmark

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Abstract
Full text of issue.

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**Kunapipi** is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The journal is the bulletin for the European branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. As such it offers information about courses, conferences, visiting scholars and writers, scholarships, and literary competitions.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet, and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

All correspondence – manuscripts, books for review, inquiries – should be sent to:

**Anna Rutherford**  
Editor – KUNAPIPI  
Department of English  
University of Aarhus  
8000 Aarhus C  
Denmark

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Kunapipi refers to the Australian aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.
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### THE YEAR THAT WAS

### BOOK REVIEW

### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS
David Dabydeen's poetry belongs with 'a literature in broken English'. In this revised usage, the odium directed at deviations from an ethnocentrically prescribed form is displaced by the recognition that the writing practices of those who are outside the dominant culture have opened 'Eng. Lit.' to heterogeneous and heretical modes. The notion has been differently deployed by Dabydeen to define the Creole of his native Guyana as a hybrid language which speaks the dislocations and oppressions of its history:

[A] feature of the language is its brokenness, no doubt reflecting the brokenness and suffering of its original users – African slaves and East Indian indentured labourers. Its potential as a naturally tragic language is there, there in its brokenness and rawness which is like the rawness of a wound. (Introduction to Slave Song, pp. 13-14)

The power of language as a means of subjugation and conversely as the affirmation of values, perspectives and traditions despised or disregarded by colonial discourses, is a concept central to critiques of 'Third World' texts and the 'minority' writings of internally exiled communities like Afro-Americans, Chicanos, Aborigines, Maoris and British Blacks. One position, represented by Ngugi wa Thiong'o insists that since language is 'the collective memory bank of a peoples' experience in history', the post-colonial world can only repossess the signifying function usurped by imperialism through the use of native languages. Other critics, extending a proposition of Deleuze and Guattari, argue that the heterodox practices of the culturally exiled who write in a 'major' language, produce a counter-discourse articulating another consciousness and sensibility in the process of decodifying or 'deterritorializing' the forms and categories of 'great literature'. Whether written in the native languages or in those of the imperialist nations, a polyglot post-colonial literature, disruptive of canonical modes, enters the lists as a refusal of the cultural supremacy still exercised by the metropolitan centres. At stake is the self-definition of radical cultural difference in its multiple registers, a practice which positions the colonial and post-colonial
worlds as subject, wrenching from the west the power of producing the other hemisphere as the deviant form of its Self. ‘To represent the colonial subject is to conceive the subject of difference, of an-other history and an-other culture’. Such writing will resist assimilation by a literary criticism whose insistent rhetoric of universals effaces both the historical conditions within which texts are produced and the specificities they speak. What is instead required of critiques is attention to the breaking of rules and the dismantling of authorized structures:

Many arguments can be made for the importance and interest of non-canonical forms of literature such as that of the third world, but one is peculiarly self-defeating because it borrows the weapons of the adversary: the strategy of trying to prove that these texts are as ‘great’ as those of the canon itself.

As critic, Dabydeen has contributed to the project of restoring to visibility the black presence in English writing and art that has been marginalized in analytical discussion. As poet, he is an eloquent black presence. In an essay ‘On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today’, he places his poetry within those nonconformist traditions where established structures are disrupted and ‘standard’ English deliberately ‘misused’ by those to whom the language is both an imperialist legacy and a step-mother-tongue:

I cannot ... feel or write poetry like a white man, much less serve him ... I feel that I am different, not wholly, but sufficient for me to want to contemplate that which is other in me, which owes its life to particular rituals of ancestry.

In search of a language that will speak the Guyanese history and landscape, Dabydeen has written in Creole and in an English which, as Henry Louis Gates has said of all black texts written in a western language, is ‘two-toned ... Its visual tones are white and black, and its aural tones are standard and vernacular’. The many linguistic registers of his poetry enunciate a self dispersed between affiliation to Indian parentage, solidarity with Guyana’s history of conquest, colonization and slavery, and a consciousness irreversibly marked and fissured by English education and residence, the disparate facets held together within a black identity. His is the poetry of one who exists precariously in at least two world, accepting diaspora as a permanent condition while remaining bound to a natal culture he can no longer inhabit; and his verse which is part of the process in Caribbean writing opening up the African, Indian and Amerindian experiences, can be read as a debt to the ancestors.

The ambition of Slave Song is to articulate in the local idiom the perceptions and dreams of the historically muted, that is, to express what
‘they themselves cannot verbalize because of their lack of words’ (Notes, p. 53). But ‘speaking for’ others is a fiction, and although it is Dabydeen’s stated intention to ‘describe’ ways of being and seeing based on ‘a jumble of fact and myth, past and present’, (Introduction, p. 10) what he does is reinvent the speech and reconceive the fantasies of slaves and peasant canecutters – and often in verse forms that can owe as much to manipulating or parodying English modes as to oral tradition. ‘Guyana Pastoral’, for instance, a lament for the rape and murder of an Indian girl, undermines the sanitized rendering of Caribbean plantation life in eighteenth century English verse and the slavish imitation of this style in what Dabydeen calls the tourist doggerel of early Guyanese versifiers. The harshly accented metre violates pastoral poesy, the convention of moon, sun and wind as benign images in this convention is subverted by recitation of their absence, and another order of naming indigenous to the Guyanese landscape, erases the mystique of nature’s sublimity:

Under de tambrin tree wheh de moon na glow,
Laang, laang, laang, she lay, laang, laang
She cry, but de wind na blow
An dem wraang an straang
An dem wuk an dem bruk till fowlcack-crow.
Who see who hear when she belly buss, when she mout splash blood?
Only de jumbie umbrella dat poke up e white eye from de mud.

Under de tambrin tree wheh de sun na shine
...
Who know wheh she lass, who know wheh foh fine?
Only de cush-cush ants dat lay dem white egg in she mout. (p. 21)

In this collection are celebrations of food rituals (‘For Ma’), the rendering of peasant wit pitted against the ‘English’ pretensions of an upwardly mobile youth, (‘Two Cultures’), and an elegy to the failure of domestic relations (‘Man and Woman’). The central preoccupation however is with protesting a history of untold oppressions and a present of relentless exploitation in a language that is ‘angry, crude, energetic’. The cutlass, sickle and blade that hack, cut, chop and stab at the cane invoke the punishing labour of working on sugar plantations; chain, lash and whip image the condition and memories of slavery; piranha, snake and alligator are figures in an inhospitable landscape. Together these tropes overturn the vision of Arcadia delivered to the West by Raleigh’s The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana and perpetuated in subsequent English literature. The voice in Slave Song is overwhelmingly that of public protestation. In
'Slavewoman’s Song’, the inferred exchanges between a speaker and an addressee imply a lament for shared sorrows:

Ya howl –
Hear how ya howl –
Tell me wha ya howl foh
Tell me noh?
Pickni?
Dem tek pickni way?
Wha dem do wid pickni
Mek yu knaack you head wid stone
Bite yu haan like daag-bone? (p. 38)

while ‘Song of the Creole Gang Women’ reworks a communal work song in the interlocution of women’s voices execrating the usurpation and abuse of their bodies:

Wuk, nuttin bu wuk
Maan noon an night nuttin bu wuk
Booker own me patacake
Booker own me pickni.
Pain, nuttin bu pain
Waan million tous’ne acre cane.
O since me baan – juk! juk! juk! juk! juk!
So sun in me eye like taan
So Booker saach deep in me flesh
Kase Booker own me rass
An Booker own me cutlass – (p. 17)

(ii)

The physicality of the language which is the poetry’s strength also signals its danger. Of Slave Song Dabydeen has written that he set out to deal with the Romance of Cane, ‘meaning the perverse eroticism of black labour and the fantasy of domination, bondage and sado-masochism ... The subject demanded a language capable of describing both a lyrical and a corrosive sexuality’ (‘On Not Being Milton’). A project exposing the ‘pornography of empire’ may well itself need to utter obscenities in mapping the convergence of sexuality with the lived experience of an oppression that is racial and economic. When such writing simultaneously articulates and interrogates the heightened and morbid erotic energies released by colonialism, it will generate its own critique. This is the case with the polyphonic Coolie Odyssey, as it is with the requiems for the rape of Indian girls in Slave Song, which lament the deeds of men whose ‘savage imagination is the correlate to the physical savagery of their work’ (Notes, p. 53). However in that disturbing
set of poems which condense the internalization of colonialism's institutional and psychological violence, there is no dialogue with the direct represented discourse of speakers whose sexuality has been channelled into the desire to inflict and receive pain, and with whose imaginative transition from Romance to rape, the reader is invited to identify.

That colonialism engendered a sexual pathology in both black and white, women and men, is not in question. What is at issue is how texts speak these psychoses. The slave who proudly resists the master's degradations by asserting an uncolonized sexuality, dreams of taking revenge by abusing the slaveowner's wife:

Whip me till me bleed
Till me beg.
Tell me how me hanimal
African orang-utan
Tell me how me cannibal
Fit fo slata fit fo hang.

Bu yu caan stap me cack dippin in de honeypot
Drippin at de tip an happy as a hottentot!

Is so when yu dun dream she pink tit,
Totempole she puss,
Leff yu teetmark like tattoo in she troat!
('Slave Song', pp. 28 and 30)

The Canecutters who perceive in the white woman the image of their search for better things, are overtaken by the desire to defile and maim her, an assault which the speakers see her as inviting:

White hooman walk tru de field fo watch we canecutta,
Tall, straight, straang-limb,

Wash dis dutty-skin in yu dew
Wipe am clean on yu saaf white petal!
O Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!
So me spirit call, so e halla foh yu

But when night come how me dream...
Dat yu womb lie like starapple buss open in de mud
And how me hold yu dung, wine up yu waiss
Draw blood from yu patacake, daub am all over yu face
Till yu ditty like me and yu halla
Like when cutlass slip an slice me leg...
('The Canecutters' Song', pp. 25,26)

A canecutter who declaims his febrile version of a white woman's nightmare, attributes to her a lust for violation:
The frenzied imagination spoken by male black voices is balanced by the cries of black women for sexual gratification, even at the hands of the master whose exploitation causes their bodies’ agony:

Everything tie up, haat, lung, liver, an who go loose me caad? –
Shaap, straight, sudden like pimple, cut free
An belly buss out like blood-flow a shriek?
Or who saaf haan, saaf-flesh finga?
Or who go paste e mout on me wound, lick, heal, like starapple suck?
('Song of the Creole Gang Women', p. 18).

The field which an oppositional writing contests is densely mined by colonialist representation. As Fanon has written, for the white person, the black is the biological, the genital, the sexual instinct in its raw state, s/he is concupiscence, sexual prowess and performance. And in these poems, I would argue, pain, frustration and anger is spoken by the native positioned as the very figure of phobic white fears and desires – even though such paranoia is derided, even though the sadism/masochism is invoked as a disorientated spiritual aspiration. Moreover, what is troubling to this reader is that as the cut, chop, hack and stab of ‘the savage ceremony of cane’ takes possession of the imagination of male canecutter and slave, the rage against their condition is spent in fantasies of abusing and mutilating the white woman. This implicates the poems in a discourse shared by the master’s culture and beyond, one that represents rape as what woman wants. It could be anticipated that a poetry refusing colonialism’s misconstructions would displace its premises. When Fanon analyzed how the native under colonial conditions assimilates as self-knowledge and acts out in conduct those features ascribed to him or her by the master, he acknowledges his own capitulation to the white person’s denigratory gaze:

The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man ... I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships. (Black Skin, White Masks, p. 112)
It is against such surrender that Fanon's writing intercedes to construct an alternative mode of self-presentation. If the reading I have proposed is valid (it is one that may, and I hope will, be contested), can the same be said of these particular poems in *Slave Song*?

(iii)

Where *Slave Song* offers a fiction of transparency, of instant access to the authentically demotic voices of Guyana, *Coolie Odyssey* satirizes the conceit of poets aspiring to retrieve a folk heritage:

```
Now that peasantry is in vogue,
Poetry bubbles from peat bogs,
People strain for the old folk's fatal gobs
Coughed up in grates North or North East
'Tween bouts o' living dialect
('Coolie Odyssey', p. 9)
```

The illusion that the poet is transmitting the consciousness and unconscious of others sustained in *Slave Song* is dispelled in this collection by the presence of the poet as speaking subject. Here it is his address which appropriates the topos of the epic voyage to tell the story of the multiple dislocations in a Caribbean history:

```
It should be time to hymn your own wreck,
Your house the source of ancient song
('Coolie Odyssey', p. 9)
```

Hence the title is without any connotation of oxymoron, signalling as it does a project celebrating the unsung heroic journeys made across geographical space, between languages, from a peasant to a late capitalist mode of production; a journey where Home is never a place of rest, but always the name of what has been irretrievably lost, to be regained only in verse. The passage is from India to Guyana, where Old Dabydeen always dreaming of India,

```
Washed obsessively by the canal bank,
Spread flowers on the snake-infested water,
Fed the gods the food that Chandra cooked,
Bathed his tongue of the creole
Babbled by low-caste infected coolies.
('Coolie Odyssey', p. 10)
```
Self-exiled from Guyana, 'young Dabydeen', 'Who move out from mud and walk England', ('Ma Talking Words', p. 40) commemorates what he has left:

We mark your memory in songs  
Fleshed in the emptiness of folk,  
Poems that scrape bowl and bone  
In English basements far from home  
('Coolie Odyssey', p. 13)

Returning to Guyana, the expatriate is appalled by the tourists' perception to which he now has access:

How they clearly passing you by like beggarman  
But perplexed your blessed sunshine country  
Should breed such you-lice, shacks.  
('Homecoming', p. 43)

The poetry oscillates between the irony of the attempt to reincarnate in verse an original condition that never was, and the obligation on the poet to write the story of those silenced by history:

I brace you up against a wall  
Doom-laden, mugging you for a life-story.  
I trade you rum for old-time Indian talk  
But you stutter creole stupidity, yielding  
No gift but a sackful of green mangoes.

History we greed for in England,  
Must know coolie ship, whip, brown paddy-skins  
Burst, blown far by winds,  
Whilst pearl-white rice feed overseer-mouth:  
England, where it snows but we still born brown,  
That I come back from to here, home,  
As hungry as any white man for native gold,  
To plant flag and to map your mind.  
('Homecoming', p. 43)

The bitterness of the expatriate writer who by reiterating the tropes of colonialism's text places himself in the position of the colonizer is assuaged by the map his verse draws, one on which the configuration of colours conceptualizes an aboriginal perception of social landscape and history.

There is ambivalence too in the poet who, on returning to 'this library of graves' for a funeral, acknowledges the claim on him of forebears who discounted themselves and whose lives went unremarked and unhonoured:
There are no headstones, epitaphs, dates.
The ancestors curl and dry to scrolls of parchment.
They lie like texts
Waiting to be written by the children
For whom they hacked and ploughed and saved
To send to faraway schools.
Is foolishness fill your head.
Me dead.
Dog-bone and dry-well
Got no story to tell.
Just how me born stupid is so me gone.
Still we persist before the grave
Seeking fables.
We plunder for the maps of El Dorado
To make bountiful our minds in an England
Starved of gold.
('Coolie Odyssey', p. 12)

The self-conscious poet who privileges writing as constitutive of meaning – the past is a 'library of graves', the ancestors are documents written in an antique script – simultaneously performs an act of communication that inserts the writing into a social process. Now instead of speaking for a community, the poet addresses himself to them, conversing with them in a language that is 'two-toned' and producing their story which is also his own history. This act of recollection is not a re-call of a pre-existent condition but the reconception in writing of what they themselves drafted in their deeds, and which 'young Dabydeen' with his access to an English education and print technology will return to them. So fine an ambition does not go unchallenged by the peasant scepticism of 'Ma', herself a virtuoso word player, deriding the vanity of poetry:

That is dream and air!
You can't make pickni from word
Howsoever beautiful or raging:
The world don't know word.
...
Book learning you got,
But history done dead...
('Ma Talking Words', pp. 40-41)

(iv)

In appropriating and alienating the tropes of colonialism's texts, Dabydeen's poetry produces an intensely focused critique of colonialist appetites and practices. Recurrently, gold is degraded into images of abused labour, as in cane and canefields, or into a figure of violent conquest: 'Yellow of the palm of dead Amerindian/Unyielding gold' ('The Old Map', p. 14). In 'El Dorado',

9
the object of desire in the conquistadors’ and colonizers’ quest after the Amerindian legend is simultaneously debased in sustained metaphors of exploitation, and redeemed through the grace of an oppressed community honouring its ‘gilded one’:

Juncha slowly dying of jaundice
Or yellow fever or blight or jumbie or neighbour’s spite,
No-one knows why he turns the colour of cane.
...
Skin flaking like goldleaf
Casts a halo round his bed.
He goes out in a puff of gold dust.
...
They bury him like treasure,
The coolie who worked two shillings all day
But kept his value from the overseer. (p. 15)

_Coolie Odyssey_ is haunted by a word that came to Europe via Columbus, was later anagrammatically reinscribed in _The Tempest_ and perpetuated by _Robinson Crusoe_. Of the power of this word, Peter Hulme has written:

Discursively the Caribbean is a special place, partly because of its primacy in the encounter between Europe and America, civilization and savagery, and partly because it has been seen as the location, physically and etymologically, of the practice that more than any other, is the mark of unregenerate savagery – cannibalism. ‘Cannibalism’... is the special, perhaps even defining, feature of the discourse of colonialism as it pertained to the native Caribbean.

As the poems variously and ingeniously invoke this ‘defining feature’, detaching it from ‘Caribbean savagery’, there is a shift in the semantic field. ‘Bone’ is reiterated as a figure of social deprivation; the baby feeding at a mother’s breast ‘Cannibalize she nipple’ (‘Christmas in the Caribbean’, p. 23); the act of cannibalism is mimiced and metamorphosed in sexual encounters:

Lapped at her ego
Like the mouth of beasts
...
Sucked her distress
Like berries from her gaping vein
(‘Water with Berries’, p. 36)

She wanted to suck words,
Violate some mystery,
Feed deep, delirious
Into some gleaming tropical vein
...
He clamped his loins
From her consumptive mouth
('New World Words', p. 37)

The daemon is briskly demystified by the Englishwoman oppressed by the black man's obsession with the self-image imposed on him:

She wanted to be alone with her world, vexed
Always by his prehistoric eye,
The strange usurping tales of anthropophagi
And recitation of colonial texts.
('The New Poetry', p. 28)

And it is exorcised by the memory of a joyous crab feast, its pleasures contrasted with the bleakness of expatriation:

Tonight we'll have one big happy curry feed,
We'll test out who teeth and jaw strongest
Who will grow up to be the biggest
Or who will make most terrible cannibal.

We leave behind a mess of bones and shell
And come to England and America
Where Ruby hustles in a New York tenement
And me writing poetry in Cambridge
('Catching Crabs', p. 44)

To demythologize 'Caliban' requires yet more complex moves. At the centre of the collection both in its ordering and its engagement with the white world's construction of its others, are the poems invoking the incommensurable wants in encounters between black man and white woman who find themselves cast in the roles of 'Caliban' and 'Miranda' written by colonialism. When the poet as supplicant black man yearns for the white woman as lover/mother to heal his psychic pain and redeem his degraded image, it is Caliban's speech that he borrows for his text - and for the title of one poem:

That when he woke he cried to dream again
Of the scent of her maternity ('Miranda', p. 33)

...he, forever imprisoned
In a romance of history
Emerges from sleep as from ship's bowel
Desperate to dream again
In her white spacious body
('Water With Berries', p. 36)
However, both the concupiscent, disobedient Caliban and the pristine figureheads of the civil society that perpetrated colonialism are parodied in the witty dialogue of 'The Seduction' where the speakers define themselves negatively in relationship to the stereotypes — as is poetic form since the sexual tensions complicit with colonial history are sung in the simple syntax, metre and rhyming couplets of the ballad:

She said her name was Kate
And whether he would mate
On such and such a date
Or else tonight before too late
Before the pause to contemplate
Before the history and the hate.

I cannot come to you tonight
With monstrous organ of delight
I have no claw no appetite
I am not Caliban but sprite
But weakness flutterance and flight
An insect scurrying from the light.

She said her name was really Jane
That she was sweet as sugarcane
Unblighted by colonial reign
That all he wanted was some pain
To wrap himself in mythic chain
And labour in his self-dismay.

You know that I am flaccid black
Yet stretch my skin upon a rack
That I may reach whereof I lack
And scrape away the mange and plaque
Of legacy and looking back
Obliterate the ancient track.

That I am naked lost in shame
Without the fantasy and game
The rules that history did proclaim —
I am the torture: you the flame
I am the victim: you the blame —
Tell me again, what is your name?

Britannia it is not she cries!
Miranda also she denies!
Nor map nor piracy nor prize
Nor El dorado in disguise
With pity gazed into his eyes
And saw he could not improvise (pp. 30,31)

The disjunctions of this dialogue are implicit in the series of poems about 'white woman'. The black man's sexuality is imprisoned in a dream world
inhabited by images of Sun-god, cane and overseer, slave ships and 'a cornucopia of slaves poured overboard', by chain, rack and whiplash, by

The howling oceanic thrust of history
That heaved forth savages in strange canoes
('The Sexual Word', p. 32)

The liberation he seeks in her embrace is refused by the white woman who can respond to his poetry but not to the importunities of his demand that she enter into his phantasmagoria: 'She forsook as tedious his confession...' ('The New Poetry', p. 28); 'She refused the embrace of fantasy...' ('The Sexual Word', p. 32). In another incarnation, the white woman expropriates the black man to serve her desire for the primitive, seeing him as 'Goldleaf or edge of assagai' ('Caliban', p. 34), or probing him for 'some gleaming tropical vein' ('New World Words', 37). In keeping with an 'Odyssey' that is a journey without arrivals, there is no repossession of a sexuality whose privacies have been invaded by colonialist representation, only the struggle to confront and disavow the positions this imposes.

Dabydeen's is a radical political poetry; nourished by images of the enslaved past endured by generations of the downtrodden, its atavism is not a retrograde worship of the ancestors but a rewriting of the west's master narrative that addresses the post-colonial condition. He writes not only as a Guyanese within a Caribbean tradition, but as a British Black who has known the 'winter of England's scorn' and whose poetry defies the racist fear that 'They will besmirch the White Page with their own words'. The irony, of which Dabydeen is aware, is that prominent in his audience are 'congregations of the educated' who are white, and if as Ma maintains 'White people don't want heal their own scar or hear their own story', then to whom are the poems addressed? Dabydeen is being ingenuous when he attacks a critic for dismissing creole as difficult; the effort required of those who know no creole is rewarding, but it does require an effort, and this makes the reception of Slave Song self-limiting amongst a diversified poetry readership. The address of Coolie Odyssey is however available to the heterogeneous poetry reading communities of the Caribbean, the metropolitan centres and the Anglophone post-colonial world. It is on these combined sources that the poetry depends for its reinscriptions in critical discussion. In a changing situation where critics are increasingly aware of the need for attention to the structural and historical difference of nations and communities, Dabydeen's iconoclastic poems which foreground their revisions of traditional and modernist forms, can now be received on their own terms – as poetry that estranges customary English usage, returning the language to
readers as the bearer of alternative meanings. Because the poetry redraws the map of territory charted by a European cartography, it has the capacity to change the consciousness of its audience.

NOTES

3. 'What is a Minor Literature?', in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press), 1986 (Published in French, 1975). The argument has been explored and expanded in issues of *Cultural Critique*.
10. See Notes to 'The Canecutter's Song' where Dabydeen writes: 'She wants to be degraded secretly (the long lace frock is temptingly rich, and it hangs loose, suggestively; also the chaos of her hair), to be possessed and mutilated in the mud. The tragedy is as much hers for her desires too are prevented by social barriers.' p. 53.

Loquats

They flourished
beside the clothes line
or the tank
in dry backyards,
still shade the dunnies
on deserted farms.
This sweetness between the leathery skin
and the glossy stones –
remember the slow smiles of the men,
the sunburnt arms of the women
near Goyder’s Line,
pioneers, laconic survivors
lit up by fruit or rain.

Dour trees
of Grandma’s time
they claimed the possums, birds,
and neighbourhood kids
plunging up half-light
to suck the pale flesh,
spit slippery pips
and clang them on next-door’s tin.
Drained skins
the colour of summer
lit the ground.

On Great aunt’s lacquerware box
a stream, a bridge, a tree –
luh kwat: Chinese rush orange.
Under the lid,
a puff of dark,
a topaz brooch, seed pearls, a ruby ring,
down the hall footsteps coming.
Click shut quick.
A wet finger swirl
on the dusty top
leaves the green cowlicks gleaming.
Nightfall

'No!' said Papa and went. It wasn't for eggs.
Nan caught two chooks in a flurry and held their legs.
Chop. Something zigzagged horribly off.
Chop. Another on crazy legs went for its life
down our safe garden, off its head.
'Silly beggars,' breathed Nan, shocked at the word.
Pulling the feathers out was better – we looked
as soon as they kept still, prepared to be cooked.
Before dark fell we came inside
but fidgeted and would not stay in bed
so Papa told us tales of giants and ghosts,
of pirates and mermaids and fabulous beasts
and how the elves stole treasure from the gnomes.
'Tom,' clicked Nan, 'You'll give those children dreams.'

Dividend

Saturday, late morning, the fever began:
the short phone calls to the little man
that Aunty Bubbles knew, the form and weight
and starting price. They're lined up at the gate
for the fourth at Victoria Park. The nasal voice
of the wireless galloped us fast as the winning horse.
'It's Valiant Boy by a short half-head.'
'Oh pooh,' our mother said, 'another dud.'

But when she wore her lucky hat to the races
once, her Uncle Clarry's grey, Sir Croesus,
came home on the rails at fifty to one.
He gave a pound note each to me and John,
and a taste for risk; we learned to back long shots,
dark horses, elderly relatives, and red hats.
Day Trip

The carriage shudders and rolls; no getting off
the illusion of stasis, of safety.
From the window seat a woman smiles:
she's nursing a baby from Vietnam
with a harelip like her own.
The baby will not smile but stares
from eyes like two dark seas
till rocked to sleep. The angel hovering
in the corner there knows nothing of this,
trapped in perfection with so much to learn –
blood, war, healing, how to hold a child.
Here in second class we're sure of less and less.
Forgetting as the train rocks on,
we watch the dust motes circling in the sun.

Piano

Over the gravel and grass and road, barefoot,
with tuppence each to spend at the corner shop,
quick as skinks on the asphalt soft with heat
and the short-cut stubbly straw of St Joseph's Prep,

across Tutt Avenue, not a car in sight,
to Mr Mellor's Store, the high stone step,
the creaky door and the cool dim light
we skipped. The smell of tea and soap,

vanilla and biscuits, welcomed us in to choose
two ice-blocks – peach and banana were best.
Going back, the stubble whirred up at our eyes
and over the convent wall as we came past,

piano music floated and was lost
to the air: grasshoppers turning back to grass.
A great deal has been written about Mr Biswas's quest for identity, and critics are generally agreed that this search is inseparable from his search for a house. It has been insufficiently remarked, however, that the idea of identity is bound up with conceptions of language in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The ways in which language is conceived and used in the novel play a major role in the characterization and development of the protagonist. Somewhere between the group of foreign-looking old men who cannot speak English but 'are afraid to leave the familiar temporariness' or life in Trinidad, and the English speaking grandmother, Bipti, Mr Biswas flickers between states: identity and nonentity. This unstable situation is aggravated by the further complication that none of the categories themselves, Hindi-speaking, English-speaking, identity, nonentity, represents a stable position, positive or negative; hence Mr Biswas's dilemma.

Naipaul himself articulates an acute awareness of the significant role that language plays in the lives of displaced, colonized people both on a national and individual level. He says of his own relationship to language:

> Every writer is in the long run on his own; but it helps to have a tradition. The English language was mine; the tradition was not.

> I've decolonized myself through the practice of writing, through what I've learned from writing, looking at the world. But let me also add to this that I feel an enormous pain about the situation.

Echoing in these remarks is, on the one hand, Naipaul's sense of loss in having to write in a tradition to which he feels alien, and, on the other hand, a sense of fulfilment through that very tradition. Of course achievement is qualified by the 'enormous pain about the situation.' Nevertheless, Naipaul's identity, his awareness of himself 'as a presence' both as writer and as man, is through language, through writing, to be exact.
Jacques Derrida has written about the tendency in Western culture to view writing as the secondary, and speech as the primary mode of communication. This hierarchical approach to language is only one in an infinite list of linguistic couplings: good/evil, truth/falsehood, man/woman, white/black and so on. The tendency to privilege speech over writing, logocentrism, derives from the belief that language points transparently to some object or idea external to and independent of itself, and to which it plays a subordinate role. Speech, because it is direct, having no material interference such as words on a page, is able to convey reality directly. Speech has this special quality, it is believed, because like interior language, the language of silent communication with the self, it enables the speaker to hear himself speak. Speech, therefore, is associated with presence.

Writing, on the other hand, is a substitute for speech; it is necessary only when the speaker or conditions favouring personal direct communication are lacking. Consequently, it occurs as the imitation and corruption of speech, its authenticity forever called into question by its materiality. The written word is the mark of loss of community, or alienation, of absence.

Derrida himself rejects phonocentrism, the privileging of speech over writing. He maintains that language is marked by differance, a term he coined to mean 'to differ' and 'to defer' simultaneously. The idea of the differential nature of language originated with Sassure and is based on the belief that there is no intrinsic relationship between the signifier and signified; for example, between the term 'role' and the concept it represents. There is no logical reason why the latter should not be called something else. The designation 'role' is arbitrary. We derive meaning from the term because we mentally differentiate it from other words which phonetically or conceptually fall within the same category, for example, 'dose' or dhalias.

Meaning is possible then as the outcome of the interplay of signs. That is, signs make sense to us only in so far as they relate to other signs, already encountered or to come, in a text. At the same time signs owe their identity to their difference from those very signs to which they relate. This relationship of difference and delay between signs accounts for the differential nature of the language, and the impossibility of definitive interpretation of texts. For, as Derrida concludes, meaning cannot be wholly present at any given moment; meaning is always being delayed. According to Roland Barthes, meaning is 'a timeless approximation', it can be indefinitely deferred.

Derrida's comments on conceptions of language in Western society have a strong bearing on the theme of identity and its connection with conceptions
of language in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The theme of identity emerges quite early in the work. At the beginning of the second chapter we are told:

Mr Biswas could never afterwards say exactly where his father's hut had stood ... when Mr Biswas looked for the place where he had spent his early years he saw nothing but oil derricks and grimy pumps, see-sawing, endlessly, surrounded by red No Smoking notices. His grandparents’ house had also disappeared, and when huts of mud and grass are pulled down they leave no trace. His navel-string, buried on that inauspicious night, and his sixth finger, buried not long after, had turned to dust. The pond had been drained and the whole swamp region was now a garden city of white wooden bungalows with red roofs, cisterns on tall stilts, and neat gardens. The stream where he had watched the black fish had been dammed, diverted into a reservoir, and its winding, irregular bed covered by straight lawns, streets and drives. The world carried no witness to Mr Biswas's birth and early years. (p. 41)

The world carries only signs of Mr Biswas's absence. The 'No Smoking' notices, the oil derricks, the grimy pumps, by their presence, testify to Mr Biswas's non-existence; the bungalows with their neat gardens, the straight lawns, streets and drives are witness to the chaos that underpins his nothingness. From here on the narrative enacts Mr Biswas's struggle to realize his identity in a world of signs, signs that negate his presence.

He has no birth certificate nor any knowledge of his age. According to Lal, he does not 'even know how to born' (p. 42). He can enter school, cross an important initiatory boundary, only after Lal, agreeing with Bipti on a plausible birthdate, writes him into the role-book. And he is ushered into the world when Ghany, with his 'affidavits, stamps and things' (p. 44) writes his name and a date of birth on a piece of paper. Later, his occupations as sign writer, and then as journalist, link him to language of a most public kind. His relationship with fiction, indeed with writing as a whole (Samuel Smiles, Dickens, foreign magazines and newspapers), and his abortive attempts to become an author of fiction, emphasize the extent to which Mr Biswas's identity is bound up with the language or the written word. At one point he is imaged as a walking sign in his floursack pants which 'despite many washings were still bright with letters and even whole words' (pp. 102-3). As his identity is bound up in language, he must find himself through language.

At his earliest interaction with the world outside his home in the back trace Mr Biswas seems intuitively aware of the arbitrariness of the sign and therefore of its corruptibility. It is this awareness that enables him to triumph over Lal the school-teacher, who, versed in mechanical equation, 'one twos are two/Two twos are four' (p. 45), believes that if Mr Biswas writes 'I AM AN ASS' (P. 47) he will automatically be an ass. Lacing the letters with ironic energy, Mr Biswas subverts their expected effect. He divests the words of
meaning by focusing attention on their materiality and demonstrating their corruptibility. He 'outlined stylish, contemptuous letters and the class tittered approvingly' (p. 47).

The same principle of self-division and self-reflexive jest runs through the work Mr Biswas produces as sign painter and writer. In painting signs for the Tulsi store,

He began by decorating the top of the back wall with an enormous sign. This he illustrated meaninglessly with a drawing of Punch who appeared incongruously gay and roguish in the austere shop where goods were stored rather than displayed and the assistants were grave and unenthusiastic. (p. 82)

And in negotiating with a potential customer who wants 'a lot of birds in the sign ... hanging about and behind the lettering' (p. 75), Alec and Mr Biswas, knowing that the latter cannot draw, conveniently convince the customer that the 'modern thing is to have a lot of words ... nothing but words' (p. 75). Since they cannot provide birds, words will do just as well. The play on the phonic and graphic relationship between the two terms juxtaposed against the unrelatedness of the sign that the customer finally gets – 'Idlers keep out' (p. 75) – demonstrates the arbitrariness of the sign, and foregrounds the play of difference that characterizes signs; it also sets the undertone of absurdity that runs though communicative activity in the novel: language is prone to subvert rather than articulate desire.

Interestingly, Mr Biswas is introduced to Hanuman House as communicator; he 'went to Hanuman House to paint signs' (p. 81). And it is during the execution of this duty that he writes the note to Shama, 'I love you and I want to talk to you' (p. 85). It is in this frame of reference therefore, that the note must be seen. through the note, the novel makes a radical distinction between speech and writing, presence and absence. Mr Biswas finds it necessary to communicate his wish to speak in writing. Speech, he believes, would be a 'low and possibly dangerous thing.' Besides, 'the presence of her (Shama's) sisters and brothers-in-law deterred him' (p. 82). As it turns out, however, it is the note that proves dangerous; it finds its way into the wrong hands. When Mr Biswas left the store 'the note was in Mrs Tulsi's hand. She held it just above the counter, far from her eyes and read it...' She 'nodded absently to her (Shama) still looking at the note' (p. 85).

The text highlights the relationship that develops between Mrs Tulsi's hand, the note and Mr Biswas:

He heard a creak on the staircase and saw a long white skirt and a long white petticoat dancing above silver-braceleted ankles. It was Mrs Tulsi... Without acknowledging
his presence she sat on a bench and, as if already tired, rested her jewelled arms on
the table. He saw that in one smooth ringed hand she was holding the note.
‘You wrote this?’
He did his best to look puzzled. He stare hard at the note and stretched a hand to
take it. Mrs tulsi pulled the note away and held it up.
‘That? I didn’t write that. Why should I want to write that?’
‘I only thought so because somebody saw you put it down.’ ...
‘What?’ Mr Biswas said ‘Somebody saw me put that down?’ ...
Mr Biswas was puzzled. It would have been more understandable if they had taken
his word and asked him never to come to their house again. (Latter emphasis mine).
(pp. 87-88)

When he attempts to defend himself against Mrs Tulsi’s intimidation, ‘She
raised Mr Biswas’s note with her free hand and said: “What’s the matter?”
(p. 90) or becomes “stern” and asks “Why did you write this then?” She waved
the note.’ (p. 91)

An incriminatory element, the materiality of the note and its public nature
(hewas seen putting it down), keeps obtruding on the scene. At the same
time Mr Biswas’s spoken ‘word’, that is, his voice or presence, is being
ignored: ‘without acknowledging his presence’ Mrs Tulsi establishes the
validity of the ‘love letter’ (p. 87). And as if to confirm Mr Biswas’s absence
she refers to him impersonally as ‘the poor boy’ and ‘this person’ (p. 89-91).
To further heighten the sense of distance Mrs Tulsi is abbreviated to the
impersonal white skirt, white petticoat, and a free, smooth, ringed and
‘armoured hand’.

In A House for Mr Biswas writing is emphatically material, public and
unpredictable; it may be misappropriated and misinterpreted. Mrs Tulsi
reads ‘I love you and I want to talk to you’ (p. 85) as ‘I love and want to
marry the child,’ her child. This interpretation makes her the logical
recipient of a note that was not intended for her. The note leads Mr Biswas
into a maze of unforeseen relationships. Writing, unlike huts of mud and
grass, leaves an imprint or trace that will not only speak of but will speak for
the subject – thus opening the way for him to be invalidated and exploited.

Speech, on the other hand, is a sign of self-presence, of the possibility of
taking charge. ‘How often in the years to come ... did Mr Biswas regret his
weakness, his inarticulateness’ (p. 91); his failure to speak is the cause of his
entrapment, and speechlessness is weakness. If the latter is correct, then the
ability to speak must be a sign of strength, or control. This conclusion is
exactly what Mr Biswas’s fictional version of his engagement to Shama
implies:

Well, I see this girl, you know. I see this girl and she was looking at me, and I was
looking at she. So I give she a little of that old sweet talk and I see that she was liking
me too. And, well, to cut a lot story short, I ask to see the mother. (pp. 92-93)
Of course, by the time he tells this story Mr Biswas 'began feeling that it was he who had acted...' (p. 93). His story is all about self-presence and control: 'I see', 'I speak', 'I act'.

The opposition between speech and writing has gradually emerged as an important discourse in the novel. In fact the text goes so far as to suggest that this contrast must be maintained. The danger in confusing the two is cogently demonstrated in Mr Biswas's presentation of his poem in memory of his mother to his literary group.

... he disgraced himself. Thinking himself free of what he had written, he ventured on his poem boldly, and even with a touch of self-mockery. But as he read, his hands began to shake, the paper rustled; and when he spoke of the journey his voice failed. It cracked and kept on cracking; his eyes tickled. But he went on, and his emotion was such that at the end no one said a word... He said nothing for the rest of the evening. (pp. 484-85)

Focusing on the written word, Mr Biswas approaches the poem as a distinctly external and public document. But presence, his voice, direct and intimate, impinges on his consciousness; he hears himself speak his writing. The two forms of communication, up to this point separate, have collapsed into one. The break-down results in paralysed communication; no one, including Mr Biswas, could continue to speak.

And yet, verbal paralysis is not limited to moments when distinctions collapse dramatically. To win favour in Hanuman House Mr Biswas 'held his tongue' (p. 188). In fact, in Hanuman House and its extensions, speech, when it is initiated, tends to freeze rather than inspire communication. That is not to say, however, that there are not occasions of constructive speech in the work; these will be touched upon later. But there is ample evidence of a link between impotence and speechlessness: for some time after their wedding Mr Biswas, wishing to avoid the final commitment, does not speak to Shama; 'he wouldn't have known, besides, how to begin, with someone who had not spoken a word to him ...' (pp. 96-97). And when after days of desertion he returns to Hanuman House, their exchange of words is not calculated to improve communication between them:

'What?' Shama said in English, 'You come back already? You tired catching crab in Pagotes?'

... the crab-catcher was considered the lowest of the low.

'I thought I would come and help all-you catch some here' Mr Biswas replied, and killed the giggles in the hall

No other comment was made. (p. 102)
This interchange, meant to hurt and humiliate, is also guaranteed to kill any chances there might be of open constructive intercourse. The novel is full of benumbing verbal confrontations such as this, and these clashes are invariably accompanied by appalling silence as if some violence had been wreaked on speaker and hearer(s). Indeed, speech often erupts into violence or takes place as a result of violence. When, during an argument, Mr Biswas hits Shama, 'she was silenced in the middle of a sentence,' and 'for some time afterwards the unfinished sentence remained in his mind...' (p. 192). In response to Shama's destruction of the doll's house Mr Biswas hurrs abuse at her, 'You bitch'. Following this outburst 'the silence was absolute.' Mr Biswas 'could think of nothing to say.' (p. 220)

It is interesting that it is during one of these moments of violence and silence that Mr Biswas makes his final break from the Tulsi house in which his writing had trapped him. The card game between Anand, Owad and Shekkar ends when Owad slaps Anand. In his humiliation, the thing Anand is most conscious of is the 'silence of the house' (p. 550). Later, when on Shama's insistence Anand attempts to apologise to Owad, 'the talk stopped'; among the cousins and aunts, 'there was silence'; 'there was no word' (p. 554) for some time. During the ensuing outbreak of verbal abuse between Mr Tulsi and Mr Biswas, Shama cautions him; 'Hold your damned tongue' (p. 556); and as Mr Biswas shouts his intention to leave the house, 'there was an abrupt silence'; 'the house was absolutely silent'. Mr Biswas's children 'remained appalled in the room not daring to move to break the silence' (p. 557). These are only a few of the numerous situations involving speechlessness in A House for Mr Biswas, and each incident of muteness is a direct consequence of the way in which characters use language.

The interchange between Shama and Mr Biswas that was quoted above is substitutive. In referring to her husband as crab-catcher Shama categorizes and diminishes him, forcing him to respond in a limited and limiting manner. Communication between characters, particularly at Hanuman House and its extensions – The Chase, Shorthills, the Port of Spain house, Green Vale – follows this pattern generally. Mr Biswas refers to Mrs Tulsi metaphorically as 'the old queen'; 'the old hen', 'the old cow' (p. 104), 'the she-fox' (p. 129); to Seth as 'the big bull' (p. 117), to Shekkar and Owad as 'the little gods' (p. 104). Seth calls Mr Biswas 'the paddler' (p. 109). Various other such alienating substitutive appellations are hurled from one character to another from time to time.

According to Roman Jakobson's study, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance,' substitutive language (such as that practised in A House for Mr Biswas) is the symptom of verbal disorder.
The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. In aphasia, one or the other of these two processes is restricted or totally blocked—an effect which makes the study of aphasia particularly illuminating for the linguist. In normal verbal behaviour both processes are continually operative but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of cultural pattern, personality and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other.

In normal communication the speaker or writer chooses from a range of equivalences available to him and combines the selected words to produce coherent utterances. Both axes, the selective or metaphoric and the associative or metonymic, must be in operation if language is to be functionally successful. Characters in *A House for Mr Biswas* exhibit partiality for selective or substitutive language; this partiality checks the balanced flow of communication that is possible when both the combinative and substitutive processes operate together. Substitution based on identity, for example, crab-catcher the lowest of the low (a term suggesting hierarchical distancing) for husband (a term suggesting connection) separates characters. It blocks the associative connectedness, Biswas – husband – father – son-in-law, uncle etc., that is possible and which encourages rather than severs communicative links. Characters in *A House for Mr Biswas* have lost the ability to speak.

Restricted verbal behaviour in the novel may be the linguistic exemplification of a limited existence. The terms of survival in Hanuman House demand subjugation. 'The Tulsi women and children swept and washed and cooked and served in the store.' (p. 97) The husbands and fathers till the Tulsi land, tend the Tulsi animals and help in the Tulsi store. Under these arrangements, they, the husbands, are provided with room and board for themselves and their families. Meanwhile, 'their names were forgotten, they became Tulsis.' (p. 97) Mr Biswas rebels against this disregard for his individuality verbally. He hurls invectives at the family continually. On one of these occasions, he gargles loudly, 'indulging at the same time in vile abuse of the family knowing that the gargling distorted his words.' He then 'spat the water down venomously to the yard below', telling Shama, 'I just hoping I spit on some of your family.' (p. 105) Speech registers his contempt, but it achieves little else. His speech is by necessity distorted, inauthentic. Thus the more he speaks, or rather, spits his words, the more frustrated he becomes: 'his status there was now fixed. He was troublesome and disloyal
and could not be trusted. He was weak and therefore contemptible.’ (p. 102) Speech cannot liberate him.

The only means of self-expression open to Mr Biswas is writing. As pointed out before, he has a special relationship with the written word. But if the collapse of the opposition between writing and speech leads to verbal disorders, will not the substitution of writing for the speech/writing opposition lead to a similar ‘aphasic’ condition? Writing in *A House for Mr Biswas* is not the result simply of collapse or of substitution.

The tyranny of writing in *A House for Mr Biswas* has its roots in fundamental historical and social conditions. Authentic, that is, undistorted, speech in the novel is usually in Hindi; Shama comforts Mr Biswas after his mother’s death in Hindi; she persuades Anand to apologise to Owad and ease family tension in Hindi. At these moments speech is intimate, reconciliatory. But English is ‘the language of the law’, (p. 175) the language that Hindi-speaking Trinidadians must master if they are to succeed in a worlds where formal education is vital. According to Naipaul ‘education is desirable because it may lead to security’. But this education is based on an alien and alienating colonial system: one has but to examine Mr Biswas’s lessons on writing from the Ideal School of Journalism, Edgware Road, London, which not only teaches but markets language, and whose secret of every short story plot in the world is lodged in the British Museum in London. The implications are disturbing to say the least.

The text’s association of English Language with Law, school compositions, scholarships, travel to Europe and professional pursuit, in other words with Europeanization, ties the language generally to writing. In *A Bend in the River* Naipaul’s narrator says:

> We simply lived; we did what was expected of us, what we had seen previous generations do. We never recorded ... We felt in our bones that we were a very old people; but we seemed to have no means of gauging the passing of time. Neither my father nor my grandfather could put dates to their stories.

> ... All that I know of our history and the history of the Indian Ocean I have got from books written by Europeans ... Without Europeans, I feel, all our past would have been washed away like the scuffmarks of fishermen on the beach ... (or like huts of mud and grass).

These remarks have troubling implications: the world, or more particularly, the Third world, was called into being not by Divine Speech but by the Written Word of the European. And since the inhabitants of the Third World depend for their history or identity on European documentation then it is in the very sign of their non-existence that their
presence is possible. The problems that this solution poses have been demonstrated: writing is material, corruptible and corrupting; it leads to misappropriation, misinterpretation, exploitation; it may misrepresent, even negate its subject. Identity bearing this legacy is tenuous at best.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Mr Biswas's search for identity, unlike that of Stephen Dedalus or of Melville's Ishmael, should be given such specific spatial and material signification. The materiality of writing, Naipaul's linking of writing to history and identity, Mr Biswas's determination to leave a mark or dwelling behind to speak for him, connects the theme of writing to the central motif in the novel, the house. Moreover, the acquisition of the house is the laying of one's 'claim to one's portion of the earth' (p. 14), an attempt to ground or pin down an elusive dream. The house, like an inscription promises permanence, albeit a troubling one. But signs of his identity, when Mr Biswas finds them, tend to evaporate, leaving the void that threatens him. At one stage, while at The Chase, Mr Biswas noted that the shop 'bore ... marks of his habitation': 'no one might have lived there before him, and it was hard to imagine anyone after him moving about these rooms and getting to know them as he had done.' (p. 186-7) But 'everything, the land at Green Vale, the shop at The Chase, belong simply to the House,' (p. 390= Hanuman House, the 'engulfing world of the Tulsis' (p. 40) where there is nothing to speak of him and where the threat of extinction plagues him. The marks of Mr Biswas's habitation gather only to cancel themselves out.

He knows what kind of house he wants; what inscription he wishes to leave:

He had thought deeply about this house and know exactly what he wanted. He wanted, in the first place, a real house, made with real materials. He didn't want mud for walls, earth for floor, tree branches for rafters and grass for roof. He wanted wooden walls, all tongue-and-groove. He wanted a galvanized iron roof and a wooden ceiling. He would walk up concrete steps into a small verandah; through doors with coloured panes into a small drawing-room; from there into small bedroom, then another small bedroom, then back into a small verandah. The house would stand on tall concrete pillars so that he would get two floors instead on one, and the way would be left open for future development ... and his house would be painted ... (pp. 210-211)

The houses that Mr Biswas occupies then, even the final house at Sikkim Street, his house, are no more than signs of his desire. Like the doll's house he brought for Savi, they are merely the reification of the lack Mr Biswas so desperately feels. The symbol of the doll's house recurs to underscore this point.
He fixed his eyes on a house as small and as neat as a doll's house, on the distant hills of the Northern Range; and as the bus moved north, he allowed himself to be puzzled that the house did not grow any bigger, and to wonder, as a child might, whether the bus would eventually come to that house. (p. 308)

The bus never gets to that house; Mr Biswas's desire is never fulfilled. At every turn, his family discover another deficiency in the house at Sikkim Street. Its description is a catalogue of what a house is not. They occupy their time camouflaging these deficiencies, but the act of covering-up highlights the defects relentlessly. The family is forced to use the same deception on the Tuttles that the solicitor's clerk used on them: make the camouflage pass for the house:

curtains masked the staircase; the bookcase and the glass cabinet hid part of the lattice work, which was also draped with curtains ... The door that couldn't open was left shut; and a curtain hung over that. The windows that couldn't close were left open ... the Tuttles were taken in (p.579).

The house at Sikkim Street, like all Mr Biswas's other places of abode, is a sign of lack, of absence.

From the outset one sign has led to another, indefinitely deferring the fulfilment of his dream. The novel is punctuated with the differing, deferring terms of waiting. At the outset, Mr Biswas began 'to wait, not only for love, but for the world to yield its sweetness and romance' (p.. 80). 'Real life was to begin ... soon ... The Chase was a pause, a preparation.' (p. 147) Then 'He was going out into the world to test it for its power to frighten. The past was counterfeit, a series of cheating accidents. Real life, and its especial sweetness, awaiting; he was still beginning' (p. 305). Still later, Mr Biswas 'was waiting for improvements ... For him Shorthills was an adventure, an interlude' (p. 402). At the end 'There was nothing Mr Biswas could do but wait. Wait for Anand. Wait for Savi. Wait for the five years to come to an end. Wait, Wait' (pp. 586-7).

NOTES
2. 'Jasmine' in Critical Perspectives, p. 20.
4. A House for Mr Biswas (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 194. All further references to this work will be intext notes within parentheses.

5. 'Jasmine', p. 19.


10. I am using the word, impotence, in both its sexual and broader sense.


12. Gordon Rohlehr views Hanuman House 'not as an admirable reconstruction of the clan but as a slave society, erected by Mrs Tulsi and Seth who need workers', and who exploit the homeless and the poor. 'Character and Rebellion in A House for Mr Biswas,' in Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul, p. 87.

13. In her essay 'Cultural Confrontation, Disintegration and Sycretism in A House for Mr Biswas', Maureen Warner Lewis interprets the novel as Naipaul's examination of historical, social and cultural contradictions in the society.


Caesarian

You were not hauled
bawling into life,
butting headfirst to your birth.

You were lifted,
like a gift,
from the wrapping of your mother's flesh.

The newsboy's whistle is a time-teller

Woman turns over,
dark sheets of night turn over,
draw back like a lid and reveal
toucans and palms
and over his lush, leafy shoulder
the lowered blind
lightening.

Dust motes blink in the sun.
The wall is pink and rose
turning past six
the colour of sand,
the colour of lions.

Trains clatter into consciousness.
Roads fill with reminders –
it's time to get up.
Over the paving stones
the newsboy's hand-cart
rattles;
herald of the new day
coming into focus
distinct as newsprint,
he whistles
awakening the sleepers,
street by street.

Down the dim corridor
patter
of sleep-troubled feet,
child emerges blinking.
Woman turns over.
Day’s abeyance ends.

Water gushing
steam billowing
radio blaring
razor shaving
tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor,
juice, muesli, toast, tea.

The last dish laid on the rack,
house empty of all but the woman
and the testimony of others:
rumpled towels, damp toothbrush bristles, twisted sheets.

Ash in the grate, black cinders,
wood to be chopped,
clothes to be pegged up.
Cleansing and replenishment,
all the rituals to be enacted
before the newsboy returns
winding up the day,
four o’clock dusk at his heels,
his cart’s wheels turning into night.

Knives and forks rising and falling,
fires dancing and dying,
beds sighing.
Rosy lions in the sand.
Toucans in the breeze-rustled palms.
Turning over and over,
shoulder to shoulder.

Positive

Hearing the result,
I knew how it felt
to be a ruddy-cheeked Russian doll
with wide wooden hips,
harbouring inside
miniatures, brightly painted,
complete with babushkas
neatly tied.

Or an ivory seed from India
containing,
smaller than a child's fingernail,
a complex, carved elephant,
perfect in every detail.
I didn't set out on purpose to meet the bear.

Some people do. I have known people who have touched bears on their first trip to the mountains. Scratched ears. Nuzzled the wet, black nose. To hear them tell it, the incident might have been as calculated as a snapshot with a fake floral backdrop. Almost all of them, especially the women, have learned to lower the pitch of their voices during the narrative and to play on the impatience of their audience, not to mention those hard of hearing.

We were really after blueberries. It was a crisp, fall morning, mist swirling over the lake in the breeze. After our second cup of coffee, we washed the breakfast dishes, crushed our tin cans and broke camp. My back still ached from sleeping on the damned foamy – I'll never get used to being that close to the ground. So I say to George, 'if I can't get a good night's sleep on this torture test of yours at least I can eat blueberries.' 'Take the lead,' he says, almost like he knows what's coming. 'Your eyes are better for detail than mine.' And like a fool I listen to him and stumble off down the trail watching for the sunny patches where Marg told me you always look for the fruit.

I swear I'd practically stepped in the dung before I saw it. A pile of droppings, still damp and steamy, right there in the middle of the trail. 'Tell me it's from a deer or an elk, George,' I say, holding my nose and still looking down at my feet. 'Lie to me, for a change.'

That's when we heard the thicket rustle...

The bear is always as fierce as a Day of Judgement and has hot, sour breath. Aware of the script, it is all fangs and claws. Nearby, a cub shinnies up a dusty tree to cheer on big momma, its tongue and lips stained with blueberry flash. Of course, the raging bear is never down on all fours because a grizzly can only hide its hump while rearing on its hind legs like a lodgepole pine. Not that the lorist wants to ever be sure that what he or she saw was a grizzly. Slight doubt works best in crème de menthe retrospectives.

'How can you be sure if you've come face to face with a grizzly or just a black bear?'

'Gee, I don't know, Fred.'

'Climb up a tree.'

'I don't get it.'

'You will. If the bear climbs up to pull you down, no sweat, it's only a black bear.'
But if it grabs onto the base of the tree and shakes you out, you'll know it's a grizzly.'

Some people are so determined to meet a bear that they stash food inside their tent as bait. Along with a plethora of pan lids to use as cymbals in an alpine rendition of the 1812 Overture if a bear actually does wander by. One chap in the final phase of boredom with his ranchette and Mercedes tied a food caché on a flimsy branch a few metres above his tent then retired inside to candlelight, champagne and a mistress with severe misgivings. Did he expect the bear to skewer himself on the tent poles for his electronic flash?

I have never been one to toy with the Fates. A child of the Alberta foothills, I learned from a very young age that God is found by lifting eyes to the West, to mountains of implacable silence. From time to time, the wilderness sent agents from the shadows to penetrate our fences. The night before my twelfth birthday a bear apparently raided our neighbour's fowl coop and gave his Irish Setter a good swat for interfering with destiny. Mr Harris, who was away at a weekend cattle auction in Calgary, returned the next morning to find the setter in amazingly good repair, considering its crushed skull and the fact that it wasn't breathing.

'Oh, well,' he told my father, putting on a brave front in my presence. 'All the durned thing could do was yowl anyway. Just wish the bear had eaten him instead of my leghorns!'

A valuable lesson. In the mountains thereafter I shied away from any sign of bear. At first, I mixed mythologies, sometimes imagining myself a Sheriff of Nottingham nervously awaiting ambush by a furry dandy in a feathered cap. Older, I began to think that the inevitable encounter had been delayed to nip my potential more tragically at the first flower of promise, which may have had something to do with the fact that I'd remained virginal after most of my friends had seduced or been seduced by the most handy female approximation of their fantasies. On a trail, I'd keep up a steady chatter with my companions, especially when the path ahead was banked with dense scrub. When I caught fish, I always washed all trace of blood off my knife then buried the guts, head, tail and bones well out of sight from camp. I read Faulkner's 'The Bear' intently by firelight.

I never doubted that my consuming attraction to the mountains would eventually bring me face to face with a bear. But I was in no hurry to hasten that day. Then it came.

It happened in the line of duty. I'd been unemployed for a few months, so when the job of mapping out recreational trails for the summer came my way, I jumped at the chance. To think that someone would actually pay me
for hiking around!

The only problem was that I had to do it on my own. Through bear country.

My supervisor was sympathetic, in her own way. I’d love to go with you and hold your hand under the elms,’ she said, batting eyebrows. ‘But our budget simply won’t allow it.’

She was only a few years older than me but had the advantage of university, so I missed the allusion. ‘There aren’t any elms in Waterton Park,’ I replied.

‘Maybe not,’ she laughed. ‘If you should make it back with all your limbs intact, I’ll pack a picnic and find us one!’

Even under fluorescent lights, she was attractive enough to string along several men, so I doubted that she’d shed many tears over my remains when they were inadvertently discovered, weeks after I’d been dismembered, by a troop of boy scouts scrounging for arrowheads. I didn’t bother to ask for a snatch of silk: I was truly alone.

Things went well enough until I came to the Borderline Track, a meandering path that led to the boundary with the United States and then continued into Glacier Park, even more infamous for its testy bear population. Just last month, a West German accountant in lederhosen had been kabobed by a grizzly while sipping Liebfraumilch on the banks of an innocuous creek. The report failed to speculate as to whether the bear was motivated by lebensraum.

The sign at the trailhead was quite explicit:

**WARNING**

GRIZZLY BEARS HAVE BEEN SIGHTED
ON THIS TRAIL IN THE PAST WEEK
CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

I clearly had my excuse. But I also had a deadline by which my supervisor’s Deputy Minister expected a draft report, else his kind attention to her ambitions for promotion might be eclipsed. She would not be impressed by a phone call about a sign posted to discourage librarians, greengrocers and lawnbowlers. And she was certain to remind me of details in the letter I’d attached to my application for the job: *...a seasoned hiker, in touch with the wilderness...* etc., etc..

A way out dawned on me. I could plagiarize highlights from a Parks Canada brochure and maybe invent a few trivialities to plug the gaps. I
scoured the shelves of the Visitor Centre and interrogated the hapless assistant at the counter, without luck. Nothing had been written on the Borderline, but they would certainly be happy to see whatever I came up with. When I asked about the bears, the assistant smiled and leaned over the counter conspiratorially.

'There aren't any bears,' he whispered.

'But the sign –'

'Too many drug runners. The Yanks are applying the pressure, you see. We'll never stop the pros, but we thought it might at least scare off a few amateurs. Wear your bear-bells and you'll be safe enough.'

'I don't have any bear bells.'

'Then you'd better just whistle a happy tune, mate.'

Which is what I did until my lips went dry halfway in along the track. Unmercifully, the ground was sound-proofed with pine needles and sodden cottonwood leaves, so I had to do something. I beat a rock against my canteen like a tom-tom until I decided that might be too aggressive from a grizzly's territorial perspective. Forced to pause several times to record essential data, I rustled the paper from my notebook and topographical maps so vigorously the edges frayed. At one point, a few squirrels, doubtlessly émigrés from more opulent campsites, crept up to sniff around my pack for crumbs. But they were the only wildlife I saw until I reached the boundary marker, a pyramid of stone with a pompous brass plaque declaring that the weary traveller now stood at the longest unprotected border in the world, a fact that would bring a smile to dope runners heading south to market, just as it must have to scads of draft dodgers seeking refuge in Canada. For a moment, a lingering breeze carried the chill of ghosts.

Something about reaching your destination makes the ground you've covered seem less of a threat. As though your scent ground underfoot makes the path a part of a tamer reality that things wild will avoid. Nevertheless, on my way back, I began to sing. I cannot carry a tune. My version of The Sound of Music would make a fascist out of Julie Andrews, but I sang it anyway. Until it occurred to me that proclaiming 'the hills are alive...' might make them so.

The bear pretended not to notice me as I came around the bend.

It was grubbing around a rotting log, flicking bits of it away like irksome matchsticks. For an instant I felt the panic of white ants suddenly exposed to the glare of sunlight. But I didn't trip and fall flat on my face as I'd imagined I would. I merely wrapped my arms around the nearest thick tree and tried to fade into the bark.
The bear still pretended not to notice.

‘Wood,’ she said, to the log’s heartwood, not to me. The trumpet had blown for generations of grubs. How could they ever have persuaded themselves that their Jericho would last until the end of time?

She was a black bear, which made me feel only marginally better. I was sure she must be larger than she seemed from the distance between us. Fat and sleek, she glistened in the filtered sunlight as though she’s just emerged from a swim in the river. Her head rocked back and forth as she splintered the log and scooped up her prey. Occasionally, she lifted a paw and shook it. Was she merely playing with her supper?

I thought of three courses of action, none of them failsafe. I could roughen up my clothes a bit and hope to pass as an oversized lichen clinging to the bark of my patron tree. But I rejected this as too passive; she’d pry me loose like a cork from a champagne bottle. Or I could scramble up the tree, leaving the contents of my pack down at ground level as tribute. Yet, having swallowed my sole remaining granola bar, what if she decided to climb up in search of seconds? Besides, my tree scaling skills were abysmal. Though I’d read somewhere that a person pursued is capable of climbing 20 metres in less than a minute, I didn’t fit that case study because the bear was still minding her own business. So adrenaline wasn’t coursing my veins in sufficient quantities. Until it was, I’d keep the Tarzan option as a fallback.

The third idea was the most rational, which should have prompted me to distrust it. I reasoned thusly:

Major Premise: Bears that are neither hungry nor provoked will not chase people.

Minor Premise: This bear is sated, and I have not provoked her.

Conclusion: Therefore, this bear will not chase me.

I decided to walk in slow motion around the bear. So I began to pick my way, at a respectful distance from her, through the scrub. Suddenly all the leaves under my boots were tinder-dry, crackling as though rubbed against a microphone. Fallen twigs snapped like vertebrae. I didn’t even see the tree root elevated just enough above the ground to catch my foot. Leaning the wrong way, I lost my balance.

Then the bear noticed me.

I remember just two things: the bear blatting like an enraged french horn in the shrinking distance and her breath over me as I fainted.

It was both hot and sour.

Soon after, I lost my virginity.
The Herb Garden

My mother before she died insisted
I should have a herb garden
Something in her English soul
amid rough South Africans
Called for the tenderness of mint
The old scent of lavender and sage

They arrived in soggy pages of The Star
With a spade taller than herself
She dug them into my backyard
Before I was ready for them
A cigarette tightly in her lips
Explaining chives made life worthwhile

That is how she died in her own
Garden of sweet remembrance
Very frail then with a bucket and spade
The size we children used for play
Always finding the sun too hot the soil
Far too dry for the gentler herbs

Today after the long heart-stopping drought
My mother's bed of lost spices
Has so flourished I have cut it back
And the mint is in the crevices of fingers
The sage under my very nails
And I remember her every gesture.
A Half-Colonization: The Problem of the White Colonial Woman Writer

In the 1986 book, *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*, the editors (Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford) claim that all women in colonial and post-colonial countries are doubly-colonized: by patriarchal society as well as by the dominant imperial or metropolitan power. In my view, *A Double Colonization* makes insufficient distinction between the position of Australian, Canadian, South African, or Creole women of European descent and their Aboriginal, Native Indian, Black African, or West Indian counterparts – that is, between the daughters of the colonizers and the colonized. The white-settler woman and her descendants occupy a privileged position in comparison to their darker native or slave-descended sisters. While the native woman is truly doubly-oppressed or doubly-colonized, by male dominance as well as by white economic and social dominance, the white settler woman can best be described as half-colonized. Although she too is oppressed by white men and patriarchal structures, she shares in the power and guilt of the colonists.

The best white woman writers are acutely aware of this dilemma. For example, Nadine Gordimer (who contributed a story to *A Double Colonization*) has dealt at length with the problematic identification between white women and black women in South Africa. In fact, her public reluctance to embrace feminism stems from her oft-stated view that no perceived oppression of white South African women can compare with the massive and myriad forms of oppression suffered by black men and women in that country. One of the subjects which most interests Gordimer is the privileged white woman who ventures into blackness, seeking to find herself through political action and personal relationship with the colonized majority of her country. Gordimer has pursued this subject from her first novel, *The Lying Days*, to her most recent, *A Sport of Nature*; in several other novels, most notably *The Late Bourgeois World, Occasion for Loving, Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*; as well as in short stories throughout her career. Although Gordimer's narrative form and style, her political analysis and protagonists have become more sophisticated over the last thirty-five years, the dilemma
remains the same. The protagonist’s efforts are well-meaning but misdirected, due to her own lack of historical and self-understanding – or misconstrued, due to the political stalemate and hostility between the races in South Africa. Thus her groping toward solidarity ends in alienation, exile, imprisonment or violence; there is, according to Gordimer, no easy identification between the women of the colonizers and the colonized.

Gordimer’s view is supported by the work of other major white colonial woman writers, most notably Doris Lessing and Jean Rhys. Again, in the fiction of these writers the white protagonist’s problem is not that she is doubly-colonized. Her oppression as a woman draws her toward the colonized blacks, but her race and class ally her, in spite of herself, with the male colonizers: with her father, brother, or husband. While as a woman she has fewer social and economic privileges than the white men to whom she is subordinate, as a member of the colonizer, settler or planter aristocracy, she has social and economic privileges denied to the black majority, male and female.

In an early Lessing story, ‘The Old Chief Mshlanga’, the unnamed main character, a young Southern African colonial girl, ventures into ‘the old Chief’s country’ only to realize that she is one of its ‘destroyers’; her discovery of this idyllic land as yet untouched by white settlement is a reenactment of the European’s invasion of Africa. The girl’s intrusion into the lush, peaceful landscape is met with a wall of hostility; her premonition of destruction fulfilled. After Chief Mshlanga and his people are removed to facilitate white settlement, she makes a last visit to the site of the village to find it in ruins.

Lessing’s character’s intention of friendship is depicted as irrelevant to the chain of events – which is, significantly, set in motion by her own father – leading to the Chief and his people losing their land. Thus, although as a mere girl she has no power to prevent this tragedy, as a daughter of the invaders she shares in responsibility. In her words, ‘I had learned that if one cannot call a country to heel like dog, neither can one dismiss the past with a smile in an easy gush of feeling, saying: I could not help it, I am also a victim.’ As Lessing has said elsewhere, ‘The children and grandchildren of these invaders condemn their parents, wish they could repudiate their own history. But that is not so easy.’

Lessing elaborates on the problematic position of the daughter of the invaders in the Children of Violence series; Martha Quest’s legacy of violence includes the colonization of Africa, a history which she was born into, deplores, but by virtue of her skin privilege, colludes in. She awakes to an understanding of her self and her history through her identification with the Africans, who are themselves awakening to their latent power and the
certainty of freedom. Martha expresses her identification with the blacks, as well as her rebellion against white-settler mores, by joining a communist group whose stated aim is black revolution. But as the group’s political contradictions and interpersonal conflicts come to the fore, Martha’s only desire is to escape from the colony.

Martha’s longing to become one with the African land and people is always defeated; in one key passage she has a revelation of the irrevocable ‘separateness’ that seems to have been ‘bred from the very soil’ of Southern Africa. As Lessing describes it, ‘The effort of imagination needed to destroy the words black, white, nation, race exhausted her ...’ As we follow Martha through the four volumes of the Children of Violence series set in Africa, the sense of her spiritual exile from both white and black colonial ‘Zambesia’ grows until it is certain that she will emigrate to England.

Martha, like other Lessing heroines, is alienated and marginalized: as a woman in a male-dominated society, as a white in Africa, as a colonial in Britain, as first a Communist, then an ex-Communist. Exiled, alienated and marginalized as she is, however, she cannot be described as doubly-colonized; her unwilling, ambiguous role of female colonist, daughter of the colonizers, is the root of her dilemma.

The fate of Gordimer’s white female protagonists in post-colonial, but pre-liberation South Africa is less dramatically pessimistic than that of Martha Quest and other Lessing characters, but their position vis a vis white and black society is similar. In The Lying Days, Helen Shaw’s attraction to and tentative involvement with blacks is thwarted by the increasingly severe apartheid laws of the Afrikaner Nationalists. Helen’s naive attempt to identify with her fellow student Mary Seswayo fails to illuminate the gulf which separates them. In the novel’s climax, when ‘violence flowers’ in the township (to borrow Gordimer’s phrase from The Conservationist), Helen remains a spectator, trapped behind glass. As Helen explains, ‘It happened around me, not to me. Even the death of a man; behind a wall of glass.’ The end of the novel sees her, like Martha Quest, en route to Europe. Full of guilt, fear and self-doubt, she is an ironic, indirect victim of apartheid.

The female protagonists of The Late Bourgeois World, Occasion of Loving, Burger’s Daughter, and A Sport of Nature commit themselves more definitively to the cause of black liberation, becoming more radical as the political situation dictates under an increasingly repressive apartheid regime. Rosa Burger is Gordimer’s most political, least naive, most self-aware and historically conscious heroine, but even she – the daughter of a Communist martyr – is hampered by white privilege. In Burger’s Daughter, Gordimer provides a sarcastic portrait of white middle-class feminists who attempt to
make common cause with black working women. She treats with more respect the dilemma of the white Communists who, in spite of their risks and sacrifices, are barred from fully sharing the blacks' burden of oppression and resistance – barred not only by the government's apartheid decrees but also by the rising hostility of the young black militants. Rosa, disillusioned with a wary of political involvement, is critical of the 'sensuous-redemptive' appeal of blackness of whites, but she admits to feeling it herself. The magnetic attraction of blackness for Rosa, her 'old Chief's country', is embodied in Marisa Kgosana, a heroic, stunning Winnie Mandela figure who is in fact described as a beautiful black country which Rosa longs to enter. Gordimer writes:

To touch in women's token embrace against the live, night cheek of Marisa, seeing huge for a second the lake-flash of her eye, the lilac-pink of her inner lip against the translucent-edged teeth, to enter for a moment the invisible magnetic field of the body of a beautiful creature and receive on oneself its imprint ... this was to immerse in another mode of perception ... Through blackness is revealed the way to the future.7

In the end, Gordimer does allow Rosa to win a form of sisterhood with Marisa. This time, when 'violence flowers' in the form of the Soweto uprising of 1976, Rosa joins Marisa in the prison where her own mother had been incarcerated – the prison which is perhaps the central site and image of the novel. Ironic as the novel's ending certainly is, Rosa is described as having come home to and making a home in prison, which, as the narrator comments wryly, is 'not among the separate amenities the country prides itself on providing' (p. 354). Within the walls which confine the state's opponents, apartheid is loosened; paradoxically, the detainees win a victory of sorts. In one of the novel's final images, when Marisa connives a visit with Rosa, 'Laughter escaped through the thick diamond-mesh and bars of Rosa's cell' (p. 355).

Rosa is typical of Gordimer's central characters in that she struggles, not out from under the yoke of 'double colonization', but rather to share that yoke, to move from the luxurious armed camp of the colonizer to the political prison of the colonized, from the sterile enclave of the whites to the materially impoverished but spiritually rich territory of the blacks, which is pregnant with 'the future'.

The white colonial woman's attraction to blackness, her longing to be black, is a strong theme in Jean Rhys' fiction as well. In Voyage in the Dark Anna Morgan says, '... I always wanted to be black ... Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad.'8 As a girl, Anna escapes from the
tyranny of her stereotypical English stepmother, Hester, to her beloved black ‘mother’, Francine. But when she becomes a woman, upon her first menstruation in fact, Anna’s childhood identification with Francine is broken. Anna thinks:

But I knew that of course she disliked me too because I was white; and that I would never be able to explain to her that I hated being white. Being white and getting like Hester. ... And I knew that day that I’d started to grow old and nothing could stop it (p. 72).

For Anna, then, the passage from childhood to adulthood is also the passage from black to white, from the West Indies to England, from warmth and light to cold and dark. Having lost Francine and blackness, having rejected Hester and whiteness, Anna is literally and figuratively a lost soul.

There are other hints of unease in Anna’s wistful, idealizing memories of her lost island, including the carnival scene in which black dancers wearing masks which caricature European features insolently stick out their tongues at their white audience. When Anna’s island dream becomes Antoinette’s nightmare in Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the masked hostility of the carnival dancers becomes the undisguised rage of the rebellious mob, and the mocking tongues are replaced by torches and stones.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is perhaps the archetypal statement of the white colonial woman’s position. Antoinette is victimized as a woman in classic nineteenth-century manner: she is sold into a soul-destroying marriage. But her victimization as a colonial is more complex, for her loss of self is connected to her rejection by the blacks of her beloved native island. In post-Emancipation Jamaica, Antoinette and her family of impoverished ex-slave-owners are despised as ‘white niggers’ or ‘white cockroaches’ by the blacks. At the same time, they are viewed with suspicion by the other whites, who, ‘when trouble comes, close ranks. ... But we were not in their ranks.’

In the scene in which Antoinette and her family are forced to flee from their home by black rebellion, her playmate and alter ego, Tia, attacks her with a stone, so shattering their identification. As Antoinette narrates:

... I ran to her. ... We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. ... When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. ... We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass (p. 38).

In this scene are the roots of Antoinette’s insanity, exile and imprisonment in England; her madness is an attempt to recover Coulibri and reestablish
her identification with Tia. The night she sets fire to ‘Rochester’s’ house she dreams that in the red sky she sees Coulibri restored:

When I looked over the edge [of the battlement] I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. ... I called ‘Tia!’ and jumped and woke. (p. 155)

By setting fire to ‘Rochester’s’ house, Antoinette takes up the torch of the blacks who set fire to Coulibri, picks up the stone that Tia threw at her. Antoinette’s madness, then, is a process of becoming Tia: her angry black Other. Through her violence against the Rochester character and his house, she reintegrates and redeems herself by joining forces with the (female) colonized against the (male) colonizer.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* draws together themes and images that run through the fiction of Lessing and Gordimer as well as Rhys’ early work, and which typify the white colonial woman’s experience in literature. Antoinette’s ambiguous role as both victim and aggressor in colonial violence is a recurrent preoccupation in these texts. Like Antoinette, Gordimer’s female characters also transform themselves from passive aggressors/victims/observers to actors in the drama of liberation. Helen watched the death of a man from behind a car window, but Gordimer’s subsequent heroines plot with the outlawed ANC, commit acts of sabotage, go into political exile or prison, love and marry black men. Nevertheless, their successes are tempered by what Gordimer depicts as the impossibility of fully overcoming their compromised and marginalized status as whites in the black liberation struggle.

Gordimer spins a web of irony around her well-intentioned but thwarted white characters which extends to an ironic awareness of her own somewhat ambiguous position as a white writer in South Africa, living in the ‘interregnum ... not only between two social orders but between two identities’. Lessing, who concluded early in her career that she had reached a stalemate as a white writer in Africa, progressively withdrew her characters from Southern Africa politics, indeed from Southern Africa itself, after she left Rhodesia in 1949. Nonetheless, Lessing’s women carry Africa within them, and like Rhys’ exiled heroines act out the transformation into the Other in dream and fantasy. In an allusion of *Jane Eyre* which predates Rhys’ use of Bronte in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Martha Quest in *The Four-Gated City* breaks down into her Other: Lynda Coldridge, the madwoman in the basement. Martha’s reintegration of self and Other empowers her with clairvoyance that allows her to survive nuclear war and to help found a Utopian community. On a more realistic level, Gordimer’s Rosa Burger
reintegrates self and other, and so redeems herself by giving up white privilege/white alienation to join Marisa Kgosana in prison.

Different as Rhys, Lessing and Gordimer are, their depictions of the white colonial woman show how her identification with the native, colonized, Other is complicated by her bonds with the colonizers – the bonds of her own history, which as Lessing argues, cannot be easily repudiated, and as Lessing, Gordimer and Rhys demonstrate, cannot be broken without risk of violence, of madness, of self-destruction.

NOTES

1. Other recent criticism of colonial women's narratives compounds the error. For example, Josephine Dodd ('Naming and Framing: Naturalization and Colonization in J.M. Coetzee's In the Heart of the Country', WLWE 27.2 [1987], 153-161) writes that 'Magda is the victim of double colonization'. Dodd's disclaimer that, 'I am not unaware of the fact that she participates in the colonization of Hendrik and Anna, but this is beyond the scope of the present essay' (p. 161), only indicates the difficulty critics have with the concept of 'double colonization' when dealing with white writers and characters.

2. Gordimer has made this point in many essays and interviews. See, for example, "A Story for This Place and Time"... (Interview with Susan Gardner), Kunapipi 3,2 (1981), 99-112.


12. In Going Home (1957; revised ed. 1968) Lessing explains this artistic withdrawal as well as her situation as a political exile forbidden to return to either Rhodesia or South Africa.
The Dance Floor in the Cave – Kanangra Walls

Folk came riding from two days round, breakfast at the cousins’, then ‘Off to the dance!’
Trotting up by the Thurat spires,
a last boulder-turn on the stock-path and
Hooley Dooley! – a cave
with a smooth plank floor, a fiddler and lanterns.
‘Partners please...’ for the genealogy waltz.

The rocks full of shell, like an ancient sea
moved lights in the ladies’ eyes;
and the rhythmic moon of the violin,
glancing yellow in the overhang
made the finest sounds ever. And there was water,
sinking through sixty foot of sandstone
to plop in a barrel.
They danced till a pale light came up
through the tree-tops below. And after,
on coffee or whisky they rode home sleepless, to milking.
No one stole that plank-floor.

Dancing was serious business
– it could leave you courting
four days’ ride away. And those eddying seas
would be life-time tides
discussed and fathered and aunted over
before any step beyond the floor – and though its wood
is charcoal in some camper’s fire,
many a stout old trunk survives in nursing homes
known to a score of grandchildren.
The young falcon doubts her wing,
spirals up gingerly
from days in the nest
when her claws measured the air
for hold, till the heavy downed body
was out and flying.

Below her, you glimpse
a field of mud dotted with blocks
like giants' chimney pots,
and a lizard's-tail of creek
sliding off through dark-green forest
with the ochre soup of an avalanche.

You tread the gravel of hold-fasts
as softly as on the whistling air.
A grasshopper leaps
and is past you,
falling so slowly
it will have a fresh appetite
when it lands.
The steel railing nudges
below your hips' fulcrum;
you are alone on the ledge,
with a million years of monkey ancestors,
watching a thistledown blow up
a hundred metres in a minute.
And your heart cries that you could fly.
Sensualities – at Katherine Gorge
(Central Australia)

1.
Like a canal of Mars, this wet-season sluice
draws off planetary floods.
The water that forms
in its continent-splitting chasm
is like no other. Serene
and warm, with no wish
to flow to the ocean, it is where
the Dreamtime put it, and if
through floods and a net of river beds
it some day dribbles to the coast
it will have lost itself.

2.
Meniscus floater,
the canoe indents
the skin of water,
a bark mat
with turned-up edges.

3.
Ant-lions in the dust
build funnels of pure instability
that slide a passing ant
onto their jaw-horns. A light shower
stiffens the dust
brings famine.

4.
This burnt midday land – a goanna crunching
on leaves like upturned scales – fades to
a windless Territory evening where
your car trails a miles-long plume of dust
that settles neatly on the road.
5.
A creek cluck-and-lucking its way down hill.
The smell of baked rock in summer,
with a hint of cool remedy splashing by:
Sensualities – at Katherine

6.
The river, that great earth-mover
has taken a contract, to wash the mountain
grain by grain to the sea.

7.
Like a tow-path running beside the river
- this spare channel of flood-time sand
with a median strip of paperbarks.
The ghost gum's bark looms ambiguous, gray or white
- its shades tell the stage of evening.

8.
A man to give his seed as freely
as the gum sheds pollen,
and for no more cause
than that the year is ripe.
I want someday to write a passage as poignant as that phrase: ‘these pleasures,’ she wrote, garlic-stinking vagabond ancient as the sphinx winking feline nods at passing fancies loving cats above all others and her mother/child the cherished Sido both of whom she would have eaten in a flash;

these pleasures: cactuses that blaze once a decade, the exhilarating loneliness of strutting naked round a stage in lime light, by shaded lamp across the thick blue pages over beach bleached sand through bloodfed fields disguised, among the dying charting every sigh from blushing adolescent thighs to layered silks supporting sagging flesh draped across a divan vain until the very end where even lust gives way to friendship and even friends die off but the mushrooms still thrust their gamey buttons through the earth if you just know where to look:

these pleasures, which we lightly call these pleasures, which we lightly call physical.
Waiting:
Royal Academy, 12.11.88

We wander through The Age of Chivalry: walls full of busy, almond-eyed men,
secure in their faith in their place in the world
their faith that brought grain or acceptance of famine.

You wince and glance round for a seat –
the plinth of a 12th century ironwork gate:
sinuey swans curve through primitive forging.

We’re stopped by a guard,
directed to benches in room number five,
‘It’s coming,’ you murmur. Another false start. You rise up, restless.

I love the annunciations:
the word or the dove or the angel
whispering into her ear.

‘She didn’t even get a fuck,’ you twist in pain,
or anticipation of pain,
or simply the wretched weight of waiting.

A man seeing you stroking your belly,
makes space by a battered, wooden St. George
slaying a demurely conceding dragon.

Your eyes have that distant, pupilless look
of worn-out madonnas
on church facades.

‘There are no pregnant madonnas,’ you say,
‘Can you think of a pregnant madonna?’
Then you wince again, and scurry to sit
'This is it.' But it doesn’t recur,
and we’re pressed to give up our places
to two old ladies, tired, with less to anticipate.

'Let's go.' If it doesn’t come today they’ll induce it.
This time tomorrow, today will be simply a story:
'The day before you were born.'

As we hurry back through the manuscript room
I notice on an intricate page, a tiny creature,
etched in gold,

its dainty toe pointed, stepping, tentatively out of the frame...
Soyinka has been interested for many years in states of being which in some way correspond to what he refers to in a seminal essay as the ‘fourth stage’ of existence. He suggests that there are four stages of human existence: ‘The past is the ancestors’, the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws ... the fourth area of experience [is] the immeasurable gulf of transition.' The fourth stage is that stage of existence which is neither ordinary human life, nor spirit existence, but somewhere between the two: the state of a man who represents a god or a spirit at a festival, for instance, or the state of a man who is passing between life and death in the process of dying or of arriving in this world. It is also the state of the gods as they make the perilous journey from heaven to earth, with Ogun clearing the way and fashioning the bridge — a myth on which Soyinka rests much of the weight of the argument about the nature of Yoruba tragedy which is the point of this essay.\(^2\) Priests, *abiku* children and some other special persons may be said to inhabit this fourth stage a great deal of the time, that is, they frequently pass beyond this living human existence to the area which is marginal to some other state of existence. The ‘fourth stage’ is, of its essence, marginal, a betwixt and between state of being. It is a stage of transition, a stage of disintegration and reintegration.

Soyinka is by no means the only African writer to feel the importance of this stage of existence — it is, after all, vitally important in African traditional life — although possibly only he would define it in precisely the terms he uses in his essay.\(^3\)

His concept of the fourth stage of existence is absolutely central to some of his plays. Almost the whole of *A Dance of the Forest*, for instance, might be said to take place in the fourth stage of existence; the deaf mute
Murano in *The Road* inhabits that stage since, during his temporary entry to that stage during the agemo festival he was 'killed' in a road accident. So he wanders through the play, alive but not alive, his marginality marked by his physical inability to receive or offer communication to those around him, particularly the Professor who is seeking The Word which will enable him to apprehend the other world. The Elesin in *Death and the King's Horseman* spends most of the play stalled on the road, the passage between life and death, as does Eman in *The Strong Breed*. Those are the most significant examples from the plays, but you can see the fourth stage at vital moments in other plays: Kongi's foiled apotheosis in *Kogi's Harvest* is a thwarted attempt to enter the fourth stage; it is there in the bacchic frenzy of *The Bacchae*, possibly even in the other-worldly connections of the old women in *Madmen and Specialists*.

In the fiction it is again of vital importance, and this paper seeks to explore the manner in which, in the fiction, one particular pattern of passage through the fourth stage is important, namely the pattern I have called the motif of resurrection: entry into the transitional fourth stage between life and death, followed by a re-entry into life.

West Africans writing in English have available to them two literary traditions, that of their own culture and that of the language in which they have chosen to write. Their own culture has a poetic tradition which is closely linked with religious observance and their language is rich in proverbial utterances. This means that a metaphor drawn from one culture may be enriched by the associations drawn from another.

Wole Soyinka uses the motif of resurrection in his novels, *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*. In both he uses myths involving resurrection, rebirth in transmuted form or the escape from the realm of death to provide a pattern of experience parallel to that lived by his characters. *Season of Anomy* contains a modern version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, while *The Interpreters* plays with several myths of the escape from death, drawn from both Biblical and Yoruba sources. Images of resurrection pervade the language of both novels and the metaphysical idea of a cycle of renewal dominates their structure. In both novels the motif of resurrection or rebirth stands for the idea of a continuity of experience in which lies the hope for the future. Individual images are often introduced fleetingly but the notion of the escape from death recurs as a motif throughout the two novels, and it is in these metaphorical terms that Soyinka conveys his message of qualified hope. It is interesting, I think, that entry to the fourth stage is the stuff of tragedy in the plays, where death is the ultimate ending; in the novels, the characters re-emerge from the fourth stage into life again.
Since the idea of resurrection has different meanings for the two cultures to which Soyinka belongs, and carries different associations in the literary traditions and religious thought of those cultures, his use of the resurrection motif opens up a wide field of metaphorical reference. This enables him to manipulate the motif so that its significance changes according to which culture one is reading it against, and both the literal and the metaphorical meanings of the motif may be simultaneously brought into play. This is most obvious in *The Interpreters*, where the whole novel revolves around the act of interpretation, and the idea of rebirth or resurrection after death is the vital one on which the process of interpretation is brought to bear.

In *Season of Anomy*, myth is used in a much more straightforward way than in *The Interpreters*, since the myth of Orpheus is related in that novel to vegetative growth rather than to any culturally specific Yoruba equivalent. *Season of Anomy* was written in the aftermath of the civil war in Nigeria and deals firstly with an attempt to create a community of good to oppose the forces of evil, and secondly with the search by the Orpheus figure for his lost Eurydice who has been imprisoned by the prince of evil in a hellish jail. The two main characters, Ofeyi and Iriyise, represent Orpheus and Eurydice, but this use of myth is a rather artificial, literary device when it is compared with the vital importance of myth in *The Interpreters*, partly because the known pattern of the Greek myth, although it is integrated with the imagery of the vegetative cycle, never quite marries with the vague sense of numinous divine essences which lies thinly over other parts of the novel.

The principal use of the myth of Orpheus in this novel is to reinforce metaphorical suggestions about the artist conquering death through his art. In the case of Ofeyi, death is the political and economic forces which he opposes, and his art is propaganda. Ofeyi makes propaganda films for the sinister embodiment of capitalism, the Cartel, which runs everything in his country; but what was supposed to be propaganda for the Cartel becomes in his hands propaganda for the communal life of the community named Aiyéró. This peaceful farming community comes to represent good in a world of evil, particularly when the Cartel unleashes the forces of death and destruction on the Aiyéróan people.

The novel is primarily a political allegory. Soyinka is setting the communal life and mystical communion with the soil which he presents in Aiyéró against the evils of capitalism and specifically against the situation in Nigeria on the eve of the civil war.

To further the cause of Aiyéró and spread its message in the world, Ofeyi creates what is virtually a myth of his own; the Cocoa Princess.
Her role is played by the beautiful and charismatic dancer, Iriyise, who becomes the centre of a series of theatrical scenes designed by Ofeyi to represent the beauty of the earth and its natural products: for instance in one scene she emerges from a giant model of a cocoa seed and performs the dance of an unfurling new plant, threatened by the hideous plagues and blights which are clearly emblematic of the evils of capitalist exploitation. In another dance, which Ofeyi has named ‘Pandora’s Box’, the cocoa pod opens to release balloons which bear the faces of the leaders of the Cartel representing the plagues and blights, and closes again on Iriyise who is unwittingly cast in the role of Hope, still crying to get out. Because Ofeyi is the choreographer of the dances, these scenes and even Iriyise herself are in a sense the creations of Ofeyi’s art. The latter dance is the one which is re-echoed in the events in the real world which follow, and in Iriyise’s role in them.

The seed or grain is used early in the novel as a metaphor for the idea, or the Hope, which Aiyérol holds for the world:

‘The meaning of grain is not merely food but, germination...’

Ofeyi waves his hands helplessly around. ‘Within this constriction?’ He shook his head. ‘The waters of Aiyérol need to burst their banks. The grain must find new seminal grounds or it will atrophy and die.’ (p. 6)

Images of sowing, germination and growth abound in the novel, and through these a contrast is developed between good and evil growth. The ballads of Aiyérol are ‘unearthed’ and new songs grow ‘from the grain of a vanguard idea’ (p. 20). Ofeyi’s dream is of ‘the Aiyérol ideal disseminated with the same powerful propaganda machine of the Cartel throughout the land, taking hold of undirected youth and filling the vacuum of their transitional heritage with the virile shoot’ (p. 23).

Seeds are not themselves living plants, but they contain the potential to become living plants. The vegetative cycle is a continual process of apparent, not real, death (for a seed is not dead) and regrowth, or rebirth or resurrection.

The Cocoa Princess, Iriyise, is linked with Aiyérol and its hope by organic images very early in the novel: ‘She took to Aiyérol as a new organism long in search of its true element’ (p. 3). She, not Ofeyi, becomes an initiate, and joins the women of Aiyérol, ‘her bared limbs and shoulders among young shoots’ (p. 20), in growing the cocoa seed. When Ofeyi uses her dance as a symbol in his subversive propaganda campaign the identification becomes even clearer.
But the sowing of the seed may lead to further problems, for the seed must be nourished and guarded. As Ofeyi tells Pa Ahime, ‘the sowing of any idea these days can no longer take place without accepting the need to protect the young seedling, even by violent means’ (p. 23). Pa Ahime warns of the unwelcome results which may spring from sowing the seeds of violence together with the seeds of the new idea:

‘You speak of sowing a new idea. But surely you have heard that saying — sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind.’

‘The storm was sown by the Cartel, Pa Ahime. Unless we can turn the resulting whirlwind against them, we are lost.’ (p. 24)

For the Cartel is not only a disease affecting the true growth (Chapter III, passim), but is also itself a sower of seeds, seeds whose growth is insidiously poisonous:

Ofeyi felt its presence as the protrusion through a slanted ridge of a toxic tuber. A man stubbed his toe on it and maybe dies; death as sowed by these false farmers, the power-men, was planned to burgeon under the soil. The offensive outcrop was only a wilful, incidental wart, a mere tip of the iceberg that might warn or kill. The real death that the people were called on to die was the death from under, the long creeping paralysis of flesh and spirit that seized upon them as the poison tuber might spread through bowels of earth. (pp. 128-129)

In another striking image we are told that the Cartel sows a live cow and reaps armed serpents (p. 133). Their armed serpents overrun the Cross-river region and break up the band which is disseminating Ofeyi’s vision, expressed in Iriyise’s symbolic dances of growth.

Iriyise is captured and incarcerated by an ally of the Cartel, who in terms of the parallel with Eurydice represents death in the form of the king of the underworld. Ofeyi ventures into his land, the land ‘across the river’, in which Iriyise is held in the depths of a prison whose inner courts hold progressively worse horrors of leprosy and madness. The parallels with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice are fairly obvious: the river is the Styx or possibly Lethe; and so too is the outer court of the prison whose governor is named Karaun (Charon), while the inner courts are patrolled by a deaf-mute, Suberu (Cerberus), but the whole idea of Orpheus as a singer is abandoned. Ofeyi is a choreographer and lyricist but not a performer; instead Iriyise herself, as Cocoa Princess, is the creation of his art.

Ofeyi succeeds in reaching Iriyise but she is in a coma, neither alive nor dead. It is the deaf-mute, Suberu, who offers Ofeyi the only possible hope:
The trusty had begun to rummage in some inner pocket of his uniform. He brought out a thick, neatly folded piece of paper, squatted on his haunches and began to unfold it on the floor. It was a poster, one of the very earliest of Iriyise. Shrouded in a filmy gauze which, he grimaced — claimed to represent a milky distillation of the creamy flesh of cocoa seeds. Iriyise was emerging from a neatly cracked golden egg-shape that represented the pod. Suberu pointed to the figure on the bed and, slowly, with laborious gestures, signalled that the figure on the bed was the same as the poster. Taken by surprise, Ofeyi watched the man mime his own enlightenment. The woman’s condition was like that egg and Ofeyi must wait patiently, for her emergence. (p. 314)

Moments of enlightenment are usually achieved wordlessly, in this novel. It is, it seems to me, a playwright’s novel, in which the visual sense is deliberately provoked into supplying important messages.

So Ofeyi comes to see that Iriyise is like the closed cocoa seed which seemed dead but contained the new shoot which would, in a kindly environment, spring into life. In the midst of the harvest of death and madness to which Ofeyi’s sowing has inadvertently led, there is still a seed of hope, capable of lying dormant through adverse conditions, and able to flourish when better conditions prevail. This is the end of the cycle of hope through which the novel has led the reader: seeds become budding plants, are strangled by the tentacles of an opposing growth and brought to a harvest of death, yet still seeds (or tougher spores) remain. There is still Hope within. Thus, through the cocoa pod dances, the Orpheus and Eurydice myth is linked (most appropriately) with the idea of a vegetative cycle of death and regrowth.

There is also an element of the sacrificial corn-king in Ofeyi himself. He is the heroic Orpheus who descends into Hades but yet returns to life unclaimed by death, having performed a kind of Harrowing of Hell. He is the hero who dies but does not die, the conqueror of death. He is not resurrected in the Christian sense, nor is he reborn. Rather, he voluntarily and sacrificially removes himself from life for a time and then re-enters life, and in this sense he, as well as Iriyise, is central to the resurrection motif as it is used in Season of Anomy.

The connection, which Soyinka emphasises strongly in the novel, between the Orpheus and Eurydice pair and the vegetative cycle, works entirely on the metaphorical level. The positive resolution of the vegetative imagery provides the reader with the ultimately positive, hopeful view of Iriyise’s condition of coma, and thus provides a positive resolution to the novel as a whole.

Far more complex in its orchestration of the resurrection motif, The Interpreters draws on not one but two separate systems of myth: the
Biblical and the Yoruba. The novel, published some eight years before *Season of Anomy*, concerns a group of friends, the 'interpreters' of the title, who are centres of consciousness through whom the reader perceives life in Nigeria. They are confronted by the fact of man's mortality when one of their number, Sekoni the sculptor, dies in a car accident. This event opens the second half of the novel. Soon after Sekoni’s death they are invited to witness the church service of a Christian cult led by a man who claims to have returned from the dead and who has therefore taken the name of Lazarus. Each of the ‘interpreters’ reacts differently to this experience.

One of them, Kola, is an artist who is painting a giant canvas of the Yoruba pantheon which is to be shown at an exhibition of the dead man’s sculpture. The changes which Kola makes in his painting after his meeting with the man who calls himself Lazarus express in paint his new sense of the importance of the Yoruba notion of cyclic continuity: that is, they are a personal interpretation of what the resurrected man means to him. The other ‘interpreters’ show in their reactions to the painting the way in which they relate to Sekoni’s death, Lazarus’ spiritual message and Kola’s artistic interpretation of their significance.

In *The Interpreters* the characters in the novel are partly identified with the figures in Kola’s painted Yoruba pantheon: each of the characters contains some element of the divine essence. Kola recognises this by using portraits of his friends to represent the gods; and it emerges through the novel that the way in which he paints the god (that is, the particular myth he chooses to represent, and therefore the form which the god takes) is also important: for instance Kola’s friend Egbo objects to the portrayal of himself as the drunken Ogun slaughtering his own people, but this particular myth may have some connection with Egbo’s violent reaction to events towards the end of the novel. The painting forms the symbolic key to the whole novel because Kola and the other ‘interpreters’ must test out their interpretations of life against the interpretations of the divine which are found on Kola’s canvas. The identification of some of the characters with some of the gods represented in the painting, an identification made both by the characters and by the reader, serves as an index to the complex of other ‘interpretations’ which they offer us: that is, their value judgements, both moral and aesthetic, and their ways of reacting to society. In the second half of the novel, after Sekoni’s death, their role as interpreters becomes more complex as their identification with divine essences becomes more important. They are commentators no longer simply on the nature of life in modern Nigeria, but on the nature of life in the abstract. The characters are not
precisely equivalent to the gods; the novel is a loosely and richly allegorical attempt to employ the established symbols of religion (Christian as well as Yoruba) to convey depths of meaning.

Two of the Yoruba myths are particularly important when one examines the Yoruba background to the resurrection/rebirth metaphor. In the first, Sango, the god of lightning and electricity, was a mortal king before he hanged himself and was translated into godhead. In the second, Orisa (whose name is the generic term for the Yoruba gods and who lived 'in the beginning') was destroyed by a stone rolled down upon him by a rebellious slave. He was smashed to pieces, but from his fragmented divinity sprang the divine essences of all the Yoruba pantheon. These two myths lie behind the interpretations of several of the events in the novel.

The myth of Sango, according to which he died as a man but lived as a god, is important in relation to the death of Sekoni, who is partly identified with Sango. Sekoni dies twice in the course of the novel, once figuratively and once literally, and twice he metaphorically rises in a new form. After his education overseas he becomes an engineer, but his project to build a power station fails and he has a nervous breakdown. This is the death of Sekoni as an engineer. After making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (not to Mecca as his Moslem father had hoped) he reappears in a new form, as a sculptor. His real death in a car accident with which the second half of the novel opens is followed by the appearance of Lazarus the resurrected man. The reaction of the surviving interpreters to Lazarus and his story is coloured by their recent experience of Sekoni's death. For some of them Lazarus seems metaphorically to be Sekoni risen and come among them. It is the reactions of the characters to the notion of resurrection embodied in Lazarus which show them in their role as interpreters of the divine. In the first half of the novel they are social beings; in the second half they are philosophical and spiritual beings too, not simply interpreters of Nigerian life, but interpreters of the Yoruba spirit as well.

Soyinka makes reference to various myths of resurrection and the miraculous renewal of life throughout The Interpreters as his characters attempt to understand the relevance to their own experience of Lazarus' appearance and spiritual message. For Lazarus is the most obvious of the transitional figures. When he died he was black, and when he was resurrected he was found to be albino. Kola's painting of the Orissa is full of portraits of people marked out in their human form as inhabitants of a half-world: albinos, who are sacred to Obatala, inhabit the fourth stage of existence; and Joe Golder, who is a homosexual, is fascinated by androgyny, which marks him as a member of a transitional world, as does
his confusion about his colour and whether he belongs to the white world or the black.

From his first appearance, Lazarus is surrounded by imagery of death and the miraculous salvation from death. Sagoe the journalist meets him briefly at a funeral. He next encounters him when Lazarus rescues a young thief from a street mob which was reckless enough to kill. Before he spots Lazarus, Sagoe has seen the thief, a nameless fugitive from justice. To Sagoe the thief suggests, in a purely literary reference, a bad poem he has read in which a fugitive is likened to Christ, and briefly the language of the novel picks up this metaphor, with a policeman on traffic duty who ignores the murderous mob being likened to Pontius Pilate, washing his hands in the stream of traffic. But Sagoe then sees the thief as Barabbas, and despite a brief interval when the language refers to him as one of the thieves on the cross and as a martyr, the metaphorical identification with Barabbas remains the principal one in this scene, until Lazarus appears from the crowd and rescues the thief from the threatened lynching, greets Sagoe and vanishes again.

Our next encounter with Lazarus is when he approaches Sagoe and his friends with his claim to have risen from the dead, and his invitation to them to attend a service at his church. The associations already built up around Lazarus by the incident with the thief predispose the reader to perceive this story of resurrection in a Christian framework, so that Lazarus briefly figures as the risen Christ rather than as his own namesake.

Soyinka does not insist on a one-for-one relationship between his characters and any of the figures of myth. Rather, he offers the reader the 'fact' of Lazarus' resurrection and a whole series of myths which one may, if one chooses, use as metaphors to explore that 'fact'. The characters who are the 'interpreters' are also using the same metaphors to examine the significance of Lazarus' claim for themselves.

Soyinka is exploring the resurrection motif on both the literal and the metaphorical level in dealing with Lazarus and the rescued thief. Lazarus claims to have actually died and risen again from the grave, miraculously transformed into an albino. Against this literal claim, Soyinka sets a series of metaphorical identifications. Thus Lazarus 'is' Christ the resurrected Saviour, while the thief at various points in the novel 'is' Barabbas, Judas and the name given to him by Lazarus, Noah (who traditionally prefigures Christ as the saviour of mankind). But the very notion of Lazarus as the literally resurrected man is a metaphor for the continuity of life: his literal claim operates on a metaphorical level in the novel as a whole. Sekoni the philosopher dies, and Lazarus the preacher
comes to replace him. Sekoni’s philosophy involved the concept of a dome of continuity, and now that Sekoni is dead Lazarus is preaching a miracle which proves the continuity of life into eternity.

Lazarus and the thief, Noah, whom he rescues are the central figures in the Christian associations of the resurrection motif. These Christian references are first suggested through Sagoe the journalist in his reaction to his first encounter with Noah, but once Lazarus meets all the interpreters together, his story of his own escape from death becomes subject to other, non-Christian interpretations. While a Christian reading sees resurrection as a conquest of death, the Yoruba one sees it as something more like a stage in a cycle. It is therefore interesting that Soyinka introduces into the novel the Old Testament story of Noah, and the sign of the rainbow which is the sign of God’s covenant with man that life will continue on earth.

I have suggested the Christian associations of the metaphor first because at least these references are available and familiar to readers of English, who may be less conversant with Yoruba myth, but the Christian and Old Testament associations are outweighed by Yoruba ones. For instance, when Kola decides to include Lazarus and the thief renamed Noah in his painting of the Yoruba pantheon, he has to decide how to represent them — or rather he has to decide what part of the divine essence it is that they represent. Sagoe suggests that Kola should paint a picture of Noah as Christ, which seems to be what Lazarus wants in support of his small Christian sect, but Kola decides that Noah holds other interests for him as a subject:

‘I might paint [Noah], but not on the Cross or any such waste of time. I was thinking of him as Esumare. Intermediary. As the Covenant in fact, the apostate Covenant, the ambiguous Covenant. When Lazarus called him Noah, I thought about it then. He does possess that technicolour brand of purity.’ (p. 178)

Yet although it is Noah who has been named for the covenant represented by the rainbow in Genesis (and there is more play in the language about the painting of Noah as an ambiguous covenant or apostate Christ), eventually it is Lazarus who appears in the painting as Esumare, the Yoruba concept of the rainbow.

Soyinka sees the rainbow as a bridge across chaos, marking the path hacked out by Ogun when he led the Orisas from heaven to earth.

The passage in which two of the characters sneak an illicit preview of the painting of the pantheon as it nears completion is an example of the way the painting provokes characters and reader alike into searching for a meaning behind the metaphor:
Joe Colder laughed, he was almost childlike in his delight at a fellow conspirator. 'I think I know which of the figures you are. In fact I recognised you at once. What do you think of the latest bit?'

Egbo took his eyes away from what he really wanted to see, his own presence in the overpowering canvas. The unfinished part was an arched figure rising not from a dry grave but from a primordial chaos of gaseous whirls and flood-waters. He is wreathed in nothing but light, a pure rainbow translucence. It was Lazarus, Kola's new dimension to the covenant.

Egbo moved his head gently from side to side, as if he meant to clear it.

'I am confused,' he admitted.

'I cannot accept this view of life. He has made the beginning itself a resurrection. This is an optimist's delusion of continuity.' (pp. 232-233)

Ultimately I think that the reader feels that Kola's interpretation is the one which Soyinka favours, even though this may mean labelling Soyinka as a deluded optimist.

Kola has painted Lazarus as the rainbow which links heaven and earth. Simultaneously he is the python which makes the Yoruba rainbow — and in Yoruba iconography the snake with his tail in his mouth represents the continuous cycle of being — and at the same time he is the creator god emerging from chaos and the god Sango who is a resurrected man. To a reader with an interest in Yoruba myth these implications are present in the passage just as surely as the image of a policeman as Pontius Pilate washing his hands conveys instant associations to a reader familiar with the Gospel according to Matthew.

This sort of complexity is possible only when the writer is exploiting the separate associations of an idea in more than one culture, in this case both the associations of the idea of the miraculous escape from death and the associations of the lesser metaphors linked with it such as the rainbow in Yoruba and Old Testament tradition. All of these metaphors spring from the central motif, which in the Christian version concerns the conquest of death, while in the story of Noah it is a delivery from death and a promise that there will be no cataclysmic destruction of life and in the Yoruba myths it is a transition through the intervening passage of death to life in a different form. I would suggest that in this novel the principal interpretation, the way in which the metaphor must finally be read, is the version which emphasises the continuity of existence. Readings of the novel which do not attempt to come to terms with the meanings expressed through Kola's attempts and failures to paint the figures of the Yoruba pantheon may overlook this vital element of the novel.

Because Lazarus as the resurrected man is, in a rather remotely metaphorical way, a reincarnation of the dead man, Sekoni, all of the
metaphors of resurrection which have been examined so far relate back ultimately to the myth of Sango who died as a man but lived on as a god. Sekoni is more or less explicitly compared with Sango while he is alive and the attempts which the 'interpreters' make to come to terms with Lazarus' story of his own death and resurrection are clearly coloured by their awareness of Sekoni's recent death; but the resurrection of Sango is only one of the two myths principally used in the novel. There is also the myth of the fragmentation of Orisa-nla and the continued life of his one divine essence in the form of the separate gods of the world. While several critics are convinced that some event in the novel corresponds metaphorically to the shattering of Orisa-nla, there is little agreement on which event it is. Emmanuel Obiechina has suggested that the death of Sekoni, whose insistence on the image of the dome links him with an idea of completion or wholeness which is lost when he dies, may be equivalent to the shattering of the whole spirit. Certainly the death of Sekoni drives the others apart, each to his own spiritual shelter. Gerald Moore suggests that Noah's death is the crucial event because it splits the interpreters from a unified group of friends into a number of individual persons following centrifugal paths in life, whose new separateness is signalled by their sitting apart from one another in the theatre at the end of the novel.

While I favour a version of Moore's interpretation, that it is Noah's death which represents the moment of the fragmentation of Orisa-nla, I am inclined to agree in a qualified way with Obiechina's suggestion that Sekoni's connection with a vision of wholeness links him with Obatala as well as with Awoonor's identification of him with Sango. He exhibits none of the fierce, wilful destructiveness which Soyinka attributes to Sango, but he does have his vital, electric creativity, both as an engineer and as an artist.

Kola's painting is the central vision of the novel, but it is not the vision of one man alone. The idea, as Kola tells it, came from Egbo:

Egbo started me on it, unwittingly of course, and in fact he should be labouring it out, not me. For one thing he is closer to the subject, really close you know, and he is sufficiently ruthless. But at least I can record, my intimations of all these presences have been too momentary and they come in disjointed fragments, that is why I have taken so long. (pp. 227-228)

Kola's intuitions about people, his interpretations of them in terms of their divine parallels, are not always satisfactory. He himself changes his mind. He had intended to paint Noah as Esumare, but comes to believe that this was inappropriate:
That was an error of judgement. Noah as the link? I ought to drown myself for my stupidity. I had him sitting here while I tried to form Esumare around his neutrality. I was wrong, woefully, amateurishly wrong. When I had fought him four hours without the trace of a beginning, I had to stop and for the first time I truly looked at Noah. If I hadn't been suffering from an overdose of cynicism I would have seen it that first time. Noah was simply negative. The innocence of his face was unrelieved vacuity — he had nothing, absolutely nothing. I despised my lack of perception. (p. 227)

He has painted him instead as the apostate of the Yoruba myth of the fragmentation of Orisa-nla, the slave named Atoóda, 'the treacherous servant rolling the stone that would crush his master' (p. 227). In the light of the novel to this point the reader may see Noah’s failure of his ordeal by fire (pp. 223-224) as crushing the hopes of Lazarus, whom Kola refers to elsewhere as Noah’s master. When Noah leaps from a window and dies, the identification of him with Atoóda takes on further significance, for Bandele the unofficial leader of the ‘interpreters’ is figuratively shattered by Noah’s death as much as by the imminent parting of the group; so too Joe Golder, as in the version of the myth referred to in the novel (p. 224) is emotionally shattered and is helped by his friends to pull himself together; and at this point Egbo, elsewhere called apostate, fails Bandele when he turns on Joe Golder. Kola has asked rhetorically if Egbo would have made the mistake of identifying Noah with Esumare, but Egbo does not even see him as Atoóda:

I cannot even call him an apostate now. We were all wrong, all disgracefully wrong. Kola left the heavenly bodies out of his Pantheon or he would have known Noah for what he is. Noah's apostasy is not the wilful kind, it is simply the refusal to be, the refusal to be a living being, like a moon. (p. 231)

In Egbo’s final analysis, Noah is not the betrayer and destroyer, but merely the instrument of destruction, the stone itself.

These symbolic interpretations of Noah’s pivotal role in the novel and the light they throw on possible readings of the actions of the other characters and on the form of the novel as a whole show one way in which the manipulation of mythic parallels functions in the novel. It is not necessary to opt for one interpretation at the expense of others. Few of the characters are linked as closely with a single god as Egbo is with Ogun or Sagoe with Esu. The novel itself may be said to mirror the myth of Orisa-nla and Atoóda in its very conception: that is, by using several characters as centres of consciousness in the novel — and the metaphors through which the reader reaches towards the meaning of the mythic parallels are being manipulated consciously by the characters in their attempts to under-
stand life — Soyinka is in a sense fragmenting his own perception. Soyinka, as artist-creator, breaks up his own whole awareness and endows each of the characters with a part of it. The sum of the characters is the whole Orisa-nla, but separately each of the characters then comes to partially represent one or more Orissa, one or more of the gods; and their movements in the novel act out (that is, 'interpret', in the sense that an actor interprets a role, or in the sense than an actor in the Yoruba religious drama is possessed by his role) the events of myth. To interpret the interpreters one must re-combine them into a single entity or view of the world.

From these examples of Soyinka's manipulation of metaphorical references to myths of rebirth and the conquest of death one can see that the motif of resurrection is vitally important in both *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*. Soyinka is able to offer a complex set of associations and to exploit many different areas of meaning by directing his reader first into one culture's set of religious metaphors and then into the myth and meaning of another culture, and this is particularly evident in *The Interpreters*.

It would be a mistake to try to identify each character with one of the Orissa, or to distinguish too clearly between what is human and what is of another world. This point is made very strongly in the first few pages of the novel, when Egbo notices Bandele's disapproval of his wish to abandon the past. Egbo then turns to ask their philosophical friend, Sekoni, what he thinks:

> You don't agree? Sekoni, what do you say? If the dead are not strong enough to be ever-present in our being, should they not be as they are, dead?
> T-t-to make such d-d-distinctions disrupts the d-d-dome of c-c-continuity, which is wwwwhat life is.
> But are we then,' Egbo continued. 'to continue making advances to the dead? Why should the dead on their part fear to speak to light?'
> Ththat is why we must accc-cept the universal d-d-dome, b-b-because ththere is no d-d-d-direction. The b-b-bridge is the d-d-dome of rreligion and b-b-bridges d-d-don’t jjjust g-g-go from hhere to ththere; a bridge also faces backwards. (p. 9)

In both novels Wole Soyinka deals with a chaotic world which is organized through his use of metaphor. In *The Interpreters* the chaos is largely an internal chaos, a confusion within the individual consciousness. Each of the characters is a separate individual trying to find his way towards some meaning to life and death. They find their meanings, and the reader too finds his meaning, through Kola's painting and the identifications it suggests between human and divine, because these
metaphorical identifications are also interpretations. The characters are shown in a way which emphasises their essential nature. Kola’s work is a sort of common epiphany caught in paint, and the vital centre of the painting which gives it its meaning is the final figure to be added, the figure of Lazarus the resurrected man, depicted in a form which suggests that the beginning of everything is also a resurrection, and that the life principle emerges from chaos. The continuity will never be broken. Whatever choices the ‘interpreters’ may make in their lives, they will be drawn to act out again and again in many forms the myths of the gods.

In *Season of Anomy* the myth is used more directly, but again in a metaphysical way. The myth is a metaphor for the philosophical message. Against a background of external chaos, in this case social chaos, the motif of resurrection emerges as the metaphor of the conquest of death.

NOTES

2. Ibid., pp. 149 (text and footnote), 153, *et passim*.
3. For example, readers of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* will be familiar with the episode in which the ancestral spirits are unmasked, that is, in which the boundary between human life and the fourth stage is rudely transgressed; and *Arrow of God* centres on the predicament of a priest who is no longer sure where that boundary lies.
4. Since this paper was first delivered in its present form, an extended exploration of this issue has appeared in Ketu H. Katrak’s superb study, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy* (Greenwood Press, 1986).
5. ‘Resurrection’ is used loosely in this paper. The problem with identifying a motif which draws on the metaphors of two different cultures is that the associations of the metaphors in each culture may be so different that no one single term covers the whole. ‘Resurrection’ is the term most familiar to Western audiences for the miraculous delivery from death, and will be used in this paper to cover the whole range of general or culture-specific occurrences of the motif.
6. Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (1965; Heinemann Educational Books, 1970). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
7. Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy* (London, 1973). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. This is a reworking of the myth of Cadmus founding Thebes.
9. This points not only to a region of Nigeria but also to Greek myth which places the kingdom of death on the far side of the Styx.

13. *The Interpreters*, p. 9, where the ‘dome’ and the ‘bridge’ are similar continuous (rather than one-directional) entities.


16. As builder of a power plant he is not only an engineer or worker with iron (Ogun) but has ‘mastered the snake-tongued lightning’ (p. 225), like Sango. Kofi Awoonor draws attention to the parallel in *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor and Soyinka* (Washington, 1975), p. 148.


19. According to some versions of myth, Obatala and Odudua are represented as two halves of a single gourd: a dome of continuity.

20. Obiechina, *loc. cit.*, says that the characters share essences. While Obiechina is to some extent forced into this position because he is looking only for Ogun and Obatala in the novel, his suggestion seems to me to be right. The characters are not precisely equivalent to the gods; the novel is not an allegory, but a looser, and richer, attempt to employ the established symbols of religion to convey depths of meaning. Sekoni is Sango in his electrical interests, but he is Obatala in his vision of wholeness.

The Seasons

At first it is easy to accept the coming of the dry season, for the greenness of things takes a while to give way to the dust. But with time it is not so easy to shrug and simply say that the coming of the dry season after the rainy one is as normal as night coming after day. Such indifference is impossible when the dry season has truly arrived and has sunk its claws into people and things. The only good thing about the land then is the sudden, wild thought of leaving, to leave never to come back but go as far as your legs can carry you, to some place where the drought is merely a thing to be told about.

Gratitude for the past rainy season quickly dies away. All that you are aware of is the slow passage of the drought, which seems to have been there since the beginning of things and will last to the end of time. You look at the empty skies with a buried bitterness, which out of the slightest provocation could be turned on a neighbour with so much bursting violence, to bring a measure of respite to the burning soul. But such possibilities are hard to come upon. Everyone slinks off into an unoffending silence.

You content yourself with hurling imprecations at the self-willed heavens. You vent off your blocked pain in impotent anger, wondering all the while what mad folly hastened you to this damnation, to this sickness, to this death. You swear this will be your last year here, this your last season; no more, you murmur, no more of this dying year after year, season upon season. But you said this last year, and the year before, all these many years you have been here.

Your lamentations continue all through the murderous afternoon to die only with the sinking away of the sun. At night it is easy briefly to forget there is a drought. All that you see are the firelights of this, this and that compound, that say nothing of the yellow barrenness afflicting the land, but merely of bodies waiting to be dutifully filled with food before crawling into sleep. Your awareness of the drought only comes from the sound of the sharp winds cutting into the night.

But the night soon is over and the nightmare begins anew. The heat squats on the land with nowhere to go, and the winds screech down determined to empty the earth of all that gives it life.

At the height of the dry season, people groan with relief as they anticipate a quick giving way by the drought to the short rains. People always know
when the season has spent its life force and there is nothing to expect but a
distant shaking of the sky. Chewing their nails, they look up at the gathering
heaviness in the sky hanging over the mountain like an outstretched eagle.
At night they peer out at the thickness of the heavens and the load bearing
down; and they murmur, 'We shall have rain come morning.' But the day
dawns to an earth as dry as ever, a sky blue with emptiness. The rains will
be late, is all that is said. People shrug off their disappointment, indifference
banishing earlier expectation.

Nevertheless, like incurable gamblers, they put into the soil their precious
seeds. And as if the rain was waiting just for this it comes down unexpectedly,
in a fury of a sudden blackening of the air and sharply risen winds. The rain
comes gushing down gathering day and night into one wet rag, and digs out
all that is in the ground waiting to stir with a little wetness. And that is the
extent of the short rains. The next day the sun is once more very much king
of the sky.

People speak of the drought no more. What is there to say? Much better
to preserve your energies than dissipate it in some useless talk that does
nothing to the hunger rooted in the compounds. Things cannot be worse.
Whereas before people always pleaded hunger, even in the best of times, to
protect themselves from the evil eye, now one can be believed when he says
in his compound he has not a single grain; for it is the very truth. How you
are surviving is not for the neighbours to know. Whatever you manage to
get, you eat in the solitude of your hunger. What stores were possible from
the last harvest are depleted. Not that much went into storage to start with.
The bulk of the last harvest went to traders in town, clever fellows who knew
nothing about grain except its price. They rushed for the harvest from their
little holes in town, all sweetness and smiles as if the farmer was a long lost
kin. So now it is the traders who have all that you need to save your children
from dying. But of those who go for grain from the traders, many run back
heatedly proclaiming that they will die before they pay the killing prices
being asked. As they have done many times, they swear that not a grain will
they sell next harvest, to people who wait until the height of a drought to
prove to you what a fool you were to give in to the jingle of coins. But it is
only a matter of time before they give in to the thunder in their children's
bellies, and go crawling back to the traders.

Miraculously one day the smell of rain hangs heavy in the air. It is
unmistakable. A fever grips the land and ties even the laziest to the fields.
But people still hold on to their anxiety. They have but half trust in the
weather, which time and again has given them painful lessons about its
fickleness; of how wrong it can be to speak up your hopes too soon or too
loudly, even when it seems beyond all doubt that things are going your way.
Many are the surreptitious glances cast upwards and at the darkened horizon, to judge the ripeness of the black clouds and how soon they will be pitted against the drought.

The rain falls. It fills the days and nights with its rush and noise and stands on the land like a pillar holding the earth and sky together. It flows on the ground in a thousand narrow rivulets, washing the stiffness of waiting out of the body. The maize bursts upwards into the falling rain with a broadness and sturdy greenness of leaf unseen before.

But it is not until close to harvest time that people dare to speak up their hopes: so much grain, so much food, so much money. This is only whispered among friends. A sham modesty greets strangers: my little piece of land has betrayed me, one would say, a few grains is all that is coming my way.

Many are the sleepless nights however, spent in cold calculation as to how far the harvest will go. And always it is found that one's dreams, rekindled by the thought of yet another crop, are as far from being fulfilled as ever. No matter. You do what you can, unsmiling, uncomplaining: here, token payment is made to a creditor who has one foot in court; there, money is thrown away for an undernourished, overpriced goat at the cattlemart; there, a bribe is peeled out for a useless job in town to keep a layabout son out of mischief.

The anxiety one had waiting for rain only sharpens after the harvest and the money. You think of running away from it all in disgust. You did not endure the drought only to suffer the uncertain gains of the harvest. You have had enough, you are leaving. The only destination you can think of is the small town by the river. You will immerse yourself in it. You will take root there. You will put behind you the relentless battle with life on the fields, where each day a thousand new demands are fed on the uneasy yield of the season.

The little town has a charm all its own. Day would break out to the sight of a man strangled or decapitated on his way home at a forbidding hour. Now and then as a lesson against excessive greed, a thief would be killed by the traders who have as little mercy for such parasites as they have for their customers. A fellow would be discovered murdered by a whore, his manhood carved out and rammed into his mouth; for what reason, the man is too dead to say.

No, you will not leave. But what holds you back is not the expanse of land here that makes dreams possible. It is not the soil which only needs a few drops at the right time to bear miracles. You are wedded to this land. To its dry seasons, bitter on the soul as the dregs of boiled herbs. To its good seasons, unfulfilling yet pleasurable as the first taste of homecoming.
Testimony

Everything's given in –
Decided to crackle into leaf,
Lay itself open –
Jackdaw nests away with their lookouts,

Twig shanties,
Make-do's for a season,
While their unspeakable brats
Prepare for flight.

Farmers' guns are busy –
Blue, keen, long snouts
Sniffing the woods for pigeons –
Barrelling up

For the sky-crazy rooks.
Habitat, not home,
Nothing means to stay,
But grow, increase,

Snatch what it can
From the earth. Now grass
Wearied of wearying of itself
Blasts green

From hill to hill,
Field to field. The sun sends
Trumpets and haloes
Through gaps in the cloud

That rolls bare-armed, practical,
In a grey shirt never
Wrung dry,
Though it trails all day in the wind.
Incident

To my left a dark hedge
And beneath it a stream,
An invisible rope of water
In this hour before dawn.

Across two fields
Light under a milkshed door,
The farmhouse standing empty,
Its windows looking out

With a stiff indifference.
Then at my feet
Earth tries its experiment,
A scrap of its jumps

Two feet in air,
Floats down – jumps again,
Light as a flake of soot
In a bonfire’s updraught,

Quick as a blink
And it’s gone. The path unfolds,
Clouds shut over my head
Like a sliding door.

Summer choked the stream
Up to its throat
In lady-smocks, buttercups,
Cut back in fall

For the cold twists of yarn
Of the winter’s water.
I’d seen frogs then,
But this in December
Was a shadow
Leaping to find its form
Lost in the swathes
Of keeled-over grass.

Storm at Skaverup

A wild wind
Makes everything nervous,
Jostles trees
In rippling bursts

So branches strain
Under their own weight;
Anything rotten
Will crack like bone.

Deep in the city
This storm was a rumour,
But each skittering burst
Punishes the driver

Punching our bus
To the crown of the road.
I grasp the cold handle
Of the seat in front.

The wind dips –
Then off a fjord
Of liquid metal
About to be cast,

Finds us again –
Buffets us out
Toward oncoming cars
Whose drivers
Flash us their shock
As they rush
Into the past. Today
There are no birds

Chancing the storm.
Even gulls
Are planted on stones
On inlet shores

Staring blankly
As water is shattered,
Swept up,
Shattered again.
The Year That Was

AUSTRALIA

With a marketing opportunity like the Bicentenary to be exploited, you could bet there'd be more Australian titles in 1988 than we can talk about here.

Although the Bicentenary logo appeared obtrusively on many dustjackets (quite ludicrously in the case of John Forbes's collection of poems *The Stunned Mullet*) a strong note of literary protest heralded the year. In late 1987 Kath Walker announced that she would revert to her Aboriginal name, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and Patrick White insisted that his *Three Uneasy Pieces* appear just before 1988, not in the Bicentenary year itself. And that's where the relevance of 1988 to White's work stops.

Inevitably, most of the other major fiction titles have been reviewed as Bicentennial books. Peter Carey says his Booker Award-winning *Oscar and Lucinda* (UQP) has nothing at all to do with the Bicentenary, but that isn't the way this novel about expatriation, God, glass and gambling has been read. Who cares! It's a wonderful achievement.

The book's failure to win any of the major literary awards in Australia is an ironic footnote. Some commentators have leapt to the good old cringing position that the British are right to give *Oscar and Lucinda* the Booker, and Australian judges wouldn't know a good 500-page novel if they fell over it. It may simply be, though, that the book's old-fashioned wordiness is not appealing to Australian readers at the moment. Or perhaps it's our culture's traditional need to cut down tall poppies. Judges of the various Australian awards may have felt that Carey has had enough publishing hype and success and other writers should be given a go. At any rate, it will be interesting to see how Australians view the book in the future, when the Booker publicity has died down.

One of those intriguing little coincidences history comes up with: Carey has a glass church floating down the Bellinger River; in her new novel, Thea Astley has a brothel, loosed from its foundations by swirling brown flood waters, drift off into the bay. *It's Raining in Mango* (Viking) is Astley at her best: both dreamlike and angry. If her feminism seems equivocal elsewhere there's no doubt about the anti-patriarchal writing here.

Like Astley, Kate Grenville takes a broad sweep of recent Australia history in *Joan Makes History* (UQP) and gives it a feminist rewriting, but it's a bit of a romp too. Grenville takes Lilian's friend Joan, a minor character in *Lilian's Story*, and lets her tell things her way: and her story is that although you wouldn't know it to read the history books, there's always been a Joan behind the events of the last 200 years. There's a slight feeling that, like most historians, the novelist is less confident as she brings the narrative up to her own period, but not enough to diminish its overall exuberance.


For those willing to read the silences in Australian literature, *Forty-Seventeen* is a stimulating short novel of ideas. An attractive minor aspect is its contribution to the mythology of the Blue Mountains in NSW: useful to put alongside, say, David Foster's *The Pure Land*.
The best new novelist in 1988 is Mark Henshaw. His *Out of the Line of Fire* (Penguin) is erotic and erudite. Like Moorhouse's *Forty-Seventeen*, it objectifies the female, but the male gaze itself is scrutinised by the presence of a second male narrator.

Slightly difficult also to get into but worth pursuing is Barry Hill's novel *The Best Picture* (McPhee Gribble). Set in a Buddhist community, it's both a novel of ideas and social satire as sharp as Jhabvala's or Rushdie's. Hill returns here to some of the concerns of *A Rim of Blue*. He's a writer of great integrity; not well know outside Australia, but *The Best Picture* should certainly change that.

With a toast to 'the Old Country, Home' on the first page, Elizabeth Jolley seems to invite an intriguing metaphorical reading of her new novel, *The Sugar Mother* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press). This wicked little fairy tale about surrogate motherhood, or academic parenting, develops some of the themes in *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* and *The Well*, but has had less attention than it might have. Perhaps its just 1988, or the tall poppy syndrome again.

Rodney Hall's *Captivity Captive* (McPhee Gribble) is a fictionalised treatment of the unsolved Gatton murders in 1898. A brother and two sisters are killed, an unlikely confession offered, and grim possibilities suggest themselves. It's a frightening portrait of the family: dark and brooding, but written in spare poetic prose that gives it a beautiful mythic quality. A striking combination in yet another novel that's been strangely underrated (and incidentally an example of Australian book design at its best).

Other fiction at the top of the list: Barbara Hanrahan's novel *A Chelsea Girl* (Grafton), Gerald Murnane's *Inland* (Heinemann) for those who like the slow pace but dry wit of *The Plains* and *Landscape with Landscape*; Tom Shapcott's *Limestone and Lemon Wine* (Chatto and Windus), and the collection Olga Masters was working on at the time of her death in 1986, *The Rose Fancier* (UQP). Although a brief and uneven collection, a handful of the stories here remind us why she is so sadly missed.

In poetry, Kevin Gilbert's long awaited anthology *Inside Black Australia* (Penguin) is the first gathering of Aboriginal poets. Despite, rather than because of, the Bicentenary's aims, 1988 in retrospect will turn to be the best thing that ever happened to Aboriginal writing. The newly confident tone of Aboriginal writers is signalled by Oodgeroo's selection here. The first, and still the most, famous Aboriginal poem in English, 'We Are Going', which laments the passing of her people, is not included by Gilbert. Instead, Oodgeroo is represented by her later poem 'The Past', which begins:

> Let no one say the past is dead.<br>Let the past be all about us and within.

Like Oodgeroo, Colin Johnson has used 1988 to rename himself symbolically. Generally known as Australia's first Aboriginal novelist, he becomes Mudrooroo Narogin with his second collection of poems, *Dalwurrра* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press): a book that persuades me, as *The Song Circle of Jacky* did, that he is also now our leading Aboriginal poet.

John Tranter's *Under Berlin* (UQP) is witty, technically assured and Tranter at his most accessible. That's not to say that sequences such as 'Sex Chemistry' are without challenges. But there's a new warmth and an impressive range in Tranter's work here, from 'The Guides', his whimsical poem about street directories, to the award-winning 'Lufthansa'.

Like Tranter, Diane Fahey seems aware that many readers are alienated by the difficulty of contemporary poetry. In *Metamorphoses* (Dangaroo Press) she gives a powerful and free reading of Euripides and Ovid from a feminist point of view. I usually hate footnotes
flyspecking the pages of poetry books but here the notes, the reproductions of paintings by Tintoretto, Titian and Rubens, and a bibliography are collated at the back, so readers who don’t need this kind of help can ignore it. Others will find it liberates rather than confines their reading of the poems and will also stimulate an interest in the classical sources themselves.

Interesting to read Metamorphoses alongside Bruce Beaver’s sequence ‘Tiresias Sees’ in Charmed Lives (UQP). This is Beaver’s tenth collection and it’s framed by his concern with the artist: both in the person of Tiresias and in a verse biography of Rilke.

It’s good to see an updated edition of Andrew Taylor’s Selected Poems (UQP); and Judith Rodriguez’s New and Selected Poems (UQP) at last collects her work and show the strong growth of this underrated poet’s work. And new collections by Peter Goldsworthy This Goes With That (ABC), Philip Hodgins Down the Lake with Half a Chook (ABC) and Chris Wallace-Crabbe I’m Deadly Serious (OUP) are worth reading.

Several collections of poems accompanied by photographs have appeared recently. The relationship between the two is literal in Mark O’Connor’s Poetry of the Mountains but metaphorical in Mark Macleod’s Finding Echo Point (Dangaroo Press) with its outstanding photographs by Reece Scannell.

Finally several interesting but uneven collections: postmodern theory somehow doesn’t sit happily with Peter Porter in The Automatic Oracle (OUP); Jennifer Maiden’s work is always challenging in The Trust (Black Lightning); and another wonderful title but a sometimes frustrating book from John Forbes: The Stunned Mullet (Hale & Iremonger). He’s an exciting poet and this book is Forbes at his best; unfortunately, it shows him at his inaccessible worst, too.

The year’s publications in drama include David Malouf’s first play Blood Relations (Currency) and Michael Gow’s 1841 (Currency). Both had a pretty rough time from the reviewers.

I wish I could report that there’s more than one really outstanding Australian play this year, but the theatre is taking very few risks with new work. Anyway, that’s another story ...

Alma de Groen’s The Rivers of China (Currency) is terrific! It sends us back in time to a patriarchal past with Katherine Mansfield suffering from TB and Gurdjieff, and forward to some frightening matriarchal future. De Groen’s work has always been successful, but minor. The Rivers of China clearly distinguishes her as a major talent.

In children’s literature, Baily’s Bones (Viking), Victor Kelleher’s anti-Bicentennial novel about non-Aboriginal Australia’s need to confront its violent past, and Robin Klein’s Laurie Loved Me Best (Viking) are among the best titles for older readers. Klein’s feminism is sometimes compromised by humour, but less so here as she moves away from the role of stand-up comic that’s made her a favourite with Australian children.

Gillian Rubinstein follows her outstanding first book Space Demons with two tautly written novels: Answers to Brat (Penguin) and Beyond the Labyrinth (Hyland House). And in non-fiction The Australopedia (Penguin) edited by Joan Grant is a dynamic compendium for 12-year-olds: beautifully designed, politically sophisticated, fun; packed with photographs, stimulating articles about the Australian way of life, and trivia, both useful and useless.

For younger readers you can’t go past Paul Jennings’ The Cabbage Patch Fib (Penguin). Chris is an 8-year-old boy whose father stupidly tells him babies come from under cabbages. It turns out to be true! Chris becomes the adoptive parent and finds out how hard it is to concentrate on a maths lesson with a hungry baby in its basket beside you.

In picture book, Graeme Base’s mystery The Eleventh Hour (Viking Kestrel) tops the huge international success of Animalia, but one of my favourites is Digging to China (Ashton...
Scholastic) by Donna Rawlins. Alexis's middle-aged friend Marj tells her that if you dig a hole straight down into your backyard, you'll reach China. Alexis does, and gets back just in time to give Marj a postcard from Beijing for her birthday. It's a friendly book, warm, unsentimental and allegorical: an unusual celebration of Australian working class life.

MARK MACLEOD

CANADA

The death of Margaret Laurence on January 5, 1987 marked the end of an era. The tributes are still being composed and the retrospective analyses are beginning; in the meantime, the loss is still felt.

M.T. Kelly's *A Dream Like Mine* (Stoddart), a novel exploring racial violence in northwestern Ontario, won the Governor General's Award for 1987. It takes its title from the Ojibway saying 'You cannot harm me, you cannot harm one who has dreamed a dream like mine.' Sean Virgo's *Selakhi* (Exile) also explores inter-racial relations, but in a fictional South Pacific island setting where the literary context established by Rimbaud's poetry mingled with the linguistic interplay of pidgin and standard English is more important than the geographic or political. Its blurb describes it as 'a wrestling with the angel of language.' The same might be said of fellow poet Michael Ondaatje's new novel, *In the Skin of a Lion* (McClelland & Stewart). Read this book for metafictional commentary on fiction and lyrical celebrations of the sensual, but be warned that for all its emphasis on historical setting (Toronto in the 1920s and 1930s), the action is decontextualised. Like Virgo, Ondaatje writes a surreal history that delights in violence. In these writers, the exotic triumphs. Gail Scott's *Heroine* (Coach House), also an aggressively experimental and densely poetic text, tries to put metafictional awarenesses into a specifically feminist and political context – the tenth anniversary of the October Crisis.

After these different intensities, George Bowering’s *Caprice* (Viking) provides the relief of the playful. A sequel to *Burning Water*, this novel continues Bowering's exploration of different ways of seeing, conceptualising and telling stories through revisionary history. Carol Shield's delightful *Swann: A Mystery* (Stoddart) satirizes academic obsessions and pretensions with a gentle touch, while insisting on the ultimate mystery of the creative process.

In a more traditionally realistic vein, Jack Hodgins' *The Honorary Patron* (McClelland & Stewart) and Jane Rule's *Memory Board* (Macmillan) explore the problems of ageing and balancing the individual's responsibilities to self and others. These are quiet novels that make subtle points about British Columbia politics and the multiple possibilities of human relations that too often we allow a deference to the conventional to limit. Katherine Govier's *Between Men* (Viking) and George Peyele's *Unknown Soldier* (Macmillan) are historical novels that stimulate thinking about public and private, past and present.

Marion Quednau's *The Butterfly Chair* (Random House), won the 1987 W.H. Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award. Here 30 year-old Elsie attempts to come to terms with her parents' lives and their violent deaths (through murder-suicide) which she had witnessed when she was 13. Marie Moser's *Counterpoint* (Irwin), winner of the Eighth New Alberta Novelist Competition, traces the lives of three generations of French-Canadian women on the prairies.
Penguin continues to publish good new short story collections. Eric McCormack’s stories in *Inspecting the Vaults* are bizarre, macabre and innovative. The interviewed author in ‘Anyhow in a Corner’ introduces ‘some new characters into an old plot’, the opening of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Rohinton Mistry, author of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, has already been hailed as an important new talent for his sensitive stories of a Parsi apartment block in Bombay. The final story, set in Toronto, includes the reactions of the narrators’ parents, still in India, to his work: Canada through the eyes of the immigrant provides ‘a different viewpoint’; the only danger would be to ‘lose the important difference’.

Another promising first published book of short stories, but with Canadian settings, is Cynthia Flood’s *The Animals in Their Elements* (Talon). Sandra Birdshell’s *Agassiz Stories* (Turnstone) collects together her linked stories previously published as *Night Travellers* and *Ladies of the House*.

*More Stories by Canadian Women*, ed. Rosemary Sullivan (Oxford), conceived as a ‘reconnaissance mission’ to identify important new writers, is a valuable collection and a good guide to the current scene. *A Shapely Fire: Changing the Literary Landscape*, ed. Cyril Dabydeen (Mosaic) includes drama, poetry and fiction by Caribbean-Canadian writers.

P.K. Page’s *Brazilian Journal* (Lester & Orpen Denys) is based on letters and extracts from her journal written during 1957-1959, when Brazil opened up a whole new world of perception to the Canadian visitor, and includes reproductions of some of her drawings and paintings from this period. It reveals the painter’s eye and the poet’s fascination with language. Sylvia Fraser’s *My Father’s House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing* (Doubleday), in contrast, remembers a period so terrible the author repressed its memory for years. Yet she has finally triumphed over horror to write a compelling book. Gabrielle Roy’s autobiography, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, translated by Patricia Claxton (Lester and Orpen Dennys) is a revealing and memorable account of a major writer’s life. Adele Wiseman’s *Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays* (Oxford) range widely in subject matter and tone but always work to encourage the ‘book molesting’ habit.

Gwendolyn MacEwan died unexpectedly in November 1987. Her last collection of poetry, *Afterworlds* (McClelland & Stewart), remains as a testament to her mythic imagination and fusion of the sensual with the dreamworlds of the visionary. ‘You Can Study It If You Want’ provides a kind of credo:

Poetry has got nothing to do with poetry.
Poetry is how the air goes green before thunder,
is the sound you make when you come, and
why you live and how you bleed, and
The sound you make or don’t make when you die.

George Bowering, *Delayed Mercies and Other Poems* (Coach House), might not agree. With Sharon Thesen, *The Beginning of the Long Dash*, and bp nichol, *Book 6 of The Martyrology* (Coach House), he shares a passionate belief that the language and craft of poetry are primary. *The Collected Poems of Al Purdy* (McClelland & Stewart) brings together the best work of one of our most popular and important poets.

In drama, the publication of Betty Lambert’s two plays, *Jeannie’s Story* and *Under the Skin* (Playwrights Union), long unavailable, is welcome indeed. These horrifying tales of the effects of sexual abuse on the victim and on those who comply through silence with her victimizing are not easy reading or viewing, but they powerfully raise some of the questions we most need to ask about power and gender relations. The same publisher has brought out John Krizanc’s *Prague*, dealing with a more familiar kind of politics: the Russian invasion.
of 1968. On a lighter note, three of John Gray's musical plays are collected in *Local Boy Makes Good* (Talon).

In essay collections by three poets, Dennis Cooley and Steve McCaffery provide alternatives to what they see as the conservatism of Canadian criticism in *The Vernacular Muse* (Turnstone) and *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973-1986* (Nightwood) respectively, and Eli Mandel employs a psychoanalytical metaphor for his reading of Canadian culture as *The Family Romance*.

Sandra Djwa's *The Politics of the Imagination: A Life of F.R. Scott* (McClelland & Stewart) is a thorough biography of a man who has contributed substantially not only to modern poetry but also to the legal, constitutional and political history of the country. Other important scholarly and critical contributions include: W.H. New, *Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand*, Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (both University of Toronto); Laurie Ricou, *Everyday Magic: Child Languages in Canadian Literature*, Eva-Marie Kroller, *Canadian Travellers in Europe*, Ethel Wilson: *Stories, Essays and Letters* ed. David Stouck (all University of British Columbia); Terrence Craig, *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction, 1905-1980* (Wilfrid Laurier University); Eugene Benson & Len Conolly, *English-Canadian Theatre*, and David Clandfield, *Canadian Film* (both Oxford in the new series, Perspectives on Canadian Culture). Also important was the publication of the first volume of the *Historical Atlas of Canada: From the Beginning to 1800*, ed. R. Cole Harris and Geoffrey J. Matthews (University of Toronto). This volume makes an important contribution to reseeing Canada. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the old-fashioned Toronto-centred view of *The Oxford Illustrated Literary Guide to Canada* by Albert and Theresa Moritz.

The Literary Press Group selected the following (the first five are collections of poetry and the sixth is of short stories) for its 1987 Writers' Choice: Frank Davey, *The Abbotsford Guide to India* (Porcopic); Gary Geddes, *Hong Kong Poems* (Oberon); J. Michael Yates, *Schedules of Silence* (Pulp); Anne Szumigalski, *Dogstones* (Fifth House); Dorothy Livesay, *The Self-Completing Tree* (Porcopic); and Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Transfigurations* (Ragweed).

DIANA BRYDON

INDIA

These are good times for literature in India with over one hundred and thirty universities having departments of literature. Literature is taught in several languages and this all contributes to indigenous literary thought. But literature is not a solely university-based affair in India. All languages with literary traditions, some of which stretch back to over a thousand years, have their yearly literary festivals, *sahitya sammilan*, attended by the literary elite as well as by the masses. The media too have taken kindly to literature: newspapers, particularly those in regional languages (readership ranging from 10,000 to 100,000), devote considerable space to literary reporting. The radio and the television offer generous time to literary classics. For instance, Narayan's Malgudi featured on television, and was well received. But the event of the year, not only for literature but also for the social history of India, was the immensely popular serialisation of the *Ramayana*, viewed by a record number of 500 million viewers an episode. The television now plans to serialise the *Mahabharata*. One feels that literature is acquiring increasingly greater importance at all
levels of Indian culture – the folk, the popular and the elite. And these three meet, compliment and also thwart one another in India in an extremely complex pattern.

The most distinctive of last year's publications to re-emphasize the plurality of Indian literary culture was Bahuvachana (which means 'plural' as well as 'many-tongues'), a periodical published by Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal. This inaugural issue contains provocative ideas and experimental writings in English translation from Oriya, Hindi, Kannada and Marathi. In particular 'Why Not Worship in the Nude?' by U.R. Ananathamurthy, a celebrated novelist himself, is memorable as a critique of Kannada fiction tradition and its social concerns. Bahuvachana is very elegantly produced and avoids all the pitfalls and shallowness of David Ray's Indian Literature published five years back. The theme of plurality is at the centre of another distinctive publication, Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature, the first volume of which was published early this year by the Sahitya Akademi (the Indian Academy of Letters). The encyclopaedia was long in preparation and is expected to fulfil a need felt by the student of comparative Indian literature. But the few early reviews that have appeared so far have been mixed in tone. It extends the field of study opened up by the pioneering, and somewhat crude, Comparative Indian Literature (1984-86) volumes edited by K.M. George. The Sahitya Akademi volume is edited by a series of editors, so it is a collective work. It is easy to be critical of the work done by the Akademi, for it feels nice to be anti-establishment, but one must look at the positive contribution it makes. The Akademi and the National Book Trust of India keep publishing monographs on Indian writers, in the series 'Makers of Indian Literature', and translations of Indian classics, ancient as well as modern, in all Indian languages, including English. The Akademi also publishes a journal of translation, Indian Literature, six issues of which were discerningly edited by its editor Balu Rao.

Balu Rao and Mulk Raj Anand have brought out a collection of short stories, Panorama (Oriental University Press) which includes stories by some of the best writers in regional languages and in English. It is desirable that more translations of works in Indian languages become available to readers outside these languages, so that the unduly heavy burden of representing Indian literature will not fall on the small body of writing in English. Most literary journals in India seem to be striving towards fulfilling this need. The Indian Literary Review, ed. Devindra Kohli, Pratibha India ed. Aruna Sitesh and Sitesh Aloeke, and Licrit, ed. P.K. Rajan offer translations. Setu is entirely devoted to literature in translation. But these journals seem to concentrate only on the modern period. It was, therefore, very refreshing to see the translation of an obscure, that is linguistically inaccessible, Marathi classic by Anne Feldhaus, The Deeds of God in Rddhipur (NY, O.U.P., 1984) becoming available in Indian bookshops. The Marathi text, Govindaprabhu Charitra, is of pivotal importance in the evolution of Marathi literature from the thirteenth century, and can form useful background reading for students of the poetry of Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre and Nissim Ezekiel, and of the fiction of Manohar Malgaonkar and Shashi Deshpande. Mention should also be made of translations of great medieval classics from Tamil by A.K. Ramanujan, Poems of Love and War (Delhi, O.U.P.) and from Hindi by K.S. Ram, Dohavali: Short Poems of Kabir, Bihariyal and Rahim (Writers' Workshop).

A.K. Ramanujan is also a poet and after a gap of fifteen years he published his third volume of poems in English, Second Sight (O.U.P.). This third volume is as remarkable as the first two, Striders and Relations, and gives little indication of the time gap between it and the previous volumes.

The Indological work by some non-Indians has been exceptionally deep in recent years. The best example of such excellence is the series of volumes on the history of Indian
literature with Jan Gonda as general editor. The last in the series to come out is *Mimamsa Literature* by Jean-Marie Verpoorten (Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1987) as part of Vol.VI. Verpoorten's survey of Mimamsa literature from classical times to the present century gives a scholarly and balanced account of an important aspect of Indian literary history and culture.

The present decade in Indian literature has seen a steady emergence of the trend described as Nativism. One aspect of it is an attempt to create native critical thinking. Two publications of nominal importance in this direction are C.D. Narasimhaiah's *The Function of Criticism in India* (Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore) and an anthology of critical statements edited by S.K. Desai and G.N. Devi, *Critical Thought* (Sterling). Narasimhaiah established himself as a pathfinder in this field with the publication of *Towards a Common Indian Poetic* (1985). He continues that task, and also continues to edit *Literary Criterion*, which has become an important forum for debates in Indian English studies. However, the journals which appear to be making really new contributions to Indian literary thought are *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, ed. M.D. Deshpande, Delhi, and *New Quest*, edited for the Indian Association for Cultural Freedom by M.P. Rege and M.V. Namjoshi. Both are interdisciplinary. *Arts and Ideas* includes writings on all arts and literature with its focus on the issues which are currently relevant to India. *New Quest* has a Radical Humanist (or M.N. Royist) editorial policy and publishes debates on Indian problems. Both of these have been useful in shaping new ideas in India without being at any time fanatically nationalistic in outlook. Last year *New Quest* carried an important statement on Indian English Literature by Rajiv Patke, and on English-Sanskrit relations by Probal Dasgupta.

What is clear is that a distinctive 'Indian' field of literary and social knowledge has been emerging in recent years. An 'Indian' argument is developing in the fields bordering on literary studies: social-psychology by Ashish Nandi, psychology by Sudhir Kakar, political history by Partha Chatterjee, history by Romila Thapar, linguistics by Ashok Kelkar and Probal Dasgupta, aesthetics and criticism by R.B. Patankar. All these have been active last year and have published books containing their ideas. The most notable among these is, I believe Romila Thapar's booklet on 'Tradition' (Delhi, O.U.P.), which establishes from the historian's point of view the intricacies of social history and points out the existing epistemological inaccuracies in Indian studies. Partha Chatterjee's book on Indian nationalism, *Nationalism and the Colonial World* (Zed, London, 1986), has a good analysis of Bengali fiction of the nineteenth century, and it outlines the nature of colonial discourse in India. More analytical work in the field of this new Indian awareness is to be found in the exceptionally brilliant series edited by Ranajit Guha and published by the Delhi O.U.P. under the title *Subaltern Studies*, five volumes of which have been published. Students of literature will find in these volumes invaluable work by critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on literary history. Chakravorty Spivak's writing on Mahasveta Devi has enhanced the interest in this great Bengali writer. Last year another of her long stories was published in English translation, *Death of Jagmohan, the Elephant*, in *Setu*.

With the trend of Nativism, there is a certain amount of revivalism too. M.Hiriyanna, whose commentary on Sanskrit poetics (*Art Experience*) and Indian philosophy had been out of print for a long time, has been re-discovered. His entire works are now available in five volumes. Traditional Indian narratology has started receiving the attention it deserves. Bhalchandra Nemade, the trend-setting Marathi novelist—and a professor of English—has come out with a tentative theory about traditional Indian narratology, which he proposed through a series of lectures, and which is about to be published. The Indian Languages Institute at Mysore too has shown interest in Indian narratology. It has been producing
books on critical problems. One of its publications, which is not recent but needs listing, is a check-list of Indian works in English translation; it lists near to two thousand translations of creative works. This institute and the cultural centre Bharat Bhavan at Bhopal are becoming the new centres of literary innovation in India. They have functioned as the highways of link between Indian languages and the national literary awareness.

The organisations that connect Indian English literature with the world outside are the Indian ACLALS, headed by Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah for a quarter of a century, and the Indo-Canadian studies association headed now by O.P. Joneja. Both these have been active throughout the year. The Comparative Indian Literature Association too has been active in bringing together the national and the regional. The work of CILA is worth appreciation, for the relationship between the regional and the national in India has always been full of tensions. The literary cultural groups such as Prakrit (which means regional culture) and which also makes talented use of the film medium, and Gadyaparva (the era of prose) using fiction, are clearly against the literary establishment such as the Sahitya Akademi. The relationship is somewhat like the political relation between the Delhi government and the Akalis in Punjab.

Some years back we had a well-written, light novel on rural Punjab moving towards modernisation in Nation of Fools by Balaraj Khanna. Partap Sharma has now published a sequel to it, Days of the Turban (London, Bodley Head, 1986). It tells the story of a young man, Balbir, seeking escape from his hide-bound Hindu family. The background is of the Punjab burning in the fire of terrorism. The novel is ambitious, and could have succeeded. But Sharma is not able to manage the plot well, which he tends to handle as the plot of a thriller. The background is present too substantially, and takes charge of the entire narrative. Sharma has an impressive range of prose diction. But he has not been able to come close to the quality of Kanthapura or Aazadi. Yet, I would prefer Sharma's novel to Mulk Raj Anand's The Road, published by Oriental University Press, 1987. It is still the story of untouchability. The social reality in India has now gone far beyond this problem. Anand writes with his usual skill. But someday he should fear becoming tiresome to his readers. The established writers Narayan, Raja Rao and Ruth Praver Jhabvala have all published during the year. Raja Rao published a few excerpts from his forthcoming novel, Narayan brought out a selection of his personal essays during the last twenty years, and Jhabvala has published a substantial selection of stories, Out of India (John Murray, 1987).

But one feels that there is nothing more we can get from the established writers. The younger generation of writers are far more interesting at the moment. Of these the most distinctive are Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth. Ghosh's first novel, The Circle of Reason (Hamish Hamilton, 1986, reprint. Abacus, 1987), displays a lively style, a sense of humour and the capacity to create a variety of characters. It uses fantasy in a way reminiscent of Rushdie's Midnight's Children. Seth's The Golden Gate (Random House – USA – 1986, reprint Faber and Faber 1986), now available in India, is a narrative in metrical verse divided in thirteen chapters. It is an interesting experiment, and displays Seth's ability to play with words and verse. It has the strength to be remembered as a curious narrative by an expatriate Indian. If less distinctive but certainly remarkable in many ways is the work by younger women writers. Bharati Mukherjee has announced herself to be 'a' writer rather than 'an Indian' writer. Such internationalism is good, for in terms of race-relations it can provide some perennial tensions for creative work. Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta and Namita Gokhale raise expectations. Gokhale's Paro: Dreams of Passion (Chatto & Windus, 1984 rep. 1986), is apparently a pot-boiler; but is has a deep irony which relates it to the Indian fiction tradition from Sharat Chandra of the last century. Paro shows that the
depiction of the Indian woman has at last crossed the Raja Rao spell (of Savitri in this *The Serpent and the Rope*) and has arrived at a realistic phase. Both Dina Mehta and Shashi Deshpande emphasise this realism in their work. Of the expatriate Indian writers, Salman Rushdie brought out a thin volume on his Nicaragua experiences, *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*.

Poetry publication has been on the low side the last year. The Writers’ Workshop continues to publish poetry; but it is a long time since the Workshop brought out a volume that should matter. The exception to this is P. Lal’s translation of Indian classics. The other poetry publishing houses like Clearing House and New Ground have not been active recently. It was only the O.U.P. publications in poetry last year that made any contribution to this field of creative writing. Among these the most outstanding have been Jayanta Mahapatra’s *Selected Poems*, Keki Daruwalla’s *Landscapes*, and Ashok Mahajan’s *Goan Vignettes and Other Poems*. Mahapatra’s selections show in retrospect his rapid progress as a new voice in Indian English poetry in the early seventies to the position of the most impressive Indian poet in recent years. Daruwalla’s consistency is reassuring for the readers who feel disappointed in the disappearance of one-time good poets like the older Parthasarathy and the younger Manohar Shetty. Ashok Mahajan is a new voice. The poems in *Goan Vignettes* are unpretentious and have a freshness in the choice of style and concerns. One feels that the literary trends in the last year show a transition in Indian English literature and literary thought, a movement towards a greater realism and nativism.

G.N. DEVI

NEW ZEALAND

The publication of three quite different poetry anthologies in 1987 earmarks the year as a significant landmark in the history of New Zealand poetry. Ranging from innovation to orthodoxy respectively, the anthologies were *The New Poets of the ’80’s* (Allen and Unwin), *The Caxton Book of New Zealand Poetry 1972 – 1986* (Caxton) and the third edition of *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry* (Oxford University Press).

Edited jointly by Murry Edmond and Mary Paul, *The New Poets of the ’80’s* lives up to its name by collecting in one volume the work of poets largely unpublished and certainly unacknowledged before 1980. The anthology’s editorial intentions are stated strongly and unambiguously by Edmond and Paul: ‘The last ten years have seen an explosion in the writing of New Zealand poetry – new kinds of poetry, new kinds of publishing, new poets. This anthology celebrates their diversity and challenges old orthodoxies.’ In situating *The New Poets of the ’80’s* within the wider context of New Zealand poetry generally, the editors reveal what they value in this collection: ‘What we do believe our selection attests to is the energy, the commitment, the intensity, and, above all, the variety of the emerging scene.’

Some of the poets in this anthology are well known – Cilla McQueen, Janet Potiki, Keri Hulme – while others – Janet Charman, John Newton, Heather McPherson – are still establishing their reputations. What is interesting to note, is that of the seventeen poets represented, three are Maori and nine – over half – are women. This unusual but encouraging representation of groups more often ignored or confined to separate anthologies of their own is the result of an acknowledgement, on the part of the editors, of what they perceive to be a flourishing ‘Maori cultural renaissance’ and ‘the changes feminism has begun to force in writing’.
Mark Williams, editor of *The Caxton Book of New Zealand Poetry 1972 – 1986* also has a definite and clearly articulated editorial intention: '...to show ... both the diversity of poetry written in the period and the main forces working through the field as a whole.' Published to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Christchurch's Caxton Press, *The Caxton Book of New Zealand Poets 1972 – 1986*, while less radical than *The New Poets of the '80's* both in content and direction, is a welcome addition to the ongoing discussion of poetry in New Zealand. In his well-referenced and persuasive introductory essay, Williams makes detailed reference to individual poems and situates them within their historical context. In representing both New Zealand's literary greats – Allen Curnow, C.K. Stead, Vincent O'Sullivan – and its promising emergent talent – John Newton, Elizabeth Nannestad, Michelle Leggott – Williams is well positioned to fulfil his editorial aim.

The third anthology, *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, edited by Vincent O'Sullivan, appears as a slightly altered third edition. While much from the previous edition remains unaltered, what does change is significant. In his 'Notes to the Third Edition', O'Sullivan, while acknowledging the past critical debates surrounding New Zealand poetry, points in a new direction and in doing so allies himself more closely to Edmond and Paul: 'It is a plurality of views and styles, an unconfined possibility of voices, which now seems to me so much more commanding than the recognizable logo in the locally patterned.'

1987 also produced a number of interesting collections of poetry. Among them was an impressive clutch from the Auckland University Press, including Elizabeth Nannestad's *Jump*, Gregory O'Brien's self-illustrated *Location of the Least Person*, Fiona Farrell Poole's *Cutting Out* and Kendrick Smithyman's tenth book of verse *Are You Going to the Pictures?*

Two very promising and well received first collections, both by women and both by university presses were Anne French's *All Cretans Are Liars* (Auckland University Press) and Dinah Hawken's *It Has No Sound and is Blue* (Victoria University Press). French writes deceptively accessible poetry which, on closer examination, is capable of sustaining a diversity of interpretations. Much of her first collection is personal poetry, directed to friends and family and often originating from undocumented sources. Still, she distances herself from that too common and too often disparaging critical appraisal of women poets, writing:

> I tell you I do not write
confessional poems. It is a lie
or half-lie ... ('Confessional').

Dinah Hawken's equally impressive collection, hailed as 'one of the most significant debuts in recent New Zealand poetry', was mainly written in New York where she lived for three years. Nevertheless it is easily recognizable as New Zealand poetry not simply because Hawken was born in Hawera or now lives in Wellington but because, while written overseas, it is directed at New Zealand either literally as in the long central sequence 'Writing Home' or referentially:

> I can be at home for a while,
high over the harbour, working a small
object from native wood, or bone;
Flaking it slowly and intently, into shape.
('Winter. New York.')
Many established poets consolidated their reputations in 1987 with the publication of their selected or collected works. Peter Bland recently back in New Zealand from England, Kevin Ireland, Sam Hunt and Ian Wedde all published their selected poems, compiled from their various past works and, without exception, including some new previously unpublished pieces. Ruth Dallas brought out *Collected Poems* (University of Otago Press), a selection from her previous half-dozen books and a useful gathering of some of her best work. Similarly, Hone Tuwhare brought together poems from his seven books and some new work in *Mihi: Collected Poems* (Penguin), a thoughtful collection of poems from one of New Zealand's foremost Maori poets with an appropriately but beautifully simple cover illustration by Ralph Hotere.

Several important collections of short stories were also published in 1987. Five years after his first collection of short stories, Michael Gifkins published his second, *Summer is the Côte d'Azure* (Penguin). Described as a 'superb literary strategist', Gifkins engages the reader with these stories which, punctuated as they are with unusual characters and unlikely sexual couplings, teeter on that knife edge where suspension of disbelief is not only essential but also almost impossible. *Summer is the Côte d'Azure* continues Gifkins' tradition of reassuringly ordinary short stories which occasionally roll to expose their bizarre underbellies.

Shonagh Koea, whose short stories are by now familiar to the wide readership of the *New Zealand Listener*, published a collection of fourteen stories, titled *The Women Who Never Went Home* (Penguin). These confident, assured stories position Koea well within the ranks of New Zealand's best short story writers and firmly establish her as mistress of the unlikely metaphor. As is by now her trademark, Koea's similes approach but never transgress that exceedingly fine line between the unusual and the ridiculous: 'Mr Ling sat on the low velvet chair, thin limbs neatly assembled like a tightly bound bundle of garden stakes' ('The Dragon Courier') or '...it echoed now in his head like the crack of his own cranium on the tide-swept rocks' ('Edmund and the Tempest').

Patricia Grace, whose novel *Potiki* won the 1987 New Zealand Book Award for fiction, also published her third short story collection, *Electric City and Other Stories* (Penguin). Grace's characteristically unpretentious, almost casual stories deal as easily with themes of racism in New Zealand – 'Going for the Bread' – as they do with seemingly less monumental subjects – taking the day off to go fishing as in 'Kahawai' or growing cabbages in 'Butterflies'. Drawing strongly on Maori custom, urban and rural living patterns, mythology, even speech patterns – '...don't you smoke while I'm out, putting the place on fire. And don't cook. You come down the marae after and have a kai down there, you hear me...' ('Waimarie') – Grace contributes to the growing field of essentially and unambiguously Maori literature written in English.

Two other collections of short stories published in 1987 are important due to their historical significance. They are Greville Texidor's *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say A Lot* (Victoria University Press) edited by Kendrick Smithyman and *Happy Endings: Short Stories by Australian and New Zealand Women 1850's – 1930's* (Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson) co-edited by Elizabeth Webby and Lydia Wevers. Both collections – although the latter is not solely about New Zealand literature – gather together rare and often unpublished manuscripts and help fill that gap in our literary landscape, the early work of New Zealand women writers.

The novels published in 1987 were a mixed bag. *Pulling Faces* (Hodder and Stoughton) was Marilyn Duckworth's eighth novel. Deftly written and captivating as always, the reader is presented with another cast of totally believable, frequently bizarre characters situated
in that recognisably Duckworth landscape where tenuous human relationships are played out against a backdrop of menacingly understated savagery.

Nigel Cox's second novel, *Dirty Work* (Benton/Ross), is an interesting work concerned with a novel within the novel. As the boundaries between the novels of Cox and Cox's character, Laurie, begin to shimmer and finally disappear – the erratum stuck to the publication page of *Dirty Work* refers not to *Dirty Work* but to Laurie's novel; Gina Tully, whose stories Laurie is writing into his novel, herself writes the introduction to Cox's novel – Cox continues to swing from one to the other with all the skill of his novel's unifying symbol, the trapeze artist.

*Running Away From Home* (Penguin) is another second novel and readers familiar with Rachel McAlpine's first novel *The Limits of Green* will recognise her style here. Similar to her first novel in many ways, this work tells the story of Fern who leaves home with her daughter to have many adventures and finally save the world. *Running Away From Home* revolves around such themes as the difference between men and women, the position of the Maori in New Zealand as tangata whenua [people of the land], New Zealand's position in the world generally and its anti-nuclear stance. Again, in this second novel, the fantastic plays a strong part and is a crucial factor in the novel's fast pace and almost allegorical quality.

*The Whale Rider* (Heinnemann) is Witi Ihimaera's fourth novel and here he continues to display his dual skills of consummate story teller and myth maker. Ihimaera develops several different but related narratives which are all finally pulled together in the climatic scene where Kahu, the once spurned female child who broke the male line of descent, wins her great-grandfather's approval and saves her whanau's mana [family honour] by riding a beached bull whale back into the ocean and saving its life.

A first novel that made a great impact on the local scene was the young Wellington author Elizabeth Knox's *After Z-Hour* (Victoria University Press). Concerned with the interactions of six people stranded by a storm in an old South Island house haunted by the ghost of Mark, an ex-serviceman, *After Z-Hour* is not only well written but researched so thoroughly by Knox as to have historical significance. Hailed as a newly discovered and major New Zealand talent, Knox was awarded the ICI Writers Prize for 1987.

A very quiet year for drama publications. One publication, however, that must not pass unmentioned is the Victoria University Press New Zealand Playscripts series *The Healing Arch: Five Plays on Maori Themes* by Bruce Mason. Not only is there the obvious advantage of having the five plays – Hongi, The Pohutakawa Tree, Awatea, The Hand on the Rail, Swan Song – available in one volume but the last two are specially valuable being previously unpublished.

1987 produced two critical works on note – *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935 – 84* Allen Curnow (Auckland University Press) edited by Peter Simpson, and Lawrence Jones' *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose* (University of Otago Press) – both by South Island academics. The first, as indicated by its title, is a consolidation of fifty years of Curnow's significant critical contributions to New Zealand's literary scene, while the second is a more broadly focused but equally thorough account of New Zealand prose and its relation to the literary traditions of realism and impressionism.

One of the most significant happenings in the journal and magazine scene was the merging of *Pacific Quarterly Moana* and *Rimu* into a new journal called *Crosscurrent*. Its claims to be 'multicultural and multilingual' are reinforced by its solid and genuine commitment to these frequently misunderstood concepts.

In addition to Grace's win in the fiction section, the New Zealand Book Awards for 1987 were Allen Curnoe's *The Loop in Lone Kauri Road* and Elizabeth Nannestad's *Jump* jointly
for poetry and Virginia Myers' *Head and Shoulders*, a collection of some successful New Zealand women's biographies, for nonfiction.

A feast of poetry, a famine for drama – 1987 was still an exciting year for New Zealand literature.

**ANNAMARIE RUSTOM JAGOSE**

**PAKISTAN**

In 1987, criticism, translations, and fiction fared far better than the other categories of writing. The few poetry volumes published during the year were by no means outstanding. Waqas Ahmad Khwaja's *Six Geese from a Tomb at Medum* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel), contains a mixture of old vices struggling with new strengths. Inamul Haq's first book, *Poems Persons Places* (Lahore: Vanguard), has interesting idiomatic turns and is indicative of a different strain in poetry, which has been mostly given to some aspects of the Islamic mystical tradition. Many noteworthy poems in the year appeared in magazines and journals abroad. Particular mention must be made of the poems by Ahmed Ali, Zulfikar Ghose, and Alamgir Hashmi in the special issue, *Chelsea 46: World Literature in English* (New York).

Of the two novels published, Ikram Azam's *Gossip Gulley* (Islamabad: Margalla Voices/Lahore: Mavra Publishers) is a rather flat and loose narrative of contemporary Pakistan. Adam Zameenzad, an expatriate Pakistani living in England, published his first novel *The Thirteenth House*, to much respectable notice in England. In mixing desire with horror and the lofty with the lowly life that Zahid, the central character, must live, the novel creates a couple of memorable characters and a social milieu which defines their roles. There are extraordinary determinants, which are underlined by the epigraph: 'Traditionally The Twelve Houses of the Zodiac are called mundane houses because they refer to everyday life on earth activities. Not much is said about The Thirteenth House.' The present Thirteenth House is set in Karachi, where Zahid, the author's autobiographical 'other', acts out his destiny. A hard-core analytical picture of the 1970s and 1980s Pakistan keeps breaking through the fictional plot and there is an attempt to recount all, since for Zahid 'the miseries of the present are the best cure for the miseries of the past. That is why the poor forget, or appear to forget, soon...'. In the five parts, named 'The Haunting House', 'The Haunted House', 'The House of Death', 'The House of Besieged', and 'The Thirteenth House', the life of this family and its 'house' is writ large, if spasmodically, over the city and the country; but the relationships are not explored well; and the descriptions of place or custom are rather coloured by narratorial quirk. Still, the writing is adequate, and a first-hand feel of the material is evident even when it is overworked.

Among short stories, to note are those by Zulfikar Ghose and Javaid Qazi in *Chelsea 46: World Literature in English*. The re-issue of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *The Bride* (1983), in a Pakistani paperback edition (Karachi: Liberty Books) will certainly help reader access, though it is not comparable in quality to – or much cheaper than – the earlier British paperback edition.

While the only and most widely used 'English' anthology, *Pakistani Literature: The Contemporary English Writers* (ed. Alamgir Hashmi; Islamabad: Gulmohar), originally published in New York in 1978, was republished, most other anthologies were of Pakistani literature in English translation. In fact, the translations both with regard to poetry and fiction in the other Pakistani languages were very distinguished in the year's work. The

In criticism, most of the writings appeared in scholarly and critical periodicals or the general press in Pakistan as well as abroad. The criticism concerned general literary topics or it focused on such authors as Ahmed Ali, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Zulfikar Ghose, Alamgir Hashmi, Abdullah Hussain, Muhammad Iqbal, Daud Kamal and Josh Malihabadi, in such places as *The Nation* (Lahore), *The Journal of the English Literary Club* (Peshawar), *Twentieth Century Literature* (New York), *CRNLE Reviews Journal* (Australia), *Asiaweek* (Hong Kong), *World Literature Today* (USA), *Annual of Urdu Studies* (Chicago), *Research in African Literatures* (USA), *Viewpoint* (Lahore), *Dawn* (Karachi), *AFRAM Newsletter* (Paris), and *Journal of South Asian Literature* (USA).


Poet Daud Kamal died during a visit to New York.

The Patras Bokhari Award of the Pakistan Academy of Letters (Islamabad) was won by Muhammad Musa, for his autobiography *Jawan to General: Recollections of a Pakistani Soldier* (1984), which was judged the best English Book of the relevant year.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

SINGAPORE

If literary achievement is to be measured by the best-seller gauge, then 1987 was, indeed, a very high point in Singapore’s literary history. *First Loves*, a collection of stories by Philip Jeyaretnam, hit the bookstores in August 1987 and by the end of the year was well into its third Reprint. It is the one Singaporean book that has remained on the best-seller list as Number One for a continuous period of three months – no mean success when you realise how young prose fiction is in this tiny island. Part of the success must be due to the book’s appeal to young people; it deals with the usual themes of new found love, new found freedom, and the conflicts and complications that arise from these. Two of the stories
included in the book are prize-winning stories ('Evening at Fragipani' having won first prize in the 1985 National Short Story Writing Competition) and the rest may be said to be basically one long story chopped up into 19 episodes. These recount the experiences and adventures of Ah Leong, typical young Singaporean, and of those he lives with and those he comes into contact with. All of First Loves makes for very interesting reading and, for the first time, perhaps, a fictional work has been written which has everyone's admiration. Part of the reason for the phenomenal success (and it is phenomenal!) could also be attributed to the name of Jeyaretnam-Jayaretnam Senior, who was for some years the sole Member of Opposition in the Singapore Parliament (1981-1984), then one of two such members (1984) until he lost his seat following legal proceedings. There was a lot of public support for Mr Jeyaretnam and gossip has it that many Singaporeans bought First Loves to show sympathy for the author's father. Whatever the reasons, the evidence of huge sales is indisputable, as is the young author's growing popularity and reputation. (Young Philip Jeyaretnam is a lawyer, having graduated with a Double First from Cambridge and having recently being given a coveted award by the House of Lords in Britain to write a book on The Retreat of the Rule of Law in Singapore). I have just one small complaint about the book: in parts the language is more of an urbane, sophisticated Cambridge undergraduate than a typical young Housing Board tenant by the name of Ah Leong. Proper editing would have cleared this up (In fact, proper editing might have helped to make the book tighter, neater, in terms of its literary merit).

A somewhat different kind of success was achieved by Goh Sin Tub. Anyone familiar with Singapore's literary scene will recall coming across Goh's name (and, possibly, stories), since Goh was an active writer and participant in literary affairs in the fifties. Then came career(s), family and other et ceteras of life and living. Now he's come back, put his stories together, and written many more; in 1987 he launched two collections: The Ghost Lover of Emerald Hill & Other Stories and Honour & Other Stories. The latter was, in fact, first published in 1986 under the title The Battle of the Bands and was a sell-out, its chief objective being to raise funds for Goh's favourite charity, the long established mission school, St. Joseph's Institution. Goh's stories depend for their appeal on his sense of humour, usually agreeable, at times rather quaint, and his grasp of Singapore's social history. Most of the stores are in fact tales, anecdotes, with their fair share of moralisms. Many of them are a delight to read, though one wishes that Goh spent more time developing his characters and situations. But it is wonderful to see his active return to the literary scene and, no doubt, more ink will flow.

There was yet another achievement: for the first time ever a book by a Singaporean writer was chosen to be put on the international 'O' level Examinations by the Cambridge authorities. This was Or Else the Lightning God by Catherine Lim. Lim came to public notice by her witty tale-telling in Little Ironies (1978) and since then has brought out several books. This year she published The Shadow of a Shadow of a Dream—Love Stories of Singapore. They're mainly cynical, tragic, sad stories, love that is not realised against a background which encourages tensions rather than happy solutions. Lim's is a witty, satirical rendition of love, often drawing upon Chinese beliefs and customs. The Shadow of a Shadow of a Dream is an interesting collection, demonstrating Lim's ability to tell a good story yet once again.

Other events in the year included the publication of Fragrant Journeys, a collection of poems by Sakina Kagda, one of Singapore's very successful businesswomen but one also given to writing poetry. Kagda's poetry tends to be on the sentimental side, with a wry look every now and then. But some of the poems in this collection merit a wider audience, as they reflect the author's perceptions of the many places she has visited and which inspired
the poems. Sub-titled ‘Poems of Travel’, *Fragrant Journeys* makes a good read without pretence. Numerous poetry readings were held, though the annual Evening of Poetry and Music organised by the Literary Society of the University was a disappointment. Wanting to move away from the usual, the organisers put on a Rock show, bringing back memories of the (mainly) American scene of the sixties, and thus depriving many young Singaporeans of a chance to share their poetry with the public. But the University of Singapore Society put on a good show with their Yin-Yang Festival which included poetry and prose readings. The Drama scene continued to flourish with new amateur and professional groups springing up and putting on a wide variety of plays. Drama with a purpose, social-realistic, seemed to gain momentum with a large number of plays dramatising easily recognisable facets of Singaporean life. But nothing outstanding was achieved. The journal *Singa* continues to appear twice a year and, as usual, contains a good mix of poetry and prose from all the four main language groups in the country.

In 1984 a Seminar had been held at the National University with the fascinating theme ‘The Writer’s Sense of the Past’. Selected papers presented at this Seminar and then re-written for a book appeared under the title *The Writer’s Sense of the Past: Essays in Southeast Asian and Australian Literature* and published by the Singapore University Press. It is edited by Kirpal Singh and contains, apart from the Introduction, thought-provoking essays by well-known scholars from many countries as well as written statements by leading writers in the Southeast Asian region. Ranging across a wide geographic region (including a leading article by the American scholar Button Rafel), the essays in this book seek to investigate the uses of the past and the effects of the past on contemporary and not-so contemporary writers, and, in so doing, help to expand our understanding of the curious ways in which history is ever-present in literature.

In summary, then, 1987 may be said to have been one of those years in which there was one very big plus and several small pluses for the literary arts in Singapore. The year promised more good things to come

KIRPAL SINGH

SOUTH AFRICA

1986 in South African marked the deaths of two considerable authors in exile, Bessie Head and Bloke Modisane. Modisane’s *Blame Me on History* appeared in Ad Donker’s Paper Books series, and *Bessie Head: A Bibliography* was compiled and published by Susan Gardner and Patricia E. Scott for the National English Literary Museum, so both authors are actively remembered in South Africa. The beginnings of a process of literary historiography and biographical compilation are evident in the *Companion to South African English Literature* (Ad Donker) and a spectrum of analytical material, both sociological and literary, is drawn together in the published proceedings of a colloquium held in Johannesburg in 1982, edited by Susan Gardner, *Publisher/Writer/Reader: Sociology of Southern African Literature* (University of the Witwatersrand). This conference was distinguished by a wide range of interest and speakers. 1986 also marked the centenary of Johannesburg’s birth, producing a flood of publications, from the trivial to the literary. Two of the more incisive collections are Digby Ricci’s wide-ranging literary views of and response to the city, collected in *Reef of Time: Johannesburg in Writing* (Ad Donker Paper Books) and Stephen Gray’s *Bosman’s Johannesburg* (Human & Rousseau) which includes previously uncollected material, and reveals Bosman’s


Drama, too, included the publication of a play based on Steve Biko's death in detention, *Steve Biko: The Inquest* (Upstairs Theatre) by Saira Essa and Charles Pillai, and Athol Fugard's *The Road to Mecca: A Play in Two Acts Suggested by the Life and Work of Helen Martins of New Bethesda* (Faber & Faber). Fugard's play, one of many works in 1986 which drew a focus on female relationships into the ambit of a broader political awareness, considers the plight of the artist in a conservative rural community, and the emotional catharsis and healing released by female friendship. Two drama anthologies collected the often highly politicised and lively theatre being produced in the eighties: *Market Plays* (Ad Donker) by Stephen Gray and *Woza Afrika! A Collection of Southern African Plays* edited by Duma Ndlovu (George Braziller, New York).

Fiction consisted of those texts rescued from the past, and often from censorship, by David Philip's Africasouth Paperbacks, such as Jillian Becker's *The Virgins*, (a rebellious middle-class daughter's rejection of her materialistic parents' generation), 'popular' fiction (Dalene Mathee's *Circles in a Forest* (Penguin) was a good seller), and selected anthologies of work by established writers such as Jack Cope (*Selected Stories*, David Philip, Africasouth Paperbacks). J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* is a 'metafiction' involving a revisionist restructuring of patriarchal forms of power and narration, questioning the possibilities and the limitations of authorship itself in a colonial context. John Conyngham's *The Arrowing of the Cane* (Donker Paper Books) is a vividly written first-person account of a Natal liberal farmer's consciousness in the decade of the Angolan war, though a perspective to judge his dilemma (to go or stay; to rot or burn) is lacking. Richard Rive's *Buckingham Palace, District Six* (David Philip) and Mewa Ramgobin's *Waiting to Live* (David Philip) recall lost communities. Ramgobin's 'Jim goes to Durban' story is lyrically told, and moves towards the generational conflict arising out of the politicised youth of 1976, making the sacrifices of an older generation, especially the adoptive mother, an emotional centre. Sepamla's much more racy *Third Generation* starts where Ramgobin's chronicle ends, and is a far less glamorous account of the underground liberation struggle than his earlier *Ride the Whirlwind*. This hero leaves for military training across the border 'like one going to the toilet in the backyard.' Sepamla, too, celebrates the continuity of black resistance to oppression, in a 'silence ... born generations before', and his 'Sis Vi' is a tribute to older women committed to their children's suffering. Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds* (St. Martin's Press, New York) strikes a strange note in the current literary configuration, not only because it has the dated
consciousness of an exile, but because its plangent and overheated fantasies seem to participate in the racist mythology it aims to attack. Mbulelo Mzamane's *Hungry Flames and Other Black African Short Stories* (Longman) is an anthology which writes up some of the continuities of black short fiction, from Peter Abrahams to Gladys Thomas.

Critically, two new volumes illustrate current trends towards historically rooted and sociologically aware analysis, Tim Couzens's *H.I.E. Dhlomo The New African* (Ravan) and Stephen R. Clingman's *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (Ravan). Clingman's work, especially, marks a new self-consciousness and theoretical sophistication in literary studies. A higher level of politicisation, and more historical awareness, have been both causes and results of the wider literary process in the decade since Soweto 1976.

**CHERRY CLAYTON**

**WEST INDIES: Retrospective 1986**

Two poetry publications should be mentioned at the outset: Derek Walcott's *Collected Poems* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) and *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse*, selected and edited by Paula Burnett. Walcott's is a massive volume of five-hundred pages – but it is not a comprehensive collection. Walcott chooses to omit about one-third of the poems from the early volumes, *In A Green Night* (1962) and *The Gulf* (1969), and several from the later books; he includes all of *Another Life* (1973), his long autobiographical poem. The omissions inevitably will generate critical speculation and second-guessing by Walcott's readers. The poems included are chronologically arranged and if read as presented allow us to trace Walcott's development towards his own distinct voice and to see how pervasive in both his early and late poems are the various dualities in his life, particularly those related to his African-European ancestry and his local-cosmopolitan education and experience.

*The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse* anthologizes works by over one hundred poets, including anonymous work-songs, calypsos by Kitchener and Sparrow, reggae by Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, and pieces by performance poets like Louise Bennett and Linton Kwesi Johnson. The established writers are each allotted five to six pages and the newer and secondary writers a page or two. Burnett omits a few names, such as A.N. Forde and Cecil Herbert, but this remains a fairly representative and wide-ranging anthology, with works by writers resident in the Caribbean as well as in Britain, Canada, and the United States.

There were several other poetry publications that should be noted: Lorna Goodison's *I Am Becoming My Mother* (New Beacon), a volume that makes us sharply aware of the narrator's psyche as it examines her relationships with family, community, and race. In *Travelling to Find a Remedy* (Fiddlehead), Claire Harris, the Trinidadian-Canadian poet, explores the individual's search for personal and racial identity in various corners of the world, including Lagos, where she is forced to acknowledge that she will be 'forever oyibo [stranger]' in Africa. Cyril Dabydeen writes fairly positively, if a bit too hortatory, about the Guyanese immigrant's experience in Canada in *Island Lovelier than a Vision* (Peepal Tree); he has some poems that evoke the narrator's moods as he recollects his life in the Caribbean, which are much more effective than those with Canadian settings. Faustin Charles, who lives in London, creates a poetry of strong emotional and spiritual attachment to his Caribbean homeland in *Days and Night in the Magic Forest* (Bogle-L'Ouverture). In *Rapso Explosion* (Karia Press), the Trinidad poet, Brother Resistance, tries to capture in print...
a form of oral poetry which when accompanied by music is called Rapso. The poet is passionately concerned in his poems with the struggles of the common man in Trinidad. Marc Matthews's Guyana, My Altar (Karnak) uses the speech pattern of Guyanese and occasionally standard English to explore the poet's attachment to his homeland. Other volumes that should be mentioned are Merle Collins's Because the Dawn Breaks: Poems Dedicated to the People of Grenada (Karia), Morgan Dalphinis's For Those Who Come After (Karia), A.L. Hendriks's To Speak Simply: Selected Poems 1961-1985 (Hippopotamus), E.A. Markham's Living in Disguise (Anvil), Eintou Springer's Out of the Shadows (Karia), and Elean Thomas's Word Rhythms From the Life of a Woman (Karia).

In fiction, the work that should be noted first is Olive Senior's collection of short stories set in Jamaica, Summer Lightning and Other Stories (Longman), which won the 10,000 Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Senior offers warm, sensitive portrayals of Jamaican rural residents, with particular emphasis on children. Written in Jamaican Standard English and Creole, the stories vividly re-create details of everyday life and evocatively convey the fears and joys, the violence and tenderness of rural life. This is Senior's first work of fiction; she previously published a collection of poems Talking of Trees (Calabash, 1985) and a reference text, A-Z of Jamaican Heritage; she is currently editor of Jamaica Journal.

Several of the novels published this year have politics as their theme. Caryl Phillips's second novel, A State of Independence (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), is a bleak study of post-colonial life on a Caribbean island where there is apparently little hope for the residents other than foreign aid. A similarly pessimistic work is Ronald Dathorne's Dele's Child (Three Continents), which has as its setting a Caribbean island significantly called Iota; the novel has a complex structure with a disjointed narrative and an intricate pattern of flashbacks. Austin Clarke's Proud Empires (Gollancz) takes us back to the 1950's Barbados political scene; though is speaks of corruption and subterfuge in island politics, it ends on a positive note. Clarke's collection of stories about immigrant life in Canada, Nine Men Who Laughed (Penguin), in contrast, is blank, portraying men of thwarted ambitions whose dominant feelings are discontentment with themselves and their adopted home.

There were two first novels by guyanese writers. Janice Shinebourne's Timepiece (Peepal Tree) portrays the maturation of a young woman against the backdrop of political tension in Guyana during the racial conflagration of the sixties; this is a commendable first novel with strong dramatic scenes, weakened here and there by the narrator's tendency to overindulge in ruminations. Harold Bascom's Apata (Heinemann) is a lively but at times awkwardly narrated novel about a gifted young man's progression into a life of crime in pre-independent Guyana.

Longman Caribbean Writers series continues to make early and established works available in paperbacks, such as Roger Mais's Listen the Wind, a collection of twenty-two stories selected and edited by Kenneth Ramchand, and Namba Roy's Black Albino, which, set in Jamaica's Maroon society, tells of the freak birth of an Albino child and the child's subjection to cruel colour prejudice. Other Longman's reissues include The Jumbie Bird, Ismith Khan's depiction of the life of a young Trinidad Indian caught between Indian and Western cultures; In The Castle of My skin, George Lamming's novel about growing up in Barbados; The Dragon Can't Dance, Earl Lovelace's portrayal of the dehumanizing world of Calvary Hill, a fictional town in Trinidad; My Bones and My Flute, Edgar Mittelholzer's gripping novel about the supernatural in Guyana; and The Children of Sisyphus, Orlando Patterson's fictional account of life in Jamaica's Dungle. Grafton re-issued Mittelholzer's historical-romance Kaywana trilogy in separate volumes.
Derek Walcott published *Three Plays* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux): 'The Last Carnival' is a tragic portrayal of two Trinidadians with antithetical views: one adheres to and the other rejects European culture; 'Beef, No Chicken' is a zestful comedy about the consequences of modernization in rural Trinidad; and 'A Branch of the Nile' dramatizes the conflicts of a small group of theatrical figures who have to choose between staying in or leaving Trinidad. Walcott's *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, which he considers 'his most West Indian play', was re-published in *Plays for Today* (Longman), edited by Errol Hill, who includes two other plays: Dennis Scott's *An Echo in the Bone*, and his own *Men Better Man*.

Shiva Naipaul's *An Unfinished Journey* (Hamish Hamilton) contains six previously published articles and the start of his book on Australia, on which he was working when he died. There were two interviews that should be noted: Wilson Harris in *Wasafiri* (5: Autumn) and Austin Clarke in *WLWE* (26:1). Harris has an article, 'Adversarial Contexts and Creativity' in *New Left Review* (November 1985); Sam Selvon has a memoir piece, 'Three Into One Can't Go - East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian', in *Wasafiri* (5: Autumn); and Jan Carew wrote 'The First Great African Explorer in the Columbian Era,' in *BIM* (18:69).

In criticism, there were Theresa O'Connor's *Jean Rhys* (New York University Press) and C.L.R. James; His Life and Work (Allison & Busby), a collection of essays on James, edited by Paul Buhle. Daryl Dance's *Fifty Caribbean Writers* (Greenwood) provides biographical and bibliographical information and critical commentary by various hands on fifty Caribbean writers. Though the quality of the entries, which range from six to fourteen pages, varies considerably, this book is a very useful reference text.

Three journals brought out special Caribbean issues: *Wasafiri* (5: Autumn), *Kunaipi* (3:2), and *The Toronto South Asian Review* (5:1), a number devoted to Indo-Caribbean writings. I should note in closing that the Departments of English of the three campuses of the University of the West Indies have started a new journal, *Journal of West Indian Literature*; the first number, with essays on martin Carter, Lorna Goodison, Mervyn Morris, St. Lucian writers, and white Creole women novelists, was published in October 1986.

WEST INDIES

The year saw several significant books of fiction and poetry published by established writers: novels by V.S. Naipaul and Wilson Harris and volumes of poems by Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite. There were in addition a few worthwhile works of fiction and poetry by newer hands. In criticism, three full-length studies were published: two on V.S. Naipaul and one on Wilson Harris.

V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and Wilson Harris's *The Infinite Rehearsal* share a common concern with exploring the writer's psyche and the process of artistic creation. Naipaul's novel has a strong autobiographical feel that the author attempts to disclaim in a subtitle, 'A Novel in Five Parts.' This disclaimer notwithstanding, it is difficult not to approach the novel - whose unnamed narrator-protagonist's experiences parallel most closely Naipaul's - as memoir or autobiography. This is one of a handful of novels - *The Great Gatsby* is another - that incorporate meaningfully paintings displayed on their dustjackets. The painting here is Giorgio de Chirico's 'The Enigma of Arrival', which becomes the major metaphor in a work that explores 'the writer's journey, the writer defined by his writing discoveries, his way of seeing, rather than by his personal adventures'. The novel has very little narrative pace and no characters defined beyond their roles in delineating the preoccupation of the mellow, reflective protagonist, who seeks to reconcile
his dual selves as artist and man as he confronts his own mortality and the changing ethos of his former and adopted homes, Trinidad and England. Like A Bend in the River (1979), this novel-memoir shows Naipaul increasingly shifting his interest from the external to the internal landscape.

The first sentence of Harris’s novel is a declaration by the narrator Robin Redbreast Glass that his alter ego, identified only by the initials W.H., has ‘put his name to my fictional autobiography’. Through this alter-ego technique and a reinterpretation of the Faust legend adapted to the ‘non-European standpoint’, Harris explores man’s efforts at integration of his fragmented selves, perceived as an ‘impossible quest for wholeness’. This is not an unfamiliar theme for Harris, but it is explored in fresh contexts with different emphases here. And, though the dense, richly-textured style of the novel—a slim one of eighty-eight pages—demands, as usual, much of the reader, it is of Harris’s recent novels perhaps the most accessible to the reader who is not necessarily a committed Harris scholar.

Women’s Press (London) brought out three novels that should be noted: the Jamaican Joan Riley’s Waiting in the Twilight, the Guyanese Joan Cambridge’s Want to go Home, and Merle Collins’s Angel, a work which relates the lives of three Grenadian women, spanning the years from the 1950’s to the American invasion of 1983. The novel explores the attempts of these women to ease away from European influences and find their own forms of identity and expression. Other novels that should be mentioned are Michelle Cliff’s No Telephone to Heaven (N.Y., Dutton), Michael Humfrey’s No Tears for Massa’s Day (Murray), the Trinidadian Amryl Johnson’s Sequins for a Ragged Hen (Virago).

John Agard brought out a collection of children’s stories, Lend Me Your Wings (Hodder & Stoughton). Betty Wilson translated the Guadeloupean Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s Juletane (Heinemann), a novel of just eighty-four pages, which employs two parallel narratives to examine incisively and dispassionately the experiences of two French Caribbean women in West African Islamic society.

Those seeking texts for courses may want to know that there were several notable reissues: Michael Anthony’s Green Days by the River (Heinemann), Neil Bissoondath’s Digging Up the Mountain (Penguin), Harold Sonny Ladoo’s No Pain Like This Body (Heinemann), Andrew Salkey’s The One (Bogle L’Ouverture). Sam Selvon’s Moses Ascending was translated by Helene Devaux-Minie and published as L’Ascension de Moïse (Paris, Editions Caribéennes), the film rights to which were recently acquired by La Société Paris Pro-Motion.

Derek Walcott’s The Arkansas Testament (Faber & Faber) provides further justification for seeing him as one of the finest contemporary poets. The book has two parts, ‘Here’ and ‘Elsewhere’, ‘Here’ being the Caribbean and ‘Elsewhere’ the United States, where Walcott is currently residing. The implication of these headings is that ‘here’ is the centre of his life, but this is not unambiguously so since the poet at times responds ambivalently to both the Caribbean and the United States. The long title poem examines his mixed relationship with the United States, but it goes beyond this cultural response to envision the nature of man, concluding that ‘What we know of evil/ is that it will never end’. Walcott is not pessimistic; he pragmatically accepts the reality of evil. The poems are characteristically textured with abundant metaphors and Classical, Christian, British, and Caribbean allusions that reflect his multiple antithetical heritages and so enrich and impart tension to his poetry.

In his volume of poems, X/Self, Edward Brathwaite refers to ‘Derek Walcott’s pitcher of clear metaphors’. This clear, simple, undecorated style Brathwaite employs and advocates in his poems. He believes that ‘the dialect of the tribes will come beating up/ against the crack/ foundation stones of latin...’ X/Self is the third book of Brathwaite’s second trilogy.
(the first was *The Arrivants*) which began with *Mother Poem* (1977) and *Sun Poem* (1982). While these early volumes examine the poet's growing awareness of himself and his people in a restrictively Barbadian setting, *X/Self* ranges widely from Britain, USA, South Africa to ancient Rome. The first poem draws attention to blacks who have had significant roles in history, beginning with Severus, the African-born Roman Emperor. The volume won the Canada-Caribbean Regional Award in the Commonwealth Poetry Prize competition.

Two other poetry volumes that should be mentioned are Arnold Itwaru's *Entombed Survival* (Williams-Wallace) and Milton Williams's *Years of Fighting Exile* (Peepal Tree). Itwaru, a Guyanese-Canadian, is absorbed with individuals isolated in 'rooms' and 'tombs' who struggle in vain to have more than encounters with others. He plays down their ethnicity and nationality, and in doing so universalizes their experiences but at the same time diminishes the poems' intensity and concreteness. Williams's volume is a collection of his poems - forty-six in all - about how faith and hope sustain him as a migrant in Britain. Other volumes include John Agard's lively *Say It Again Granny: Twenty Poems from Caribbean Proverbs* (Bodley Head), Ayanna Black's *No Contingencies* (Williams-Wallace), Anum Iyapo's *Man of the Living, Woman of Life* (Akira), Rooplal Monar's *Koker* (Peepal Tree), Grace Nichols's *Come Into My Tropical Garden* (Black), Kenneth Parmasad *Child of the Storms* (New Voices), Milton Smalling's *The Battlefield* (First Class), and Frederick Williams's *Leggo de Pen* (Akira).

Among non-fiction pieces by the creative writers are interviews with Jan Carew in *Journal of West Indian Literature* (2:1), and with Wilson Harris in *Commonwealth* (9). V.S. Naipaul has an article on Shiva Naipaul, 'My Brother's Tragic Sense' in *Spectator* (24 January), Vic Reid writes on 'The Writer and His Work' in *Journal of West Indian Literature* (2), and Sam Selvon has an essay on life in London during the 1950's, 'Finding West Indian Identity in London,' *Kunapipi* (9:3). Critical pieces in periodicals and journals are increasing by leaps and bounds. At least fifty articles were published in various journals, particularly in *WLWE, Journal of West Indian Literature, Kunapipi, JCL,* and *Third World Quarterly.* Over half a dozen doctoral theses were completed in universities around the world. There were two book-length studies on V.S. Naipaul: John Thieme's *The Web of Tradition* (Dangaroo/Hansib), a perceptive and thorough study of literary allusion in V.S. Naipaul's fiction; and Peggy Nightingale's *Journey Through Darkness: The Writing of V.S. Naipaul,* which provides an illuminating commentary on Naipaul's dark vision of ex-colonial societies. Sandra Drake's *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition: A New Architecture of the World* (Greenwood Press), examines Harris in terms of modernism, focusing on *Palace of the Peacock, Ascent to Omai, Tumatumari,* and *Genesis of Clowns.* Amon Saba Saakana published *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature* (Karnak House). David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo's *India in the Caribbean* (Hansib), a collection of essays by various hands, has a sociohistorical bent, but there is a handful of literary pieces. Another collection of essays is David Sutcliffe and Ansel Wing's *The Language of the Black Experience: Cultural Expression Through Word and Sound in the Caribbean and Black Britain* (Blackwell).

Finally, I should draw attention to a relatively new annual bibliography of Caribbean Literature in *Callaloo* (10), which annotates both critical and creative works. David Dabydeen and N. Wilson-Tagoe have an annotated bibliography on selected themes in West Indian literature in *Third World Quarterly* (9; July). A useful serially published bibliography is *The Caricom Bibliography* put out by the Caribbean Community Secretariat, Georgetown, Guyana. Half-yearly with annual cumulation, it has a fairly comprehensive and up-to-date literary section.

VICTOR J. RAMRAJ
GERMAN INTEREST IN THE NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH


Mid-June saw the event of the Eleventh Annual Conference on Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in German-speaking countries as a joint venture at Aachen and Liège. The conference had as its theme ‘Crisis and Conflict in the New Literatures in English’. Its dimensions of scope and the number of its participants are ample proof of a bustling activity in the field in Germany (and, of course, of the untiring temperaments of Hena Maes-Jelinek and Geoffrey Davis who shouldered the organisational burden) and provide a good opportunity for a brief review of related material available in print.

Endeavours to delve critically into the German colonial past are sparse and fairly recent.¹ It was, however, as early as the mid-seventies that a handful of younger German scholars took the initiative to cross the boundaries of established ENG. LIT.; some of them had considerable first-hand experience of the countries concerned. The positive outlook of the outsider led to the objective project of Grundlagen zur Literatur in englischer Sprache conceptualized by Werner Arens, Dieter Riemenschneider and Gerhard Stilz as general editors.

Following the model of the branching off of the USA, the editors discern four main areas: Canada, Australia, New Zealand/ India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh, Sri Lanka/ West, East, and Southern Africa/ the Caribbean. They want to offer ‘means of orientation’ not only for students of (English) literature but also for those whose attention focuses on economical, political, or sociological perspectives in some kind of cultural approach. The original plan comprised seven volumes: 1. Kanada 2. Australien 3. Newseeiland 4. Indien 5. West- und Ostafrika 6. Südafrika 7. Westindien. These books are written in English. Three out of the planned seven have so far been realized, India, West and East Africa, Canada, in that order, and with the one on Australia forthcoming.²

The de facto sequence of publication is preferable to the one originally intended. By persistently applying one and the same pattern of presentation, the authors facilitate comparability and encourage actual comparison by equally emphasizing ‘factors of integration’ as well as ‘development of differentiation’. Each volume begins with an introduction of about twenty pages that very reliably maps out the field, from its historical beginnings to its contemporary diversifications. In an analogous way the documentary part brings
together about fifty longer passages taken from important texts. It thereby equally represents the then and now of each area. All these texts are widely annotated and are extensively commented upon. Equal emphasis is laid on ‘regional tendencies’ on the one side and on more ‘internationalist’ outlooks on the other. Next, an exhaustive compilation gives details about the important writers and their works in a comprehensive overview, which, then, is followed by a structured bibliography of useful material. The function of reference work is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of a threefold register, i.e. names, titles, subjects. Thus the volumes certainly make good complementary reading alongside their respective counterparts in the Longmans Literature in English series; also those who do not know any German can be sure to put these carefully written and diligently edited volumes to good and profitable use.

Even more accessible are the five published volumes presently available of German conference proceedings, since they are – the first excepted – all in English. The majority are genre-oriented, from drama, to poetry, and short story, or focus on a general theme, like tension, or examine a theoretical problem, like historiography, All contain between fifteen and twenty contributions that cover partly the ‘national’ outlook, partly the comparative angle, partly deal with individual authors and occasionally include one or the other original text by younger writers; in this way they provide a welcome experimental platform.

NOTES

1. E.g. the film-maker Peter Heller, director of films like *Usambara - Das Land wo Glaube Bäume versetzen soll* (1980) or the historian Horst Gründer who is the author of *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien* (1985).

2. Three books are not intended as substitutes for areas which have not yet been covered, but they definitely deserve to be mentioned in this context: Geoffrey Davis and Michael Senior (eds.) *Texts for English and American Studies 12: South Africa - the Privileged and the Dispossessed.* Paderborn: Schöningh, 1983. and *Matatu, Zeitschrift für afrikanische Kultur and Gesellschaft* (1988), *Towards Liberation: Culture and Resistance in South Africa.* edited by Geoffrey Davis, Matsemela Manaka and Jürgen Jansen

PETER O. STUMMER

This second volume of poetry follows the important collection of David Dabydeen in 1984 entitled *Slave Song* which won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize the same year. This second collection represents an interesting shift of focus away from the use of creole to explore the slave past of Guiana, the land of the author’s birth, towards an examination of the black West Indian identity in a remote, cold and indifferent English society where he has come to live and teach. Here, the historical identity of the West Indian and Guyanese heritage has to be carefully protected and fostered for, as he proclaims in the sparkling introductory poem ‘Coolie Odyssey’,

> In a winter of England’s scorn  
> We huddle together memories, hoard them from  
> the opulence of our masters.

The engagement of any black writer with the post imperial culture of contemporary Britain sooner or later necessitates the confrontation with a literary problematic of colonialism. As George Lamming pointed out in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), the colonial relationship of Prospero and Caliban is one that renders the latter a ‘child of nature’ and one furthermore which makes him ‘eternally without the seed of a dialectic which makes possible some emergence from Nature’. As successive black writers since the 1950s from the Caribbean have discovered in Britain, the ambivalent cultural status of blacks in English society continually threatens to reduce black literature to that of marginal exiles who have no moral anchorage point to engage with the literary mainstream of English culture. It is still a major obstacle despite the more recent emergence of a vocabulary of multiculturalism in English education and the increasing visibility of formal concern to incorporate West Indian and South Asian literature and history into the school curriculum.

Dabydeen has seen one way through this entrenched burden of colonial stereotyping by a direct engagement with English movements in poetry. In the 1950s at the time of the first generation’s engagement with English culture there was a self-conscious lurch going on in English writing into a conservative provincialism epitomised by the novels of Kingsley Amis and John Wain and the ‘movement poetry’ of Philip Larkin, Donald Davie and their acolytes. However, since the 1970s new poetic forms are being experimented with, ‘Poetry bubbles from peat bogs’ and even in English poetry itself there is a growing willingness to employ imaginative language epitomised by Craig Raine and the ‘Martian poets’. As a ‘real’ alien, Dabydeen has the advantage of being able to perceive English society from a concrete standpoint and not that of an imaginary Martian, though this enterprise is to some extent viewed sceptically given the tendency for active cultivation of black poets who can now perform
In rare conceits
To congregations of the educated
Sipping wine, attentive between courses —
See the applause fluttering from their white hands
Like so many messy table napkins.

At several points in the volume, the complex historical relationship between England and the Caribbean is explored, such as in ‘Burning Down the Fields’ in which the imagery of the burning of the sugar cane is transferred to the streets of the inner cities where

...the wood-chips on the black people’s shoulders
Will heap up huge bonfires around which
The wretched will gather to give praise
To the overpowering love of God
Who will not forsake the aim of his people
But will guide the stone to thinnest point of glass,
Bank, Bingo Hall, Job Centre, and a Bookshop
Selling slim volumes of English verse.

There is a reflection of bitterness and disillusion in many of these poems exemplified by ‘London Taxi Driver’ who ‘has come far and paid much for the journey/ From some village in Berbice’ but who

...grunts rebellion
In backstreet discount sex
With the night’s last whore.

Sexual relationships too with English women reveal a conflict of expectations and dreams as in ‘Water With Berries’ when

...so afterwards she confessed it
Taking the home train to Cheltenham
From his basement in Balham
Never again wanting to meet.

There is at points an exploration of self-delusion as in ‘Coolie Son’ when a toilet attendant writes home ‘Englan nice, snow and dem ting,/ A land dey say fit for a king’.

The chief importance of this volume can be seen in its contributing to a new language through which to explain and understand the West Indian presence in Britain. In this project the language itself has been to a considerable extent taken up by Caliban and employed not merely to curse but usurp several dominant literary conventions based on a depoliticised relationship to nature and natural forces, as in the poetry of Ted Hughes, or a fatalistic acceptance of the post-war English ‘compromise’ of town and countryside and suburbia as in Philip Larkin. Dabydeen shares a similar position to the Ulster poets like Seamus Heaney and Tom Paulin in being able to appeal back to a vital folk culture and a life rooted in the soil, though it is a specifically Indian one guided by the conventions of Hinduism. Here the language of poetic memory crackles and spits:
Jasmittie live in bruk —
Down big hut like Bata shoebox
Beat clothes, weed yard, chop wood, feed fowl

or as Old Dabydeen

Washed obsessively by the canal bank,
Spread flowers on the snake-infested water,
Fed the gods the food that Chandra cooked
Bathed his tongue of the creole
Babbled by low-caste infected coolies.

On occasion, though, the language shows tendencies of lapsing into the melodramatic as in ‘The Sexual Word’ where the poet is envisaged

...stuttering out his dream
Of journeys ended:
The howling oceanic thrust of history
That heaved forth savages in strange canoes
Weighed with magical cannon and muzzle and anklechain.

Many of the poems, indeed, seem weighed down by the dominance of racist imagery in English society and are unable to usurp or transcend this. The racism stretches down into the colonial society itself as Old Dabydeen

...called upon Lord Krishna to preserve
The virginity of his daughters
From the Negroes.

This is in many ways an honest exploration of one’s own folk roots that avoids the all-too-frequent tendency at idealisation and romanticisation. However, the long shadow of ethnic separatism stretches too from the Caribbean to England in this volume and it is by no means clear that an alternative bardic vision is offered to indicate where the future of black literary culture in England can be seen to lie.

PAUL RICH
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BARNIE is from Abergavenny, South Wales. He is the editor of the Welsh cultural magazine *Planet*.

DIANA BRYDON teaches at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

HEATHER CAM is an Australian poet.

KATIE CAMPBELL is a Canadian poet and playwright living in England.

CHERRY CLAYTON teaches at Rand Afrikaans University, South Africa.

ROSEMARY COLMER teaches at Macquarie University, Sydney.

G.N. DEVI teaches at Baroda University.

STEPHENV GRAY is a South African novelist and poet. He lectures in Johannesburg.

ALAMGIR HASHMI is a Pakistani poet and academic. He has lectured both in Switzerland and Pakistan.

ANNAMARIE RUSTOM JAGOSE teaches at the University of Wellington, New Zealand.

MARK MACLEOD teaches at Macquarie University, Sydney.

TOLOLWA MARTI MOLLEL is a Tanzanian student in Drama doing his doctoral studies in Edmonton, Canada. His stories have been broadcast on the BBC and published in *Greenfield Review, Kunapipi, Okike* and *Edges*.

MARK O’CONNOR is an Australian poet.

JAN OWEN is Australian. She divides her time between writing and teaching creative writing. She has won several awards for her writing and her last collection of poems, *Boy with a Telescope* was widely acclaimed.

BENITA PARRY has written on British writing about India, Forster, Kipling, Conrad and Imperialism, and colonial discourse theory.

VICTOR RAMRAJ teaches at University of Calgary, Canada.

DAVID REITER is a Canadian writer whose fiction and poetry has appeared in numerous magazines, amongst those *Outrider, The Fiddlehead, Canadian Forum* and *Kunapipi*.

PAUL RICH is a South African academic lecturing in English and New Literatures in English.

KIRPAL SINGH teaches at University of Singapore.

PETER O. STUMMER teaches at the University of Munich.

THORELL TSOMONDO teaches at the University of Zimbabwe.

ROBIN VISEL lectures at the department of English at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada.
FICTION

POEMS
Jan Owen, Heather Cam, Stephen Gray, Mark O'Connor, Katie Campbell, John Barnie.

ARTICLES

THE YEAR THAT WAS

BOOK REVIEW

COVER: Photograph by Peter Højrup.