1980

The Year That Was

Anna Rutherford

University of Aarhus, Denmark

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

Rutherford, Anna, The Year That Was, Kunapipi, 2(1), 1980.
Available at:https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol2/iss1/18

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

Abstract

Australia

It's been a year for the bizarre in Australian fiction: a transvestite who is a Byzantine empress/ station hand/ whore-mistress; a narrating foetus; a plantation owner who takes you out at night to wrestle renegade pineapples to the ground; characters with words stamped on their foreheads and one with a coffin growing out of his side ...
The Year That Was

AUSTRALIA

It's been a year for the bizarre in Australian fiction: a transvestite who is a Byzantine empress/station hand/whore-mistress; a narrating foetus; a plantation owner who takes you out at night to wrestle renegade pineapples to the ground; characters with words stamped on their foreheads and one with a coffin growing out of his side...

Little did Synge know when he said there should be material for drama with all those 'shepherds going mad in lonely huts'!

The theme of the year's most remarkable book, Patrick White's The Twyborn Affair (Jonathan Cape) is caught early when one of its characters remarks, 'The difference between the sexes is no worse than their appalling similarity'. It's a novel which seems to have been, unusually for White, more favourably received at home than abroad. Perhaps its complexity has surprised readers used to the simpler style of the three books preceding, and yet it is a more personal book: profoundly moving, witty and Brittly entertaining in a way quite unlike anything else White has written. The story of Lt. Eddie Twyborn DSO, and his other lives in Europe is at least partly The Fortunes of Richard Mahony fifty years on, with its title giving more than a nod to The Tichborne Case — and it has therefore a good deal to say about being Australian.

The Twyborn Affair's conscious yoking of colonial and sexual imagery compares interestingly with Thomas Keneally's Passenger (Collins), which centres on a foetus in transit between the placental richness of an Irish family background and the potential shock of a birth in Australia. And the foetus is the narrator, flowering into total knowledge at the touch of a laser probe. Birth, with which the novel closes, is the end of everything rather than a beginning.

Passenger is Keneally's best novel since Gossip From the Forest. It is delightfully witty, satirical, a colonial disorientation myth, a religious novel (not surprisingly), and a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Foetus, in which Keneally, in an interesting but problematical stylistic dichotomy,
takes on the constant tussle between high and popular styles in his work
and in Australian literature generally.

The Shandyan device of pre-natal narration which initially seems to
link *Passenger* with David Ireland's *A Woman of the Future* (Allen
Lane/ Penguin), is one of those intriguing spirit-of-time coincidences
like that of the Keneally/ Astley/ Ireland novels about aborigines in the
early '70s, but with less obvious roots.

In centring on a female narrator and main character, *A Woman of the
Future* is straight away a disarming departure for this novelist who has
captured Australian male mythology so brilliantly in such novels as *The
Glass Canoe* and *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*. And while it doesn't
quite pack the immediate punch of those novels, *A Woman of the Future*
is at once more thoughtful and more carefully constructed.

Here, David Ireland uses the laser-like observation of the young girl
Alethea Hunt to accumulate a bizarre and alarming picture of the future
Great Australian Ugliness. And yet balancing Alethea's own bleak vision
is the acceptance and compassion she gradually learns from her father
and others. *A Woman of the Future* is finally a more optimistic novel
than anything else Ireland has written: it is about watering the desert
metaphorically, even literally, and as its American publication and
reviews suggest, will be the novel to give David Ireland the wider
audience he deserves.

Another writer too long denied the serious attention her work demands
is Thea Astley, three times winner of the Miles Franklin Award, and still
the only major female novelist in Australia since Christina Stead. In *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* (Nelson), she finds the right balance
between the rich and spare styles of her novels *The Acolyte* and *A
Kindness Cup*, and returns to the absurd comedy which is her greatest
strength.

Set in Australia's Deep North around Cairns, this is a linked sequence
of stories about the screwballs who live there, somewhat bent but still
laughing and crying, under the rule of 'the Gang of One': dole-cheque
hippies hanging onto the late '60s in the rainforest; bomb squads sent out
to defuse a case of mangoes... They're all crazy! And despite Australia's
apparent difficulty in accepting a satirist who is female, they are
captured with not only wit, but unmistakable compassion. *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* joins a gathering number of books about amazing scenes
to our north.

The acrobatic revisions that thesis-writers will begin to make to their
assessments of Randolph Stow as a child-star-burnt-out-at-32 novelist
may be as interesting as Stow's new novel *Visitants* (Secker and Warburg) itself.

Curiously, within a year, both Stow and Christopher Koch have broken their long silence with a vengeance: Koch, with his best novel so far, *The Year of Living Dangerously*; and Stow with his most difficult, *Visitants*. Set in Papua in 1959, *Visitants* takes as its central image the well-known report at the time, of a UFO sighting by an Anglican missionary and thirty seven Papuan witnesses. As the novel develops, 'the isle is full of noises' indeed, strange and half-heard: murder, arson, cargo-cult, disappearances, visitants (some of them Australian). The multiple point of view employed to give shape to the chaos often obscures rather than clarifies, making *Visitants* on the one hand Stow's richest novel; on the other, his most difficult and disturbing — and a must for re-reading either way.

The outstanding first novel of the year is *1915* (UQP) by Roger McDonald, who is already highly praised and to some extent (like this novel) over-praised as one of the best of the newer poets in the last ten years. *1915* was marketed (the only word) with a good deal of advertising 'hype' that misrepresented its main strength. Yes it is about Gallipoli and young Australians going off to war, but it is more about the 'going off' than about the war itself. And that's as McDonald intends it to be: war in close focus, through the eyes of two country boys and the people they leave behind. It's a poet's novel, beautifully written; perhaps slower and longer than it should be, but a remarkable achievement and one that promises much from his next novel nevertheless.

In short fiction, Morris Lurie's *Running Nicely* (Nelson), and the keenly awaited second volume from *The Fat Man in History's* Peter Carey, *War Crimes* (UQP), are worth mentioning. But *The Hottest Night of the Century* (A & R) turned up, under its quite literal and playfully misleading title, the best new short stories, from expatriate Glenda Adams. Right from the first sentence the reader is hooked: ‘Sometimes I tell lies, and sometimes I only tell stories, but never with intent to harm. I only want to please people and make them happy.’ Some of the stories here reflect Adams' Australian experience, and some of them the point of view of her home in New York for the past sixteen years. Readers interested in new writing by Australian women may find the short story anthology *Stories of Her Life* edited by Sandra Zurbo (Outback Press) useful — more useful in fact than its companion volume of poetry a few years back, *Mother, I'm Rooted* — but they can do no better in 1979 than the work of this one woman in *The Hottest Night of the Century*. 

137
In poetry, the year is David Campbell's, whose untimely and painful death was strangely overshadowed by the triumphant vitality of *The Man in the Honeysuckle* (A & R). This is an exciting book. The signs are there for those determined on a search, but it is far from being consciously a Last Book.

Unfavourable judgements are ventured from time to time on the recent writing of Wright, Hope, Stewart — the generation responsible for much of the character of Australian poetry as it's generally known. David Campbell may have begun more modestly than his contemporaries, but the poetry of *The Man in the Honeysuckle* is a uniquely powerful finish.

Its excellence tends to overwhelm *The Border Loss* (A & R), a new collection by Jennifer Maiden, who is a striking and individual voice at her best; as it overwhelms an expensive collector's piece in A. D. Hope's *The Drifting Continent and Other Poems* (Brindabella Press), illustrated by Arthur Boyd — which as a book of poems about Australia appears a curiosity more than anything, from this particular poet... (Though his *The New Cratylus: Notes on the Craft of Poetry* from O.U.P. is Hope at his best, talking frankly and easily about the writing of poetry in a way that persuades me again that his critical writings may live longer than the poems for which he is more widely known.)

Aside from Campbell's, the year's best collection is Robert Gray's third, *Grass Script* (A & R). Gray is in the Wright and Murray mainstream of Australian poetry, but with a Buddhist philosophy underlying the poems that is his own mark (and that perhaps invites comparison with Stow's earlier application of a Taoist point of view to nature in Australia). *Grass Script* is an excellent successor to Gray's previous volume, *Creekwater Journal* — losing perhaps some of the fresh innocence of that book, but confirming the impression that Gray's ability to capture the zen moment in just the right image again and again is remarkable.

New volumes by Robert Adamson, *Where I Come From*, and Dorothy Hewett, *Greenhouse* (both Big Smoke) point to new directions: for Hewett towards tighter discipline; for Adamson, back to simplicity and the faux naïf, in these recollections and fantasies about childhood on the Hawkesbury mudflats. And Hewett produces in *The Man from Muckinupin* (Currency) the best playscript published this year, and her best play since *The Chapel Perilous*.

Two significant publications relevant to Australian children's literature: ignore the cute title and go straight into *Seven Little Billabongs* (Melbourne U.P.), Brenda Niall's important study of Mary Grant Bruce
and Ethel Turner, two of the best early writers, revived for reasons both literary and sociological in recent years; and Rosemary Wighton's edition of the first Australian book for children, *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* (Jacaranda), a standard point of reference, but till now available only in its original 1841 condition in the state libraries.

And finally, an anthology indispensible to those interested in the development of a national consciousness in Australian literature, Brian Elliott's very good anthology, *The Jindyworobaks* (UQP). Rightly, in view of Les Murray's and Patricia Wrightson's sustained experiments with the Jindyworobak ideal of fusing white and black Australian mythologies in literature, the book concludes by admitting that its original thesis of the Jindyworobak poem or story as a 'closed form' may have to be revised. The Jindyworobak movement became for some time regarded as an eccentric and immature joke, due to influential criticisms such as A. D. Hope's, which referred to it as the 'Boy Scout School of Australian Poetry'.

But the Jindyworobaks may yet have the last laugh as Hope's own poetry seems to settle into a place of historical rather than living importance, and interest in the Jindyworobaks is renewed. And as those lonely huts, whether peopled by mad shepherds or Boy Scout poets, appear less Upside-Down every year...

MARK MACLEOD

Mark Macleod teaches Australian and children's literature at Macquarie University, Sydney. He is currently writing a book on Bruce Dawe.

NEW ZEALAND

Plumb in the centre of the target, so to speak, of New Zealand literary activity through 1979 is, surely, Maurice Gee's novel *Plumb* (Faber '78, now in paperback also) which won in 1979 *three* major literary awards—the James Tait Black in U.K., and the N.Z. Book Award (fiction) and Sir James Wattie Award both in N.Z. This uncompromising report on the life and times of a non-conforming Presbyterian minister has been discussed elsewhere; it seems it may be first of a trilogy. In some absolute
scale of literary merit may next come Allen Curnow's latest volume *An Incorrigible Music*; here the two main poems come from his recent Italian travel, 'In the Duomo', dealing with the Pazzi conspiracy in Renaissance Florence, and 'Moro Assassinato', set in contemporary Rome. The theme of death (and sacrifice?) runs through a masterly but dour book, with a recurrent and sardonic angling refrain, 'A big one'. The title seems oddly counterpointed to his earlier *An Abominable Temper* (1973). In England expatriate Fleur Adcock released through Oxford *The Inner Harbour*, with a substantial New Zealand content relating, perhaps, to her recent visit there, also (from Bloodaxe Press), *Below Loughrigg*. Frank Sargeson, publishing in *Tandem* (Reed) with Edith Campion (a cycling partner whose earlier slightly gothic stories *A Place to Pass Through*, 1977, he highly praised) produced his 12th short novel.

Two important events in 'academic' publishing would appear to be (from Heinemann E. B.) a selection, *James K. Baxter as Critic*, ed. F. McKay and (from Oxford) *The Urewera Notebook: Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Ian A. Gordon. The former of these is, of course, of interest rather to students of Baxter's poetry than to rigorous critics; the latter is Katherine Mansfield's final and lively journal (1907) of her New Zealand experience, specifically a camping holiday through this rugged Maori heartland. Antony Alpers, by the way, has a large and new study of Katherine Mansfield appearing shortly. In this context should be mentioned publication in *The Turnbull Library Record XII* (1) May 1979 (Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington) the hitherto unpublished manuscript of a synopsis, list of characters, and chapters one and two of Katherine Mansfield's early (and really terrible!) attempt at her novel *Maata*. This same issue of the Record, incidentally, contains a fascinating talk by James Bertram, 'Charles Brasch in Perspective', drawing on unpublished material in his forthcoming edition of Brasch's memoirs, *Indirections*. This title will almost certainly be released by the time these words appear in print, so perhaps this is also the place to note that by the same date (or even as I unwillingly scribble in December), from Oxford (N.Z.) should appear not only *Indirections*, but, extremely importantly, *Beginnings*, ed. Robin Dudding, in which an erstwhile editor of *Landfall* and founding editor of *Islands* gathers together a series of autobiographical sketches of that title that have appeared in these two journals, including such figures as Sargeson, Frame, Finlayson, Duggan, and major painter Colin McCahon. Oxford also promise (or threaten!) to inundate us with *The Collected Poems of James K. Baxter*, ed. J. E.
Weir, besides Vincent O'Sullivan's 6th volume of verse, *Brother Jonathan, Brother Kafka* and the return by poet of '50s now historian editing the projected Oxford History of New Zealand, W. H. Oliver, in his poems *Out of Season*. I do not get any commission (or even review copies!) from Oxford so I need declare no 'interest' in very strongly recommending not a literary but a historical title of theirs in 1978, *Looking Back*, ed. Keith Sinclair and Wendy Harrex. It is a quite invaluable photographic history of this country both in pictorial record and substantial text. 1979 saw no new titles added to Oxford's series 'New Zealand Writers and their Work'.

Perhaps the other most substantial publishing event of 1979 has been the recent appearance (November) of W. Samoan Albert Wendt's third novel *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (Longman Paul). It is a three-part novel of which the central part is the only slightly embellished and brilliant novella, 'Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree', already published, Wendt's title is undoubtedly the novel of the new South Pacific writing to date and will also hold a major and permanent place in all the literature of this area. This was a busy month for Wendt, for at the same time a young and innovative director, Paul Maunder, launched a commercial feature film of Wendt's *Sons for the Return Home*. This film had excellent, if searching, reviews; even more praise has been given to the film of Janet Frame's *A State of Siege*. This latter film won a Golden Hugo award in 1978 at Chicago, beating 140 other student films from round the world; it has now been sold widely to overseas television (including, at the time of writing, Denmark and Belgium).

Film-making has become an important area of creativity out here in the last few years and has been strongly linked with our literature throughout. In particular the series 'Winners and Losers', for TV, adapted several short stories a few years ago, and also Ian Cross's novel, *The God Boy*, made a TV film that was particularly praised. There was also *Sleeping Dogs*, based on C. K. Stead's *Smith's Dream*, released through commercial cinema. In 1979 besides the films of Wendt and Frame above, Roger Hall's social comedy *Middle Age Spread* has made a successful film; the play itself, surprisingly, has been playing successfully in England. Hall himself came to New Zealand as a nineteen year old immigrant; his latest play, *Prisoners of Mother England*, (putative origin of 'Pommy') has played to capacity audiences in Wellington and appears to draw upon this same field of immigrant experience in New Zealand as some of the poetry by Peter Bland, some years ago, and, currently, Russell Haley. Hall's plays are published here by Price Milburn.
Frank Moorhouse and David Williamson. Such transcendence of traditional pakeha (European New Zealand) insularity was furthered by a panel of readers including Albert Wendt, Patricia Grace, Hone Tuwhare, newcomer Apirana Taylor and others. Moorhouse's session was a comic tour de force presenting 'The drover's wife' (Lawson), 'The drover's wife' (Drysdale's painting), 'The drover's wife' (Murray Bail) and 'The drover's wife' ('paper' by an Italian student of Commonwealth literature at Milan). Wendt stressed N.Z. was part of the South Pacific — but was he really heard?

Some excellent papers included C. K. Stead's 'From Wystan to Carlos: modern and modernist in New Zealand poetry' and Lawrence Jones's 'Inside and outside: realist and non-realist fiction'. Stead's paper is in latest Islands (No 27); hopefully Jones's may surface sooner in Landfall?

PETER ALCOCK

Peter Alcock teaches English at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. He is the compiler of the New Zealand bibliography for the Journal of Commonwealth Literature.
1979 was an exciting year. Though not much was actually published, plenty was done by way of promotion and encouragement. The Ministry of Culture came out in support of local writing, with promises of subsidy for publication as well as the aim of setting up a Journal to foster creative writing in all the four language streams, i.e. English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. This official support is most welcome and long overdue.

The most significant publication of 1979 is, no doubt, Edwin Thumboo’s *Ulysses by the Merlion*. The love poems in it remind one of his very early verse, though economy and precision tightly observed are new dimensions: ‘So delicate/ This silence we fall upon/ It feeds mutual thought’. The title poem will surely go down as being among Singapore’s classics. In its ability to render forth the social history of this tiny island, in its vibrancy of expression, ‘Ulysses by the Merlion’ reveals Thumboo at his national best:

Despite unequal ways,
Together they mutate,
Explore the edges of harmony,
Search for a centre;
Have changed their gods,
Kept some memory of their race
In prayer, laughter, the way
Their women dress and greet.
They hold the bright, the beautiful,
Good ancestral dreams
Within new visions,
So shining, urgent,
Full of what is now.

The collection enhances Thumboo’s stature as being the most important poet writing in English to emerge from Singapore.

Tan Kok Seng, who had made his mark by writing *Son of Singapore* (1972), came out with *Three Sisters of Sz* (Heinemann). It has an interesting story line, centring around the conflict which arises when siblings have been educated from different standpoints. The fact that the mother of the girls (the sisters) gambles overmuch and leaves the daughters to their own devices further heightens the dramatic tensions of the novel. Tan attempts (and to some extent succeeds) to portray a very serious social problem besetting Singapore and Malaysia. We could do with more such explorations.
*Fourteen Short Stories* (Pan Pacific) by Lim Thean Soo unfortunately failed to capture the popular interest. Lim writes with great feeling for his characters (and perhaps sometimes overdoes this a little) but his sense for community, his sharp observations are to be commended. Lim is preparing a sequel to the book.

*Pacific Quarterly*, January 1979 (guest-edited by K. Singh) was a special issue devoted to Singaporean and Malaysian Literature. Contains poems, short stories and essays. Singapore's *Sunday Times* (circulation over 100,000) started a weekly Poetry Corner (edited by K. Singh) and a weekly Profile on local writers by Lena Bandara. This was a most encouraging move.


KIRPAL SINGH

Kirpal Singh recently returned to the University of Singapore after completing his doctorate at the University of Adelaide. He is the South East Asian editor of *Pacific Quarterly Moana*, his first volume of poems, *Twenty Poems* was published in 1978 and together with R. Shepherd he has edited *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. 
A strange year. Manohar Malgonkar’s novel *Open Season* was published by Orient (Bombay); K. R. S. Iyengar published a volume of poems, *Leaves From A Log*; Shiv K. Kumar too ambled into another field, this time the novel, with *The Bone’s Prayer* (both Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi).

Prabhakar Machwe’s *Literary Studies and Sketches* came from United Writers, Calcutta. Pritish Nandy edited *The Vikas Book of Modern Indian Verse*, with contributions translated into, as well as originally written in, English. There were no other ‘big’ names.


A step up is represented by being able to find another publisher! This was managed by Raji Narasimhan after several novels from WW: *Forever Free* appeared from Orient. Rakshat Puri’s poems *In The Chronicles* found Parag Prakashan, and Keshav Malik’s *Storm Warning* found Samkaleen (both Delhi), Manuel C. Rodrigues self-published from Bombay his *Selected Poems* with a foreword by Professor Armando Menezes — who recently retired from Karnatak University, Dharwar. H. Kulkani’s *From the Beach* and *The Flaming Sword*, both came from United Writers, Calcutta.

Basile Vitsaxis, the Greek Ambassador to India, added both to Greek poetry in English and to Western poetry published in India, with his *Like Candle Drops* (Samkaleen). Another foreign contribution is Alastair Niven’s *The Yoke of Pity* (Arnold-Heinemann), a full study of the work of Mulk Raj Anand.

Indian contributions to the study of foreign literatures include S. T. Kallapur’s elaborate exploration of the parallels between oriental tales and those of John Steinbeck, and C. R. Yaravintelimath’s *Jesting Jeremiah: A Study of Noel Coward’s Comic Vision* (both from Karnatak University, Dharwar). K. K. Dyson has an excellent and detailed study of the journals and memoirs of the British in India from 1765-1856, *A Various Universe* (OUP, Delhi), but a disappointing first collection of poems, *Sap-Wood* (Writers Workshop). Her second collection, *Hibiscus From the North* (Mid-Day Publishers, Oxford, UK) is much better.

Other ancillary literature of interest included Sajal Basu (ed.) *Underground Literature During the Emergency* (Minerva, Calcutta), Krishnabai Nimbkar, *A Political Dissenter's Diary 1970-78* (International Book Service, Pune, Vol. 1; Vol. 2 to come) and A. A. David, *Diary of a War Widow* (Sunrise, Delhi). The most substantial of these is undoubtedly A. B. Shah (ed.) *Letters and Correspondence (1883-1917) of Pandita Ramabai* (1858-1922), which fills a massive gap in basic information relating to this pioneer woman reformer and writer; the editor's own humanist bias, however, leads to some misunderstandings in his introductory remarks. The Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture have shown unusual initiative in sponsoring such a publication (Bombay). Shamsunder Manohar Adhav's biographical *Pandita Ramabai* appeared from the Christian Literature Society, Madras. A. K. Mukherjee's *Guide to Selected Reference Tools and Indological Source Materials* (World Press, Calcutta) has material which may be of interest to western scholars attempting to understand India. Travel literature includes S. Nihal Singh's impressions of China, *The Gang and Nine Hundred Million* (Oxford and India Book House, N. Delhi) and Raj Thapar's *The Invincible Traveller* (Vikas).

The most notable event, in fiction, was the defection of Narendarpal Singh, who has won prizes from the Sahitya Akademi (the Indian Academy of Letters) for his work in Panjabi. He has now started writing novels in English: *Flaming Hills, Trapped*, and *On the Crest of Time* (Vikendrit, Delhi); this development needs to be seen along with the translation of Indian writing in English into regional languages which has been going on for several years.

K. A. Abbas portrayed the extremist Maoist group, *The Naxalites* for the first time in Indo-Anglian literature (Lok, N. Delhi). Nirmal

Satirical short stories appeared in George Menezes *Pardon, Your Middle is Showing* (Orient Longman). Startling juxtapositions of a somewhat different order are to be discovered in Lawrie Pinto's *Father Austin in Dustbin*, a sequel to *Alleluia in Kali Masjid* (!), Sanjivan, N. Delhi. M. V. Rama Sarma, on the other hand, is steeped in tradition, like most South Indians: *The Bliss of Life*, S. Chand & Co., N. Delhi. Jyoti Jafa's historical novel, *Nurjahan* (United Writers), Balwant Gargi's autobiographical *The Naked Triangle* (Vikas), E. P. Menon's *Silent Storms* (Symphony), Tribhuvan Kapur's *In Ecstatic Embrace* and Vikram Kapur's *The Traumatic Bite* (both Vision Books), and E. Harter's *Bosom of the Family* (Arnold-Heinemann) should be known.

Remarkably, apart from Adhav on Pandita Ramabai, there are all of five other biographical volumes. The least weighty is Metropolitan Aprem's sketches, *The Nestonian Fathers* (Mar Narsai Press, Trichur) which may help to illuminate the ideas and practices of this unnecessarily maligned indigenous group. A. Mascarenhas explores the Roman Catholic Fr. Joseph Vaz of Sancoale (1651-1711), self published, Vasco, Goa.

M. O. Mathai's *My Days with Nehru* (Vikas) has aroused considerable warmth; Rajmohan Gandhi wrote with passion and sparkle, as always, *The Rajaji Story* (Bharathan, Madras), S. Nagaiah's *Memoirs of a Principal* (Tirupati) may help foreign readers to appreciate the problems facing Indian education. Primila Lewis's *Reason Wounded*, on the other hand, may help appreciation of the problems facing rural reconstruction: the book resulted from an attempt to unionize farm-workers in a suburb of Delhi (July 1975-January 1977).

A strange year. But an interesting one.

Prabhu S. Guptara teaches at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India and is at present completing his doctorate at Stirling University, Scotland. His first book of verse, *Continuations* was published in 1979.
WEST INDIES

All the notable prose fiction came from novelists who had previously made their mark. V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (London: Deutsch; New York: Knopf) is yet another of his dispassionate and disheartening reports on the post-colonial Third World, the focus this time being on Africa. It is a thoughtful act of de-mythologizing which at the same time leaves the impression that the myth of the Dark Continent is alive and well. In *The Dragon Can't Dance* (London: Deutsch), Earl Lovelace fulfils the promise of his first two novels, *While Gods Are Falling* and *The Schoolmaster*. Chronicling the hard lives of dwellers in a shanty-town yard in Port-of-Spain, Lovelace writes with sympathetic but unsentimental insight into the Trinidadian popular arts of carnival and calypso, and offers a sound analysis of the origins and nature of despair and rebelliousness in the deprived.

Roy A. K. Heath followed his prize-winning *The Murderer* with *From the Heat of the Day* (London: Allison & Busby), the story of an unsuccessful marriage across the class line in British Guyana in the 1920s. Allison & Busby also reprinted George Lamming's *Season of Adventure*, a most welcome event. Also very welcome was the publication, at last, of Claude McKay's memoir *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (Kingston & Port-of-Spain: Heinemann Caribbean) in a volume, edited by Mervyn Morris, which includes the Jamaican short stories from McKay's *Gingertown*.

Derek Walcott's latest collection of poems, *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux), takes up again some of Walcott's major themes, including exile, the burden of history, the will to endure and the threats of political tyranny and disorder. The two most interesting pieces, representing in different ways new departures for Walcott, are the two long poems: 'The Schooner Flight' and the title-poem. The latter, quite consciously appropriating something of the method and style of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, looks at the dilemma of an idealistic, sincere West Indian Prime Minister dreaming of a revolution without bloodshed. Perhaps because the manner of the poem is somewhat atypical of Walcott, it seems to lack some of that positive textual and sub-textual complexity which is part of his strength. 'The Schooner Flight' has it, yet conveyed through the easy, blunt-speaking vernacular voice of the poem's 'red-nigger' sailor-protagonist.

His retrospective scrutiny of his life, deepened by the long perspective of West Indian history, is articulated in a happy, long-awaited blending of
Walcott's lyrical and dramatic voices, these in turn blended with the narrative/novelistic voice.

In *Shadow-Boxing* (London & Port-of-Spain: New Beacon), Mervyn Morris's art continues to perfect itself, an art of good sense working out of a strong, questioning concern about his relationship with self and society and through sparer and sparer ironic parables. Anthony McNeill's *Credences at the Altar of Cloud* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica), a thick, packed volume, could not exactly have been anticipated from his earlier work, and some of it may take some getting used to. He seems to be enjoying the exhilaration and compulsion of an orphic seizure in which every thought and feeling runs the risk of becoming a poem. At its best, some of the work achieves the Romantic ideal of redeeming the banal, and there are many unquestionable triumphs, as in the epistolary love poems with a yearning music. The general impression of a cherished, even cultivated spontaneity seems to derive in part from certain aspects of American poetic tradition, but there is also the acknowledged influence of modern jazz. Jazz, working with West Indian folklore and folk wisdom, is also an important factor in Shake Keane's little suite (or 'Rhymes and Notes' as he calls it), *One a Week With Water*, which won a Casa de las Americas prize and was published in Havana by Casa. Also winning a Case prize was Andrew Salkey's *In the Hills Where Her Dreams Live* ('Poems for Chile, 1973-1978', Havana: Casa de las Americas). Edward Brathwaite compiled *New Poets from Jamaica* (Kingston: Savacou), the anthology being a special double-issue of Brathwaite's journal *Savacou*. The poems cover a fairly wide variety of moods and voices and include the performance-oriented work coming out of the urban proletariat, with the strong influence of the protest language and music of that group. A heartening feature which runs through much of the poetry mentioned in this report is a genuine, serious experimentation. It is also pleasing to see that more than half of the poets in the Savacou anthology are women.

EDWARD BAUGH
Several established writers, many of whom first made their reputations in the seventies, have published important new books this year.

Margaret Atwood’s novel, *Life Before Man* (McClelland & Stewart), has received the most publicity, but doesn’t really break new ground. Atwood seems to have secularized Purgatory and located it in Toronto in 1978. Her characters, all of whom visit or work at the Royal Ontario Museum, are presented as people under glass, fossils of the 1960s, who continue going through the motions of living, but are essentially dead. They are hollow people beyond Eliot’s imagining, difficult to accommodate within the traditional novel without verging into either bitter satire or soap-opera sentimentality, and Atwood’s control sometimes slips. She seems to be trying to expand her scope and move beyond the temptation to mere cleverness, but she hasn’t yet found her balance as a novelist. Her talents seem better suited to poetry.
While Atwood uses the museum to represent the lessons and the dead weight of the past, Clark Blaise in *Lunar Attractions* (Doubleday) balances the archaeologist’s belief that ‘everything is precious’ against the Romantic art of historical reconstruction; both are part of the museum’s presentation of the past to the present and of the artist’s attitude to his art. The autobiographical format, the Florida childhood, and the furniture store business are familiar from other Blaise narratives, but here they are joined into a more conventional structure: a three part Bildungsroman in which the narrator, David Greenwood, slowly pushes back the ‘borders of permissible innocence’.

Like Blaise, David is fascinated by the interactions between the worlds of fact and myth, the pull of the everyday and ‘lunar attractions’, and the mystery of identity. The sensational story of Laurel and Larry Zywotko and the mutations which David’s last name undergoes represent Blaise’s attempt to convey the complexity of what Patrick White would call ‘our several lives’.

Jack Hodgins’ second novel, *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* (Macmillan) also explores the interactions between dream and reality, miracle and disaster, but in the manner of the magic realists. There is a Western exuberance and optimism in Hodgins’ work which contrasts sharply with the Eastern voices of Atwood and Blaise. Where Atwood’s theme is boredom and Blaise’s fear, Hodgins celebrates vitality and love. Regionalism has always been a strong force in Canadian writing, yet despite these regional differences, each of these three writers speaks with a contemporary voice, expressing the dominant concerns of our time with energy and authority.

In contrast, Hugh Hood is deliberately out of tune with his times. *Reservoir Ravine* (Oberon), the third novel in his projected twelve volume epic cycle entitled *The New Age*, integrates personal, national, and universal history into a Christian design which values each detail in itself and for its contribution to the harmony of the whole. Sometimes it works; sometimes it leads to laborious over-writing and a tedious barrage of facts. Hood aspires to be our Spenser and our Dante. He hasn’t yet convinced me he can fill that role or even that we need Canadian versions of these writers, but his work raises intriguing questions, which we must continue to confront, about the nature and function of art in a new country.

Mavis Gallant also stands somewhat apart from the mainstream. Her detached narrative stance, European settings and underplaying of story and emotion have in the past rendered her an unattractive subject for
critics interested in the typically Canadian or in the isolation of national themes. Her new collection of stories, *From the Fifteenth District* (Macmillan), further strengthens her reputation for a craftsmanship which is both unobtrusive and compelling.

*Crossings* (Vancouver, Pulp Press), a first novel by the playwright Betty Lambert, has attracted attention for its lively re-working of the artist as troubled young woman theme. The dialogue is good, and it's mostly dialogue, but there is little substance here. Pretentious but promising.

New collections of poetry from established older poets, Raymond Souster and Irving Layton, and from well-known younger poets, most notably Dennis Lee, Michael Ondaatje and George Bowering, have all appeared this year. Each of these books represents a consolidation of earlier work rather than the taking of new directions, but there is excellent poetry among them.

Layton dedicates *Droppings from Heaven* (McClelland & Stewart) to Louis Dudek, who prefers Layton the social satirist to Layton the visionary. As we would expect from such a dedication, the poetry is mainly angry satire. There is none of the mystifying complexity of the earlier Layton, and little of his subtlety. Except for a few impressive poems, like 'Senile, My Sister Sings', this is not Layton at his best.

Souster's *Hanging In* (Oberon) gives us a competent poet writing the kind of poetry he is known for: short lyrics about everyday happenings or imagist moments modelled on Williams' red wheelbarrow spoken in a quiet, colloquial voice. He is a good balance for Layton, as their concerns are similar but their techniques differ: instead of raging, Souster pokes gentle fun.

Dennis Lee's *The Gods* (McClelland & Stewart) demonstrates the range of a versatile and committed poet, but it will be remembered for its inclusion of the long elegy on 'The Death of Harold Ladoo'. This poem is a long meditation on the significance of the Anasi years, and on relationships among artists and between art and reality. Lee strikes just the right balance between personal emotion and public statement. It is a moving and impressive achievement. The waste, the futility, the illusions and self-delusion are recognized and incorporated into the final vision, along with the knowledge that 'speaking the words out loud has brought me close to the bone' and the hope that men will be called on again 'for passionate awe in our lives, and a high clean style'. Hearing Lee read this poem was one of the highlights of my year.

The new poems in Ondaatje's collection, *There's a Trick with a Knife*
I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1963-1978 (McClelland & Stewart), which is two-thirds old poems, are less ambitious in scope and possibly more distrustful of our ability to communicate through language alone. They are fascinating lyrics, which experiment with mood and voice, and delight in the play between language and thought. Ondaatje improves with each new volume.

Bowering's Another Mouth (McClelland & Stewart) is more uneven. I prefer his sardonic voice to his lyric one (his satire is brilliant), and his longer poems to the shorter. His earlier long poem 'Allophanes' is one of the nine contemporary Canadian long poems included in The Long Poem Anthology (Coach House) edited by Michael Ondaatje. This collection brings together important but lesser known long poems by poets whom Ondaatje in his introduction calls the 'unofficial' voices of the 70s, accompanied by brief critical commentaries by the poets, biographical details and a selective list of criticism about their work. It's an excellent anthology for anyone interested in contemporary Canadian poetry.

Although drama has never been strong in Canada, some of the year's more memorable plays have been Rex Deverell's Boiler Room Suite, Roland Lepage's In a Lifetime and David Fennario's Balconville, all published by Talonbooks. Canadian Theatre Review Publications have brought out the second volume in their historical series Canada's Lost Plays, entitled Women Pioneers, ed. Anton Wagner, and Playwrights Co-op have published a Supplement, 1975-76 to their Bibliography of Canadian Theatre History, ed. Ron Ball & Richard Plant.

Two new critical books for the student market provide useful surveys of the old established canon of Canadian writers. D. J. Dooley's Moral Vision in the Canadian Novel (Clarke, Irwin) is designed as a corrective to conventional Canadian criticism, which has concentrated on national identity and theme to the exclusion of a concern with literary or moral issues. The book definitely serves a need, raising more questions than it can answer and forcing all of us to formulate our own positions more clearly. Tom Marshall's Harsh and Lovely Land: The Major Canadian Poets and the Making of a Canadian Tradition (University of British Columbia Press) is less controversial, but a solid and stimulating introduction to its subject.

At a more specialized level, readers who are already well versed in Canadian writing will find Crossing Frontiers: Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature, ed. Dick Harrison (University of Alberta Press) essential for considering some of the directions Canadian studies
may be taking in the 80s.

1979 was a productive year for Canadian writing. Many good writers are in the middle of their careers and we may expect further development from them. We can only hope that predicted cutbacks in government funding to some publishers and those experimenting in the arts will not limit their development or prevent the work of newer writers reaching our attention.

DIANA BRYDON

Diana Brydon was formerly at the University of Adelaide and now teaches English at the University of British Columbia.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Publishing in English in Southern Africa has never had a firmer nor more propitious decade than the 1970s. Before then creative works in English had traditionally first appeared in the U.K. and/or the U.S. — a pattern established in the 1820s or earlier and which was broken, at first fractionally, only after World War II. Since then, local publishers like Howard Timmins, entering the conservative book-market (mostly with factual books of local interest) have slowly gained a corner of the market for Southern African authors writing in English. The 70s saw the rise of the literary publisher and, with him, the rise of the Southern African English author writing for his or her own publishing industry.
This is still a novelty for the new generation; older writers continue to publish abroad (with their books being re-imported) — Nadine Gordimer with Jonathan Cape and Viking, and Athol Fugard with Oxford University Press, for example. The Afrikaans-language writer, meanwhile, has two major publishing groups to choose from — Perskor and Nasionale — while the writer in a black vernacular language has almost exclusively their educational subsidiaries. In 1979, the pattern in English had fallen into a more varied one for literary works: there was David Philip in Cape Town, and Ravan, Bateleur, and Ad. Donker in Johannesburg to choose from, between them putting out about 50 literary works. Overseas publishers with well-established Southern African connections, like Heinemann Educational, Oxford U.P., Rex Collings and Macmillan, also continued to publish locally during the year.

From Heinemann Educational in the African Writers Series came Bessie Head’s collection of stories, The Collector of Treasures (and Other Botswana Village Tales), her fourth work, although within Southern Africa this first appeared as a hardback published by Philip. Also imported were the new novels of the two other novelists currently in most noted and mature production, Gordimer’s Burger’s Daughter and André P. Brink’s A Dry White Season. Although very different in style and structure, both novels have similar interests — the conflict between right and left, the repressive restrictions of the ‘police state’, and the ethos and penalties of political commitment to reform within the apartheid society. Both, for a while, encountered the modern South African gamble, which compels publication abroad for more direct and confrontative works — the elaborate and lethal system of censorship control. Although she had had some editions of two works of hers written in 1958 and 1966 belatedly released (A World of Strangers and The Late Bourgeois World), Gordimer had the predictable reversal of Burger’s Daughter being banned and then, by some devious and unpredictable inner workings of the vast and inconsistent Publications Control Board, released.

The same occurred for Brink’s A Dry White Season, which he wrote in both English and Afrikaans — the same Brink whose Kennis van die Aand (Looking on Darkness) banning earlier in the decade, together with the imprisonment of his fellow Afrikaans writer, the poet Breyten Breytenbach, heralded the first onslaught against Afrikaans writers. Previously unscathed, 1979 saw the works of Afrikaans writers banned in about equal proportions to those in English by both blacks and whites, thus relegating them as well to the role of outsiders, as their English
counterparts have been on a selected basis for two decades.

The return of Ezekiel Mphahlele to South Africa brought more anomalous developments in the on-going and bitter censorship saga. Although he as a person was not banned when he went into exile, unlike many of his compatriots of the 1950s, two of his works were repeatedly banned (*The Wanderers* and *The African Image*). His third novel, *Chirundu*, first appeared in 1979, daringly published by Ravan in paperback (he has changed his name to the Sotho Es'kia Mphahlele), and remained unscathed. From the same stable a first collection of stories by Mtutuzeli Matshoba (*Call Me not a Man*), which is more blatantly critical than Mphahlele's novel, was suppressed after selling 5,000 copies, while two works, both firsts, from Ravan in a single volume, Neil Alwin Williams' *Just a Little Stretch of Road* and Phazel Johennesse's poems (*The Rainmaker*), both strongly expressive of black consciousness tenets, slipped through.

Also from Ravan came the third novel by miniaturist Yvonne Burgess; although little known abroad (her *The Strike* is due for release in New York), her *Say a Little Mantra for Me* achieved a pleased readership in South Africa and her first novel, *A Life to Live*, was paperbacked by Donker. He also gave out a first novel, *The Sons*, by David Abbott, which for seamy social realism hit a new and somewhat turgid level of frankness in South African English dialect, so bastardized as to be incomprehensible to a reader not familiar with Afrikaans and other languages as well — an example of how a work written for its own home readership can now be written in its own language.

The same is true, pretty well, of a novel like Burgess', and fiction by others like Sheila Roberts, Peter Wilhelm, Ahmed Essop, Lionel Abrahams, Christopher Hope, James Matthews, Mothobi Mutloatse, Mbulelo Mzamane, Richard Rive, Barney Simon. Although none of them published a new book-length work in 1979, it is they who constitute the new prose writers of the 70s.

Being a relatively small literary scene, however, it would seem that the pressures of life in Southern Africa force writers into being more versatile than they would perhaps like to be. An example is Sipho Sepamla who, together with Mongane Serote, Oswald Mtshali and Mafika Gwala, is a black poet of stature who commands a large audience. In 1979 he debuted with a novel, *The Root is One* (from Collings, co-published in South Africa by Philip), a probing, low-profile examination of a riot situation, clearly allegorizing the events of Soweto 76. Another poet, though younger, Christopher van Wyk, put out his raunchy *It Is Time to Go*
Home (Donker) and his first short stories in the little magazines.

The converse is the established novelist who kicks out the poems on the side: in this case, Jack Cope (who had not published a book of poems since 1948), the general editor of the Mantis Editions of Southern African Poets series (now numbering the work of 14 poets), included his own Recorded in Sun in a companion volume with fellow novelist, C. J. Driver's Occasional Light. Although Driver is generally numbered among the long-lost compulsory or voluntary exiles (like Jillian Becker, Dan Jacobson, Peter Abrahams among novelists, and Dennis Brutus, Keorapetse Kgositsele and Mazisi Kunene among poets — the whites usually having evacuated by choice and the blacks usually without choice), the collection of his poems, gleaned mainly from South Africa's little magazines, fortuitously stressed the cumulative role that is played by such magazines, often publishing fugitively, even clandestinely — always in perilous circumstances, ranging from the obvious censorship hazards to the purely financial. The two are not unrelated, for no English magazine publishing receives any form of sponsorship other than private support.

The magazines that functioned through 1979 were, in fact, only a few, and ailing. The record-holder for longevity is Contrast, founded in 1960, which managed only one number (no. 47) during the year. Magazines like The Purple Renoster, Ophir, The Classic, Izwi, Bolt, Donga were distantly remembered, and Speak plunged, while New Classic skipped the year; S'ketsh, the magazine of black theatre, on the other hand, resurfaced with one number. Only Staffrider, under Ravan's protection and mostly given over to black community writing, maintained a head (two numbers). Two new reviews were announced, Heresy and Wietie, the former with one number and the latter to come from a new mostly-black publishing outfit, Sable Books.

Amongst academic reviews/magazines, Standpunte (published and financed by Tafelberg, mostly Afrikaans, all but exclusively white), now over thirty years old, maintained schedules and included some creative work and articles on English South African writing. Other reviews are related to university publishing; Theoria from the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and English Studies in Africa from the University of the Witwatersrand maintained sombre standards, including evidence of the burgeoning English South African scholarship which is beginning to spill into such magazines with impact and influence — English South African literature is, perhaps, discovering itself critically and 1979 was the first year of climbing on the new bandwagon. The only magazine
devoted exclusively to scholarship of African English literature (largely Southern African), *English in Africa*, attached to the Institute for the Study of English in Africa of Rhodes University, Grahamstown, exuded sweet printers' silence, but had its two numbers per annum backlog for 1978 and 1979 scheduled for catching up in 1980. Pretoria's University of South Africa's *UNISA English Studies*, which has cut down to two numbers per annum, continued to publish reviews and some articles on local publishing with reliable success.

It was an average year, one might say, beset with the normal old problems. Dramatically rising costs of printing, however, caused indirectly by the energy crisis, cut budgets, reduced sales, made all publishers and editors more cautious of taking risks. On the other hand, the popularity of a writer like Herman Charles Bosman (d. 1951) was unaffected; the year saw his complete works in print from Human and Rousseau for the first time, in a standard series now numbering twelve volumes (including selections). But there was one new tack in 1979 in the overall pattern that had prevailed throughout the seventies.

That was the publishing in book form of drama scripts. In the past the smaller readership for plays and the relative lack of publicity accorded the local playwright outside his own area of performance (Fugard is the huge exception, but all his scripts are available from the wider world) had created an impasse — plays simply were not published beyond the magazines and the reviews. But if the seventies saw the rise of the new generation of prose writers and poets in English, it also spawned an unprecedented amount of local theatre, by playwrights of all colours, and this pushed through the publication taboo as well.

Ravan led with four modestly-produced playscripts in a series of individual publications (*Not His Pride* by Makwedini Julius Mtsaka, *The Fantastical History of a Useless Man* by the Junction Avenue Theatre Co., *Lindiwe* by Shimane Solly Mekgoe and — her second play — *The First South African* by Fatima Dike). Donker responded with a five-in-one collection, *Theatre One*, including Dike's first play, *The Sacrifice of Kreli*, Douglas Livingstone's *The Sea my Winding Sheet*, and a previously unscripted experimental play by Fugard, *Orestes* (first performed in 1971). Also included was the prolific Pieter-Dirk Uys's *Paradise is Closing Down*, and his smash-hit multilingual satire that ran throughout the year, *Die Van Aardes van Grootoor*, was put out in a single volume by Taurus.

A footnote about Taurus. Founded by three reckless academics as a samizdat outfit, functioning by mail order in a semi-clandestine way to
avoid the prohibitions, and thus inhibitions, that apply to all 'commercial' publishing, Taurus publishes on the risky principle of getting rid of stocks along the grapevine before the axe falls. Thanks to a snarl-up of legal niceties, this process does not appear to constitute 'publication'. There is not one South African English-language publisher who has not thought of giving up 'publishing', in the accepted sense of the word, at one time or another, thanks to the controls which attempt to manoeuvre the literature into the shape it has resisted assuming throughout the 1970s.

STEPHEN GRAY

Stephen Gray teaches English at Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg. He has modestly refrained from mentioning his own publications in his review. One was a work of criticism, *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*, the other a volume of poetry, *Hottentot Venus*. Both books were published by Rex Collings and will be reviewed in the next issue of *Kunapipi*. The title poem of *Hottentot Venus* appears in this issue.

Editor's note. We apologize for the absence of entries on East and West Africa and hope they will appear in the next issue.