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Book Reviews

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Abstract

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Athol Fugard, *Tsotsi*. Rex Collings, 1980. 168 pages. £5.

Tsotsi is a novel which Fugard wrote in 1959/60 at the same time as he wrote *People are Living There*, his first successful play. The manuscript has been kept in the National English Documentation Centre in South Africa from where it has recently been unearthed and published. It has had a measure of success in South Africa itself before its UK publication by Rex Collings.

It is always interesting to suddenly be confronted with an early work of an established writer, and in the case of Fugard it is very rewarding. *Tsotsi* contains all the major themes in Fugard's oeuvre, many of his virtues and some of his vices. It is also an outstanding example of that rare species in South African literature, the successful trans-racial character portrayal. It describes three days in the life of Tsotsi, a young black criminal in Sophiatown, during which he commits a murder, beats a friend to pulp, accidentally comes into possession of a baby which he reluctantly starts looking after, finds himself unable to commit a second murder, nurses his beat-up friend, flirts with religion and finally meets his end. Like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* Tsotsi has no memory. He lives out his violent destructive life fighting an inner darkness which is a horror of existence, an awareness of the absurdity of life out of which he can see no other way than death which is his chosen métier. His recovery of his past through a series of symbolic events in the violent, squalid and oppressed black township is an early example of Fugard's characteristic blend of political protest and existentialist philosophy. There is, however, a subtle shift in emphasis. Whereas Sizwe Bansi's identity problem in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is entirely the making of the political system, and Buntu's solution seems to be an acceptance of existential defeat to ensure physical survival, Tsotsi's gradual awakening first manifests itself in a new awareness of choice, of possible alternatives. This stops him in his tracks as he had always been 'the victim of dark impulses', and when he is unable to kill the beggar he realizes that even 'killing itself was a choice'. The existentialist moment of choice, governed by man's free will is here regarded as at least a potential redeemer as is religion, and Tsotsi suffers Kirkegaardian anxieties.

Tsotsi's ultimate physical destruction seems relatively unimportant compared with his victory over life's absurdity, expressed in his choice of preserving life in the shape of the baby rather than spreading death. This somewhat optimistic belief in man's capability to shape his own destiny has been replaced by a more bitter vision of man's defeat in a hostile world in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. In this connection a comparison with Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* is instructive. The two novels resemble each other in their portrayal of black outlaws moving through the underworld of the township, but in Alex La Guma's version the tsotsies are helpless victims or inevitable outcomes of a specific set of social circumstances, in which the idea of choice is absurd. This obviously reflects his communist convictions, and it seems to me that La Guma's choice of the ordinary decent

slumdweller as the carrier of hope is more convincing than Fugard's existential metamorphosis of a *tsotsi*.

The Fugard virtues are to be found in style and technique. The novel is tightly controlled, every word serves at least one purpose, often several. The background is evoked in precise, vivid and poetic language which gives depth and meaning to the novel. Psychological states are expressed through dialogues of typical Fugard intensity and shortness, often consisting of keywords which for the speaker have a different and more precise meaning than their dictionary explanation, which makes them sound more like absurd monologues than dialogues, the Music Hall back-talk without the humour. The vices or perhaps just vice lies in the literariness of the book. In the symmetry and neatness of its symbolic structure it appears somewhat contrived. The symbols are obvious and stick out of the book like bones on a starving animal. *Tsotsi's* break-through to his past is built up to through a series of symbols: the smell of old newspaper, a spider, a yellow bitch, the too searching questions of the friend he beats up, the baby; in the second part where his childhood is reconstructed each symbol is carefully accounted for. Finally the baby is directly identified with his newborn self, giving heavy symbolic meanings to his attempts to hide it in derelict buildings or even kill it. This over-emphasis on getting your symbols right and consistent is perhaps the mark of a beginner, but it does not overshadow the fact that *Tsotsi* is a remarkable achievement and a very thought-provoking and enjoyable book by one of South Africa's leading writers.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Mtutuzeli Matshoba, *Call Me Not A Man*. Rex Collings, 1980. 198 pages. £4.95.

This collection was first published in South Africa but was banned there in November 1979. Rex Collings had earlier agreed to publish it in the U.K. and copies had been despatched to them before the banning order was made. It thus is a good indication of what the present South African government does not want to hear. In an introductory autobiographical note the author states that he wants 'to reflect through my works life on my side of the fence, the black side: so that whatever may happen in the future, I may not be set down as a »bloodthirsty terrorist«'. The threat of violence which is implied in this purpose is absent in the book. The author states explicitly that he does not want war, he visualizes an 'army of justice', not necessarily belligerent, consisting of good people of all colours. This realization comes to the main character in 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana' who is obviously the author himself, and it is a result of the impact of his first mixed party where for the first time he meets good whites. The main concern of the short story, however, is a visit to a political prisoner on Robben Island, and the story continues along not altogether unexpected paths of thought like 'Prison where is thy victory?' and 'A luta continua'. The tension between the two lines of thinking is not solved, neither in this particular story nor in any of the others. The subject matter covers the range of the only too well known black South African grievances: political persecution, slum conditions, gross injustice, corruption and bribery, prison labour on farms, including whippings and

starvation, the Immorality law, Bantustan, etc. They shed no new light on these subjects. The dominant feeling is that of indignation which adds to the predictability of both story and character. Dotted in amongst the plots are little tracts or discussions about such subjects as racism, tribalism, war, love/hate or Bantustans. It is a very sad fact that even the most appalling human conditions, presented by an obviously sympathetic author fail to arouse sympathy if either the presentation is bad or it has been said too often, both of which, unfortunately, is the case with *Call Me Not A Man*. In a South African connection, however, the protest of the book has obviously not been made often enough, and looked at in terms of a tool in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa itself it has already proved its worth by being banned.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*. Heinemann, London, 1979 (first pub. East Africa Publishing House, Nairobi, 1978). 309 pages. Csd. £5.50, ppr. £1.80.

Ayi Kwei Armah's fifth novel, *The Healers*, explores the degeneration of African society in a historical setting. The bardic voice which introduces the tale informs the reader that the time is just over a century ago and the place close to the river Pra. Against the background of Wolseley's expedition against the Asante and the fall of Kumase, Armah deals with the men whose mission is to heal the spirit and to unite a people fragmented by nationalism and by their manipulative rulers.

A summary of the events in the novel reads like the plot of a historical thriller. Densu, swiftest and strongest of his age group, escapes trial by poison for a murder he did not commit, and on a roving commission to gather information for an Asante general and for the healers he infiltrates the white camps, marches with the Asante army and is present at the fall of Kumase before returning to face trial before a white judge and be exonerated after a dramatic courtroom appearance by the victim's mother.

But *The Healers* is not the tale of adventure which this bald summary might suggest. Armah's moral concern pervades the narrative.

Densu himself, in spite of his ubiquitous presence at the scene of any great event, is not so much a hero at the centre of the action as a moral observer, an onlooker watching history unnoticed from a shadowy corner. The action-packed plot is only a vehicle for Armah's analysis of the personal and social moral failings which lie behind the history. Like Armah's fourth novel, *Two Thousand Seasons*, this work is dominated by his perception of a people in error, a people wandering from the true path of life. But where *Two Thousand Seasons* makes the arrival of the white slavers an automatic trigger for the rise and immediate success of the freedom fighters, *The Healers* is more closely located in historical time and place, and its solutions are those which work only over many ages. Armah postulates the existence of a group of healers, psychotherapists of society, who work slowly to heal the spiritual diseases of their community with no hope of immediate success.

Armah's vision of the role of the healers takes shape through the conversations of the characters. In one of the more successful scenes, the casual joking between age mates modulates into a sense of wonder as Densu is offered his friend's vision of the world below the surface of the stream. The friend, who has closed his eyes and assumed a foetal position underwater, talks serenely of the happiness of seeing what brings things together; but Densu is entranced by the experience only temporarily. Damfo, too, talks of the healer's different way of seeing the world. In Densu's growing understanding of what a healer is and does, in the general's conversations about his illness and what it reflects of the disease of the Asante people and in the debate among the healers about what their role should be we learn that healing is inspiration; its opposite is the manipulation practised by those who seek power. Manipulation is a poison which enslaves and destroys its object, as the brainless giant who is the real murderer is destroyed by his servile obedience to Ababio.

The division between manipulators and inspirers raises the question of the extent to which the healer is justified in working manipulatively to gain a greater good. It seems to some of the healers that the general's inspiring leadership might prove to be a viable alternative to the existing forms of power, but Armah dismisses the possibility when the general is betrayed by the royal manipulators. Instead the promise for the future lies in a more nebulous hope: the whites' attempts to destroy the unity of the African nations is beginning to reunite the whole African people in a new dance, to West Indian music.

The Healers is a novel of uneven achievement. The attempt to cover the political background of the attack on Kumase does not always merge happily with Armah's visionary presentation of the Manichean struggle between manipulators and inspirers, and at times even the absence of dramatic tension in the writing and the constantly judgemental depiction of character cannot prevent the novel from coming perilously close to the clichés of the adventure story. Yet it remains a valuable novel and an interesting development of Armah's thought.

ROSEMARY COLMER

Philip Curtin, Steven Feierman, Leonard Thompson and Jan Vansina, *African History*. Longman, London, 1978. 612 pages, £9.75.

The stateless societies, which Europeans found in Africa, were one of the main reasons behind the myth that Africa was the continent without history. People without elaborate states were considered backward. 'Recent authorities', write the authors of *African History*, 'suggest that this view is far from accurate. At some levels of technology, state administration may only serve to draw off part of the social product for officials and courtiers who contribute little to that product.' 'Statelessness was clearly preferred' (p. 82).

Stateless societies created special problems for the European invaders as well as for the historians. 'Because there was no one to make a formal surrender, there was also no one to survive in office.' 'The Europeans could try to accept the »surrender« of important people, but in fact no one had the power to make more than a personal decision to

cooperate with the new rulers.' 'In this setting, separate reactions to European rule and European power had to be made by individual men and women, a process that is better illustrated for Ibo country by Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* than by any formal works of history' (p. 465).

Aiming at a broader conception of the nature of history than is found in books of the history of other continents the authors of *African History* have succeeded in creating a synthesis which gives the reader a better comprehension of African societies than perhaps any other single volume of history. The book, designed as a textbook for courses in African history, is distinguished from previous general histories by two features: the authors are 'less interested in the deeds of the great than in the culture and behaviour of ordinary people' less in events and more in the patterns of historical change. And they are 'consciously' seeking to look at African history from an African point of view'. This attitude is not new, but the book probably contains less political history and more about stateless societies, culture, economics, more ethnographic and social anthropology material than any other work of comparable size.

African History is divided at about 1500, 1780 and 1880 into four parts of which the first three are organized by regions: North Africa, East Africa etc. With colonial rule the patterns of African history became general for all regions, and the colonial period is treated in a series of topical chapters. For obvious reasons the goal of creating a synthesis is best reached in the last part and in the introductory chapter on the roots of African culture. In this chapter Jan Vansina questions or discards a number of theories on race, language, the spread of iron-age-culture etc. which were held until a few years ago. The theory that divine kingship developed in Egypt and spread from there into the East African lake country or westward beyond Lake Chad is discarded, and the similarity between African states is explained by a theory of saturation. After the rise of kingdoms in different parts of the continent they began to exchange ideologies, etiquette, insignia and roles. After a thousand years the kingdoms ended up more similar than they were at the beginning.

The oral tradition and the Arab or European sources are concentrated around these African states. Because of the present book's emphasis on trends rather than on events they are not given equal importance. But in the choice of which states or events are considered important there seems to be a certain lack of consistency.

In the chapters about West Africa the old states of Mali, Kanem and Songai are dealt with in a few pages, which seems quite reasonable. In the nineteenth century a good deal of attention is given to Usman dan Fodio and Samori Ture and his short-lived 'empire', while for instance the Asante confederacy is left out in the cold. On the map of West Africa in the early nineteenth century Greater Asante is shown as including the coast, which may be right for a short period. The century however was characterized by a southern limit of Asante power, the threats of Asante invasion in the Fante country and several military clashes between the British and their Fante allies on the one side, Asante on the other. It is impossible to understand today's antagonism between the coastal population of Ghana and the Asante population without a better account of these events than the few remarks found in the book. Moreover the interested reader finds little to explain the tenacity of Asante nationalism, described by Dennis Austin in 'Politics in Ghana' as 'a Kumasi centred Ashanti movement, which appealed for support in the name of the Asantehene, The Golden Stool, Ashanti interests, Ashanti history and Ashanti rights'.

Like most multi-authored works the book is characterized by a certain unevenness. Jan Vansina's chapters on Equatorial Africa are rather short, and Steven Feierman's chapters on Eastern Africa seem to assume too much knowledge of the background. All the same the book includes so much new information which has been gathered in the last decades about the African past that it has few rivals among shorter general histories of Africa.

SVEN POULSEN

Ulla Schild (ed.), *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*, XXIX, 2-3. Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen. Special Double Issue: 'Afrikanische Literatur — Perspektiven und Probleme'.

In her vigorously committed introduction to this wide-ranging collection of essays on most of the major African literatures Ulla Schild claims that 'Coming to terms with (African literature) is the right and the duty of everyone who is interested in literature at all'. This statement might seem a little doctrinaire ('Recht und Pflicht' are terms from a literary arsenal one doesn't associate with literary tolerance) but it should be understood as the pardonably impassioned manifesto of a scholar who is doing much to make African culture known to a reluctant central Europe. Whatever their weaknesses, these two volumes reflect in their range the energy and enthusiasm of their editor. The inclusion of essays on literatures in the main African languages as well as on those in all the relevant European ones distinguishes this work from comparable productions.

The essays are of two types: original and sometimes controversial statements of opinion and summaries of a given field. Of the first type Aliko Songolo's questioning of Jahn's Muntu-concept is the most interesting. Muntu, he feels, forces a vast range of heterogeneous materials into a deceptively monolithic categorical structure. Eckhard Bretinger discusses rather modishly the problems of readership. Jürgen Schäfer meditates on the place of African literature in German university curricula.

Essays of the second type face problems which are familiar to many who have attempted to write such introductions: the strains of summarizing a complex subject for a largely uninformed audience and the disproportion between subject matter and essay length. Two articles in the first volume illustrate in an exemplary way the difficulties and the possibilities of the genre.

Johannes Ries's article on francophone literature falls into many of the traps, especially into that of using hasty plot summaries as the basis of generalizations which are either too sweeping or too trivial to yield any sense of insight. Correspondingly, the language wavers between the pompous ('...bestimmt von unabweisbarer Notwendigkeit und schicksalhafter Verkettung der Ereignisse') to the banal (what conceivable reader needs to be told that a recurring theme in African literature is 'the conflict between the traditional African setting and European civilization?'). Characteristic is the piling up of parallel linguistic structures to stress the unstressable. This wall of rhetoric seems to be intended to conceal a European critic's loss of confidence on finding himself up against a literature which defies his accustomed norms.

Dieter Riemenschneider's account of the anglophone literature of the Seventies forms a total contrast to this. He is securely in command of the material, so that he can choose without fuss what points to emphasize and how to illustrate them, and he justifies his procedure in a crisp methodological introduction. His language is clear, straightforward and unpretentious and therefore well suited to the task of introducing (and attracting) new readers to African literature. His arrangement is thematic, not chronological, so that the reader can follow the logical pattern of generalization and particularization without being jerked through a maze of disparate ideas. Other writers such as Claude Wauthier on political literature, Donald Burgess on the literatures of Cape Verde, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Nancy J. Schmidt on children's books also fulfil their purpose admirably.

In short the collection is rather uneven. But this is not the fault of the editor; the difficulty lies rather in the shortage of well-informed scholars who have the skill of imparting their knowledge to the sympathetic layman, and this in turn is due to certain gaps in the German (but not only the German) educational system. It is the editor's purpose to contribute towards the closing of such gaps. That her work inevitably suffers from the problems she is trying to solve is paradoxical and reflects not at all on her own courage, determination and thoroughness. One hopes that she will be given further opportunities to tune European ears to voices speaking European languages in unaccustomed ways and more alien languages in ways that can be highly relevant. Since Miss Schild has worked on the justifiable assumption that the interested German reader will be able to tackle essays in French and English, the collection has much to offer the non-German reader as well.

NELSON WATTIE

Wilson Harris, *The Tree of the Sun*. London: Faber & Faber, 1978.

Anyone with more than a passing acquaintance with Wilson Harris' work is aware by now that the amenities of conventional narrative — those tidy, more or less linear assumptions gathered around the words *complication*, *climax* and *denouement* (or around the single word *plot*) — have long since been put aside. One could argue that this has been the case going back as far as Harris' very first published novel, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), but certainly by the time of *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1965), his sixth, the decision to give freer rein to complication while pulling back (to make further use of such terms) on climax and denouement, became a much more discernible one. All of Harris' works have tended to probe a world of relentless, resolutionless complication, but with *The Eye of the Scarecrow* the exploration became much more self-conscious and self-reflexive, taking itself on as its own subject matter in fact. The novels which have followed *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, with the possible exception of *Tumatumari* (1968) and *Genesis of the Clowns* (1977), have likewise let go of that merest thread of a remnant of story on to which the first five novels held ('story' in the sense of a sequence of events perceived as external to the writing and which the writing is therefore obliged to report as a progression, however complex, towards resolution).

From *The Eye of the Scarecrow* on, Harris' work, as though the only story worth telling

were Genesis and the genesis of art were of the same order of mystery as that of the universe, has invested deeply in a sense of story as a play of elaboration native to writing itself. *The Tree of the Sun*, Harris' fourteenth novel, is very much a continuation of this tendency, as again the artistic or conceptual act of which the novel is born reflects on itself by way of protagonists who are themselves artists and/or writers, as well as by way of allusions to some of Harris' earlier works. The novel has as one of its three central figures the Brazilian painter Da Silva da Silva, who first appeared in *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* (1977). Da Silva's wife Jen has finally become pregnant after eight years of marriage, and da Silva reflects on the painting, called 'The Tree of the Sun', which he began the same morning on which he and Jen slept together and she conceived. Figuring prominently on the canvas are the novel's two other central protagonists, Julia and Francis Cortez, previous tenants of the house in which the da Silvas live. The Cortezes, dead for some twenty-five years, are resurrected by da Silva's having happened upon a novel written by Francis and a volume of letters written by Julia hidden away in an inner wall of what is now his studio. Though Francis and Julia while alive wrote in secret, unbeknown to one another, da Silva's painting and Harris' novel become the occasion for a belated dialogue between the two.

But no such summation as this can possibly do justice to the staggering density and richness of Harris' book, whose title has partly to do with a restless, explorational pursuit of *ramification* which constantly undoes any settled sense of what it can be said to be about. The peculiar, essentially poet's way Harris has with language again comes stunningly to the fore, visiting lightning-quick dislocations of a clairvoyant kind upon whatever it reports. Thus we get a persistent hovering, an endless play between holding back and disclosure not at all unlike the way we imagine a ghost might move. And this is highly appropriate to a book which repeatedly insists upon itself as haunted or spooked, the issue of an intercourse between the living and the dead. Or as Harris has it of da Silva at one point: 'Perhaps it was an inescapable fiction or costume of possession, in the translation of other lives and letters and books, in which he was involved, as if he became the »soul« of past and present times in everliving presence or renaissance of the arts.'

NATHANIEL MACKEY

Len Garrison, *Black Youth, Rastafarianism, and the Identity Crisis in Britain*. The Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Project, London, 1979. 68 pages. £1.50.

Len Garrison's long essay contributes a novel perspective on the influence and function of Rastafarianism, a messianic cult founded on a strict interpretation of selected passages from the Old Testament and a very loose interpretation of the teachings of Marcus Garvey. The major sources on Rasta¹ concentrate exclusively on the rise and development of the Rastafarian faith in the predominantly rural, Third World context of Jamaica. Garrison's subject is how well, and why, Rasta travels to the urban, industrial environment of Britain's West Indian immigrants.

The intimate link between Rastafarianism and reggae music has prompted interest

beyond the narrow confines of sociology and theology, and it is primarily through the lyrics of reggae songs that Black immigrants in Britain have come to know Rastafarianism. It is Garrison's hypothesis that this interest represents 'a subconscious attempt by the Black youth in Britain to provide an antithesis to the ... challenges and threat to his humanity' (p. 2). Although his perspective is strictly British, Garrison's arguments in fact provide (if such a thing were needed) a justification and rationalization of the activities of any minority group which actively resists integration.

Part I outlines the failure of cultural assimilation, while Part II deals in greater detail with the consequent 'Cultural Reversal and Separation' in the search for the meaning of being Black in a white society. The account of 'the Roots of Ras Tafari Historical Consciousness' in Part III is too brief to do justice to its subject. The reader who is unfamiliar with Rastafarianism would do well to consult one of the sources cited below first. In his attempt to depict the informal, oral tradition of Rastafarianism as a monolithic ideological construct, Garrison fails to come to terms with the escapist, self-deluding aspects of Rasta doctrine, i.e., that Haile Selassie (formerly Ras Tafari) is the Second Coming of Christ and that the repatriation of all Blacks to Africa is inevitable.

But Garrison's primary concern is not so much the *form* of Rastafarianism as it is its *function* in the ongoing redefinition of a Black identity in a culturally plural society, and on these terms the essay offers worthwhile insights into some possible alternatives to total cultural assimilation.

ALBERT L. JONES

NOTES

1. For an annotated bibliography, see J. V. Owens, 'Literature on the Rastafari: 1955-1974. A Review', *Savacou*, 11/12, Kingston, 1975. Important later studies include Joseph Owens, *Dread: the Rastafarians of Jamaica* (Sangster, Kingston, 1976) and Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians: the Dreadlocks of Jamaica* (Heinemann, London, 1977).

V. S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979.

A Bend in the River represents a further step in V. S. Naipaul's attempts to relate present to past experience. In earlier works of fiction and non-fiction — particularly *The Mimic Men* and *The Loss of El Dorado* — Naipaul turns to history for explanations of our present condition and for reassurance that what happens to the individual is not the result of mere cosmic whimsy. In articles such as 'A New King for the Congo' (*New York Review of Books*, 26 June 1975), which introduces many details that appear in *A Bend in the River*, Naipaul captures the absurdity and chaos he perceives as the lot of men in both former colonial and metropolitan societies. One of the goals of his fiction is to impose

order on the chaos; the narrator of *A Bend in the River*, Salim, seems to share in this longing. He keeps before the reader an awareness of the slave trade that was conducted in his part of Africa; he frequently recollects the other settlers and other eras at the bend of the Congo River where he becomes a shopkeeper; and he records the attempts of a European priest, Father Huismans, to preserve both the African and the European past of the area. But ultimately Salim fails to find in history or in the past the order or the reassurance he needs. The history of his family and of his people, Muslim migrants to Africa's east coast from the north of India, does not exist: 'the past was simply the past'. Neither is there an adequate recorded history of his part of Africa. Discussions at the home of a historian, Raymond, suggest that it may not be possible to preserve the truth of events even if one can discover that truth at the time they occur. And so, in the end, Salim must relinquish his vision of the past simply to live and do what is expected of him. He learns from his old friend Indar (who tragically renounces his own teaching) that one must 'trample on the past'. And he learns from his love affair with Raymond's young wife Yvette that neither pleasure nor pain really matters: 'men were born only to grow old, to live out their span, to acquire experience'.

In this book the bleakness of Naipaul's vision is more than the result of his awareness of the dilemma of the post-colonial world in which all men seem rootless, without values and goals. The book is a complex investigation of the many types of dependence men place themselves in; a love affair is seen to be a form of enslavement and both are compared to relations between metropolis and colony in complex patterns of imagery. But Naipaul goes further to investigate the possibility of discovering the essence of truth or reality. After Salim's experience of jail and his observation of tortures there, he states the ambivalent attitude many of Naipaul's characters hold toward their bodies:

In a cell like mine you very quickly become aware of your body. You can grow to hate your body. And your body is all you have: this was the curious thought that kept floating up through my rage.

Not only in jail or in physical danger but in all situations, Naipaul seems to say, man can be certain of nothing but his own physical existence and that in itself makes him terribly vulnerable.

His civilizations are also vulnerable. When Salim arrives in England, he finds that European civilization is 'shrunk and mean and forbidding', threatened by the oil wealth of the Arabs. Past settlements at the bend in the river show that the situation of any society is precarious, subject to new threats; all that remains constant is the bush with its primitive vitality which Salim senses when he regards Huismans's collection of masks. A natural force, the hyacinths in the river, threaten to choke the river which has always been the highway of civilization into the bush. In the imagery of the novel the hyacinths bring different messages to Salim but always they are associated with the strength of primitive forces. It is, of course, at the same bend in the river that Conrad's Kurtz discovers 'the horror' in *Heart of Darkness*. Just as the hyacinths convey different messages at different times, so events of the past may be interpreted in many ways depending on the perspective of the historian. As the floating hyacinths are inexorable in their movement downriver, so is the progress of history, but both, Naipaul seems to suggest, lack a totally consistent and discoverable meaning. Furthermore, because the study of history is associated with civilized, highly organized societies, and the hyacinths with primitive, natural, or bush forces which threaten to overwhelm the precariously

sited outposts of progress, the hope that history can provide enduring comfort by ordering chaos, explaining the present through investigation of the past is denigrated.

Having considered history and come to question what actually is real, what is the truth, Salim decides that even the questions are pointless; all that matters is going on. And yet the effect of the book is less discouraging than this might suggest. In the first place, the characters are much more likeable than those of, for instance, *Guerrillas*, the novel published before *A Bend in the River*. Furthermore, in reading V. S. Naipaul's fiction, it is impossible to remain unaware of the creative presence behind the narrator. *A Bend in the River* is a brilliantly unified and coherent book, one in which an apparently straightforward narrative masks very complex patterns of imagery. Naipaul's readers are rewarded by discovery of the creative intelligence that controls and orders the raw materials which Naipaul records more objectively in his capacity as a journalist.

MARGARET NIGHTINGALE

Cyril Dabydeen, *Distances*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1977. 22 pages. \$2.00.

Cyril Dabydeen, *Goatsong*. Mosaic Press/ Valley Editions, 1977. 34 pages. \$3.25.

Cyril Dabydeen, *Heart's Frame*. Vesta Publications, 1979. 73 pages. \$4.50.

Cyril Dabydeen is a Guyanese writer, teacher and critic who came to Canada as a student in 1974 after having taught elementary school in Guyana for some years. He obtained degrees in English and Public Administration and is now living in Ottawa, where he has taught communication at a community college. Before leaving Guyana he published one volume of poetry, *Poems in Recession* (Sadeek Press, Georgetown, Guyana, 1972). In Canada, apart from the above volumes, his poems and short stories have appeared in many of the literary magazines, and another volume of poetry, *This Planet Earth* (Borealis Press) has now been published.

Distances is a slim volume with an unattractive front cover which would be acceptable as an illustration for a book about unemployment in the industrial Midlands but does not have much to do with Dabydeen's poems of tropical growth and decay. The poems in this volume deal with the poet's roots, with the experiences of his childhood and youth, and with the difficulty of adjusting in a new country. There are closely observed scenes of emotion, poems about writing poetry, and ones in which the poet registers his own thoughts and actions. 'Poet Speaks to the House' with its concise language, clear structure and pointed conclusion is a successful example of the latter, whereas a poem like 'Rat-catcher' seems too personal for the reader to decipher. The best poems in this volume are those which, like 'Maestro' and 'The Fat Men', concentrate atmosphere, people and memory into images so full of meaning that they transcend time and place. In this volume Dabydeen's strength lies in his mastery of language and his ability to present scenes from his native Guyana through precise short sentences and careful observation.

His world is on the one hand the hot and humid coastal regions where birth and death, growth and decay are simultaneously present, with glimpses back into history and myth which bring to mind Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, and on the other hand Canada where he is the immigrant. In 'This Is It' he sounds almost like Margaret Atwood, but other Canadian poems show that he stands on his own feet in Canada as well. Images and language at times run away with the poet but in many of the better poems there is a competent handling of the material and an attitude which reminds the reader of V. S. Naipaul.

hewn to the pith
 you become the axe-
 man aware of the
 tribe's dialect.

These lines from 'Anthem', the last poem in *Goatsong*, can be used about Cyril Dabydeen both in his Guyanese poems and in his poems about immigrants in Canada, in which more than in *Distances* he has found the dialect of his tribe. Themes and images from *Distances* recur in *Goatsong*: the father-bull figure, the waiting mother, the Guyanese village people, the suicide theme, the adjustment process of the immigrant, but there is more 'singing' as announced in 'Goatsong', and the imagery is more controlled than in *Distances*. 'Taurus', 'Absences' and 'Trail' are good examples of how the poet has brought more emotion and less cool observation into his poems, there is humour and vitality (cf. the Dylan Thomas influence), and also social commitment.

As the poem 'Encounter' tells us the Guyana we see is not the paradise world of *Green Mansions*, but a world full of snakes. There are idyllic village scenes, but they are juxtaposed with very personal poems about the poet's family which breathe protest against the violence and resignation. Yet, as the poems of transition show, this world still draws the emigrant who with two countries belongs nowhere. In this volume Guyana still seems to weigh heavier in his imagination than Canada and gives rise to a father-figure with mythical proportions, whereas many of the Canadian poems are observations by an outsider. Like the poems in *Distances* the observations are accurate, at times ironic, but with a tendency just to place things in front of the reader to look at. With the poems about immigrants Dabydeen joins what is almost becoming a genre by itself in Canada, 'black literature in Canada', dealing with the life of West Indian, Asian and African immigrants.

In *Heart's Frame* Cyril Dabydeen develops themes from his earlier books, going deeper both into his Guyanese past, his British colonial heritage, and his present Canadian immigrant existence. The book is divided into three parts:

'Open Spaces' which creates a mythology of the Guyanese coastal region in which the Guyanese tropical rain forest and savanna become part of a mythical universe at times reminiscent of Dylan Thomas' world, the Greek myths, and of native legends;

'Shapes and Shadows', a series of portraits and encounters;

'Tropics' which contains a more personal picture of Guyana, seen and remembered by someone who lives between two worlds.

A few lines from 'Replenish the Day' give the essence of the first part of the book, 'Open Spaces':

Replenish the day
with myth solidifying meaning
at the firm edge of memory

In 'Open Spaces' a fertile new/ancient world region teeming with life is given shape and meaning through the opposite elements of sun and rain. In Dabydeen's world the land and the people on it are exposed to elements which rule them as the Greek gods ruled their world. Man and nature in unity experience the dryness, hardness, strength, white light of the Sun god, a god who in Aztec and Inca times, i.e. in the past civilizations of the American Indians, was powerful and glorious, but who is seen by the present inhabitants as a power which must be endured until release comes with the rain. The sun gives associations of aloofness and hard brick walls, whereas the rain, the soft ground, the moon and stars bring closeness, touch, love. Through modern 'fairytales' and legends man's unity with this sun/rain world is shaped into a mythology where the opposites co-exist and balance. The balance is seen in the one of the last poems in this group entitled 'Solid Light':

Solid light
night — sun
flames — waves
rock hard — opening ourselves to wounds

almost give a summary of the imagery 'Open Spaces' is built on and which personified becomes the god figures in the myth.

'Shapes and Shadows' consists of encounters and portraits from Canada, Guyana, and Europe. The poet is in these poems an acute, sensitive observer of his surroundings, who through his use of language and imagery recreates characters and situations. He writes poems of social commitment about the immigrants, the Native Indians, the poor, and he explores his own situation as an immigrant with roots in another world. In the poems about women there is more genuine emotion and less of the uncommitted distanced attitude found in his earlier poems. There is less unity in this part than in the other two due to the self-contained nature of these poems.

The poem 'Song' from the third section 'Tropics' links this group to 'Open Spaces' through its sun-moon, hardness-softness imagery. This imagery ties the poems of all three sections together and gives the more personal poems of 'Tropics' an added dimension, linking the fates of the individuals to the mythology of the country. Scenes from the Aboriginal Indian past, the European conquest, the poet's childhood, and the lives of Guyanese in Canada are all seen on the background of a country whose nature has shaped its people's identity.

There is more unity in this collection of poems than in the two earlier volumes, the poems reveal a remarkable sense of language without the somewhat artificial dictionary words and neat phrases which could be found occasionally in the earlier poems, and above all, there is a greater richness of themes and more exuberance in this volume.

INGER HASTRUP

Ediriweera Sarachchandra, *Curfew and a Full Moon*. A Novel about Sri Lanka, translated from the original Sinhala by the author. Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., *Writing in Asia* series, 1978. 223 pages.

In his novel *Curfew and a Full Moon* (his first fictional work to appear in English translation), Sarachchandra writes of Sri Lanka in April 1971, a time when an insurgent insurrection created a period of national emergency in the island. The story is set in the University campus at Peradeniya, where the author had himself held the Chair of Modern Sinhalese Literature, and its central character is a university don, a professor of archaeology, who finds his view of life and of himself profoundly changed by the experiences of 1971. Professor Amaradasa is thoughtful and sensitive, but his training has taught him to live in the past, when life (as he imagines it to have been) was ordered and beautiful. His sympathy for his students, some of whom are among the insurgents, forces him to face the ugly realities of life outside his tranquil intellectual retreat. The incidents in the novel correspond very closely to the nightmarish events that were kept out of Sri Lanka's censored newspapers but were made common knowledge by the ramifications of the island's local grapevine and have been confirmed by official documentation.

The novel does not itself strive for documentary realism, however. Sarachchandra's interest (like Lloyd Fernando's in writing of Malaysia in *Scorpion Orchid*) is chiefly in the crisis of conscience through which 'Professor Amaradasa' must go before, at the end of the book, he joins the insurgents in their struggle to establish a new society. Although the novel is narrated in the third person, the action is viewed through his eyes, for the most part, as is the setting: in an experiment that does not quite succeed, Sarachchandra adopts strikingly figurative language, replete with elaborate simile and metaphor in the tradition of classical Sanskritized Sinhala literature to depict Peradeniya's lush landscape as it appears to the studious Amaradasa. In its attempt to deal in fiction with social change in the island, *Curfew and a Full Moon* must stand with Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*, Martin Wickremasinghe's Sinhala novel *Gam Peraliya* (*Change in the Village*) and Punyakante Wijenaike's *Giraya*. It is also a personal, valedictory poem written for an academic community that was once a true centre of learning and life.

YASMINE GOONERATNE

Albert Wendt, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*. Longman Paul, 1979. \$12.95.

In 1974 came from these same publishers Albert Wendt's brilliant and daemonic novella in the stories of that title, 'Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree'. Now, five years later, that gem reappears, in a complex setting, as the heart of this three-part novel, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*.

It is preceded by Part One, 'God, Money, and Success' — the title of his father Taui-lopepe's 'Truly Inspired' (chap. 9) sermon — narrating Taui-lopepe's rise to power over the village Sapepe and his acquisition and establishment of a large new plantation, *Leaves of*

the Banyan Tree. It is, in turn, succeeded (for his son, Pepesa, is about to die at the end of 'Flying-Fox') by Part Three, 'Funerals and Heirs'. In this Tauilopepe attempts to establish succession of the estate in his grandson but, as he preaches again, in the very pulpit of the grandiose church he has built as memorial to Pepesa, yet another heart attack cuts him down and, by ingenious plotting, the spoiled young heir is disinherited and the fruits of a strenuous life-time go to the amoral, emotionless, existential anti-hero Galupo, 'Wave of the Night'; he is Tauilopepe's bastard by a local store-keeper's wife brutally begotten at the end of Part One. On the final page, Galupo 'let the tingling bubble up from the earth into his toes and up into his belly. Then, like sweet coconut milk, it surged up his chest and throat and out of his mouth. And he laughed for the power and the glory was his. Now.'

'Flying-Fox' is an irregular tessellation of highly symbolically titled parts — 'The Pink House in Town', 'A Haunted House in the Town', 'Trial of the Native Son' — unnumbered and told in laconic first person narrative by Pepesa dying of TB in the sanatorium. 'Outside the hospital window the bald-headed men are feeding their fire' of 'meat, guts, bits and pieces of people from the surgery department'. Their presence commences and concludes the story, and, just in case you do not recognize the allusion to Matthew xiii, 40-42 ('...so shall it be in the end of this world') the section 'Last Will and Testament of the Flying-Fox' (from which it is not far to 'Exit') contains his friend Tagata's (the 'Flying-Fox') farewell letter headed 'Judgement Day'. Contrariwise to the evidently uncalculated *brío*, *rubato*, *sforzando* of this brief core (only seventy-three out of four hundred and thirteen pages), the numbered, calculated, carefully expository chapters of Part One, and the similar overtly developmental aftermath of Part Three cannot but in some degree become insipid, lacking in more than mere focus and concentration. This unfortunate contrast is further enforced by the absence of Pepe's mild argot and flavoursome first person narrative and its substitution by an omniscient narrator who, like the 'eye of God' — surely hardly fitting in this existential world? — presents carefully formulated documentation ('The Price of Copra', 'Orators and Gold', 'The Wage Battle', 'Business Men and Con-Men Celebrate' are some chapters) and methodical plot.

Leaves, in its origins (according to an interview in *World Literature Written in English*, April 1977), dates from about 1963 and has been cut from 'originally about 1,000 pages'. *Leaves* is also 'probably the only long novel I'll ever write; it was a large hunk of my life, some twelve years' and it is Wendt's earliest attempt at long fiction of any kind, even ante-dating his first novel, *Sons for the Return Home* (1973). It curiously, then, blends both developed and undeveloped skills, both early and, possibly changing, later values.

There can be no doubt that, from Apia to Moresby, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* is the finest sustained work of fiction yet from the South Pacific; to me the contrast in the internal divisions is still marked.

What, as a Western reader, I find most disturbing here in Wendt's created rural and urban Samoa of three generations is an almost total lack of what I, at any rate, recognize as 'humanity'. This is not merely the absence of Europe's (rightly?) cherished 'individuality' which seems so frequently absent from typical 'third world' ethos and fiction of 'situation'. It is the almost total absence in Samoan and 'palagified' worlds alike of any softness, gentleness, of 'love'. This is a heavy macho world of fights, fucks and, through the *palagi*, finance. I realize Wendt's polemical purpose is indeed to show 'independent' Samoa 'as it really is'. But I can no more credit the deep truth of this picture than I can,

say, of the '30s New Zealand in John Mulgan's even more simplistically polemic (and 'truthful') *Man Alone* (with which one can profitably contrast, say, Robin Hyde's same country at the same time in *The Godwits Fly*; in the Polynesian world a *possible* similar contrast might be the very obvious 'humanity' in Patricia Grace). Simply, I think Albert Wendt's early, continuing, and selfless commitment to serving the arts in the political arena of the South Pacific over many years now has made him — like Tauiilopepe! — substitute (in how different a cause!) unconscious sermon for sincerity and, for creativity, (honest) propaganda. The characters demonstrate a thesis, the plot likewise.

I cannot help wondering also how relevant may possibly be Chinua Achebe's portrayal of the world of the Nigerian Ibo and its lop-sided exponent Okonkwo in his marvellous *Things Fall Apart*, sub-titled in America 'The Story of a Strong Man' and that most remarkable (from Achebe!) reference in its Chapter 16: 'Then the missionaries burst into song ... one of those gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism which had the power of plucking at *silent and dusty chords in the heart of an Ibo man*' (my italics).

Quite early, in plot and in final sentence of *Sons For the Return Home*, Albert Wendt's debt to Albert Camus became apparent. In the interview cited he says 'I was made for Camus. I read Camus in high school and re-read him even now.' This becomes interestingly overt through the later chapters of 'Funerals and Heirs' in the speeches of Galupo — 'My mind is also the best, the most devious, the most heartless that papalagi books have produced in our sad country' — who in one place ('A Most Expensive Gift') appears to conflate Camus and Sartre (*Caligule* and *Kean?*), later quotes Camus in a context apt for Oceania — 'The opposition here is between magnificent human anarchy and the permanence of the unchanging sea' — and tragically affirms to himself 'all that was permanent and true was the darkness within, a darkness as beautiful as this sea, a darkness out of which all truth and power and glory sprang'. This is not what I understand Pepesa to mean when, in 'Trial of the Native Son', before the sexless Black-Dress *palagi* judge he affirms, 'I have the darkness and myself'. It does, though, fit the name given Galupo by his vengeful ruined mother. The 'philosophy' that powers Galupo, is fascinatingly outlined in Chapter 14, 'The Mythology of Night-Wave' (what a book-list on p. 366! — Camus, Dostoevsky, Japanese pornography, Dreiser, Borges, etc.!) who sees all others as 'Other-Worlders' and Fallen. True enough, and yet in that final chapter, 'The Time and the Place', the milky triumph (*Oedipal?* there is much to substantiate this) of that final page already quoted yields him only '...*But you were correct in not loving anyone, in not believing in that sentimental Other-World crap. Love is a weakness*'. And, next page, 'I am also ... *a product of the history and whole movement propelling our country towards an unknown future. Or, shall I say, I am that future...*' Not only obtrusive and theatrical but — *false?*

In *Islands* 26 Peter Crisp, reviewing Wendt's outstanding second novel *Pouliuli* ('Albert Wendt: Pathways to Darkness') writes quite brilliantly of the force of Wendt's emergent themes — love betrayed, anti-hero, darkness. In *Leaves*, Wendt's earliest fiction in origin thought not in publication, there seems to me uneasy compromise between the promise of such radical depths and the dominance of surface realism (generalized) and a world of *realpolitik*, both, humanly and aesthetically to me less than adequate.

And yet, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, in sustained power of writing, sweep of incident, skill of plot is a view of the South Pacific — humourless, loveless, or not — that must be read and reckoned with. That great banyan tree may be cardboard, the climactic hurricane a matter of sound effects, and all characterization cramped into one obsessive

doctrinal over-riding pattern, yet the detail of island life, the undoubted realities of *palagi* exploitation, bigotry, and worse together with the heat, the plantation, the sea, the scenery, the night — all these do create a time, a place, the *victims*, with an authority that ensures this book a permanent place. As an impertinent — and ignorant — outsider I must acknowledge competence and commitment — but as reader of novels I regret the terms of that commitment.

PETER ALCOCK

Patrick White, *The Twyborn Affair*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1979.

It was Pascal who remarked that the last act is always the bloodiest, and Patrick White's last novel, *The Twyborn Affair*, is certainly painful, even more so than most of his works which have been, in all conscience, painful enough. For what is at issue here is the spectacle of a man wrestling in public with his own soul. There is nothing else but this and in the event, he is defeated. In conventional aesthetic terms, the novel makes a poor showing: the story-line is discontinuous, confusing and often boring, while the tone is self-indulgent, often offensively so, the characters are stylized, more often targets for the novelist's desire to prove a point than centres of interest and exploration, and the wide range of narrative device, ranging from conventional third person narrative through snatches of dramatic dialogue, interior monologue and — as we have come to expect from White — dream sequences, draws attention to itself, suggesting a novelist who has fallen victim to his own virtuosity.

Why, then, should anyone be expected to pay much attention to this novel? Because, I suggest, the artist may be the Early Warning System of History, because this novel may have a grim predictive value which we might all pay attention to. White has always had a great deal to say about and to Australian culture which it seems he has never been able either to live with or do without, but now it may be he presents a picture more universally significant. The Australian may be the type of everyman, in the sense of A. D. Hope's poem, 'Australia', a poem often quoted but little understood, even perhaps by the poet himself, when he characterized Australians as

...the ultimate men
Whose boast is not We live; but we survive,
The type which will inhabit the dying earth.

Thus in its own way *The Twyborn Affair* resembles Naipaul's new novel, *A Bend In the River* which equally implies that the colonial situation of disinheritance provides a general image of contemporary man, condemned to live in a world in which everywhere 'men are in movement, the world is in movement and the past can cause only pain since present and future seemed to be filled with violence and savagery'. But where Naipaul still holds on to some belief in civilization and its values, paying tribute to them in the coherence and shapeliness of the form he devises to tell his story of disintegration, White seems to have lost this belief. His novel concludes inconclusively on a savage note with the

death of his protagonist in the blitz and with the novelist seeming to rejoice not only in this death which is not seen as a release into the world elsewhere which is posited in White's other works but as a relapse into nothingness, from the pain of existence he/she and, it seems, the novelist himself, is no longer able to bear but also to rejoice in the end of what we call civilization. Thus the novelist delights in the violence 'happening in the city its inhabitants thought belonged to them' (p. 429) and in the way in which the paraphernalia of civilization is destroyed: 'it seemed to Eddie Twyborn as though his own share in time were snatched away as though every house he had ever lived in were torn open, the sawdust pouring out of all the dolls in all the rooms ... a few broken bars of a Chabrier waltz scattered from the burst piano' (p. 429).

The defeat here, in fact, though at first it seems to be merely personal — Eadith/Eddie Twyborn is the first of White's protagonists since Elyot and Eden in *The Living and the Dead* to fail to achieve some kind of apotheosis — occurs on a larger scale. White makes a great deal of play here of the pain of being Australian, taking the Australian not only of the type of the suspended man, suspended between belonging and alienation between the aesthetic and the moral and between the two sides of the self, the masculine and the feminine, but also as the type of Protean man¹ who is unable to take or hold any one definite shape of identity but is the victim rather than the master of historical circumstances and physical environment and thus he also suggests that the Australian is thus the type of contemporary man. In previous novels he was prepared to escape in two ways from the consequences of this insight, escaping into the past, into personal memory as a mode of reassurance, and into an ideal of a world of art which is somehow exempt from the pressures of history. Now, however, there is no such escape. The career of his protagonist echoes his own — oscillating between the two sides of the world, involved in a love affair with Greece but also with the Australian landscape, someone from a privileged Australian background who disdains what that background implies yet is equally uneasy in the West End of London. Moreover, what the story tells about is a series of betrayals, of oneself and of others and its aesthetic form is altogether deficient.

What, then, is the significance of this story? In traditional aesthetic terms as we have said it has little significance, and could be dismissed as a failure, an unfortunate and perhaps self-indulgent aberration in the career of a novelist who has always so far given aesthetics a good deal to talk about. But in larger terms it becomes much more significant precisely on account of the way in which it refuses to go on playing according to the rules invoked by traditional criticism. Like its equivalents in the plastic arts, *The Twyborn Affair* dismantles itself, becomes a 'happening' which invades the life of the reader, demanding that he or she participate in something which is no longer a game but in deadly earnest, the experience of becoming someone 'looking at (his) reflection in the glass ... (trying) to convince (himself) of an existence most people take for granted' (p. 221). Then, all sorts of disturbing things begin to occur: identity, even sexual identity, is no longer something to be taken for granted — the protagonist begins as a woman, turns into a man and then back into a woman, to become a man again in the last moments of the story. Nor are the conventional definitions of good and evil adequate, though very clearly good and evil exist and indeed, matter significantly. What we are asked to do is follow the intuition of Rimbaud and, indeed, of some of the greatest philosophers and mystics, to the end, to accept that what is outrageous, whatever it is which costs us most pain to conceive, may be the truth, and to learn to live with the truth. Thus, the image of the artist which emerges here is that of the bawd, Eadith Trist whose brothel becomes her 'work of art (with) its reflexions, its melting colours, the more material kitchen quarters,

the less and more material girls she was bringing together, each skilled in one or the other modes of human depravity' (p. 322). Nor does this necessarily express cynicism. Eadith Trist's work rescues her life and perhaps also her clients' lives from meaninglessness, and if this seems outrageous to conventional morality, then so much the worse for conventional morality. Though her house exists 'for purposes the world considers immoral', Eadith reflects that these purposes may also be seen as 'aesthetic — oh yes, and immoral, we know — but no more so than morality can often be. Better to burn than suppurate' (p. 377).

And this perhaps constitutes the significance of *The Twyborn Affair*, the decision to burn rather than suppurate, to attempt to express a vision which perhaps means the end of what we have come to define as civilization and its values. In terms of these values, it is not a successful novel, representing at best an aspect of that movement towards silence which George Steiner suggests flows through the most significant art of this century. One can only hope that these values hold. If not, then this is a novel whose conclusions are likely to return to plague us and our complacencies.

VERONICA BRADY

NOTES

1. A phrase coined by the American social psychologist, R. F. Lifton.

R. Shepherd & K. Singh, eds., *Patrick White: a Critical Symposium*. CRNLE, Flinders, 1978. 142 pages. A\$6.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche says, in celebration of Aeschylean Prometheus:

Man raising himself in titanic proportions makes his culture his own through strife, and compels the gods to unite with him because he grasps their existence within his very own wisdom.

The imagination of Patrick White is of this titanic order. His works permit an infinity of approaches and, whilst yielding fruit, yet baffle and elude attempts to circumscribe them in a pat exegesis. The critical essay in which the novelist is being tested turns out, in the end, to have been a testing of the critics, scholars, intelligences, sympathies which engaged in it. In his case scholarly activity only fitfully illumines what it examines. At best it offers a scrawled treasure map, or a briefing on manners and ritual: but always is itself illuminated and elucidated. This above all is what struck your reviewer of this excellent volume, the

Twitching Colonel' in the light of Indian philosophies); by David Tacey (a politically based and as such enlightening reading of *Big Toys*); by May Brit Akerholt (a confident and adroit reading of Jungian allegory in the *Four Plays*); by Cynthia Vanden Dreisen (listing and expounding the successful strategies of Patrick White as religious propagandist); and by Manly Johnson (an essentially allegorical reading of *A Fringe of Leaves* in the light of Vergil and other traditional gurus) – it seems to me that all these papers, invaluable as may be the insights they incidentally unlock, fall into a trap of allegorising what are metaphorical events and must continue to be looked on as such if they are to remain interrogable.

The danger of allegorising a symbolic novel lies in treating its purport as crystallised, as something fixed (albeit 'difficult') that may be translated off, or out of, or – alas – into, the narrative. But Patrick White's art is metaphoric: the purport of each work has to be *armed* by living through the temporal unfolding, in bony syntax and the textured tissue of style, of a fictional, a *told* experience. Allegory essentially ignores the HOW of art as a gross ladder to higher meaning which is to be kicked away as soon as it has served its purpose; metaphor insists on HOW's primacy and is rooted in the word that compels perception.

And so it seems to me that those essays which are turned, like humble seismographs, on to the recording of regular irregularities in structure and texture come nearest to affording real access to what is going on, and, by their very attentiveness to the actuality of word and page, do justice to both text and reader. David Kelly's close analysis of structural strategies in two chapters of *The Eye of the Storm* opens up true insights, and moreover offers critical tools for further exploration. Paul M. St. Pierre confidently demonstrates how a group of those recurrent metaphors in which fictional incidents are solidified (e.g. tunnel, spiral, eye, etc.) also function as a symbolic code of knots in a hidden net of meaning – in this case a meditation on the nature of time, of ends and beginnings – which delineates the contours of that living vision which ultimately articulates the narrative. Veronica Brady reminds us of this in her excellent summation of the seminar. Finally, she says, the goal of the critic is 'to discover the underlying sense of life, the passionate response from which (the work) arose initially'. In this light, everything within the uttered world of art coheres, everything is eloquent. And yet, I would suggest, it is not to be apprehended or examined – let alone judged – entire in a single overview. Only apprehensions like St. Pierre's of structured reticulations within the linguistic plenitude of White's prose permit the sudden authoritative glimpse of that gleaming living thing with its mindless eye, its power and its glory, 'ritually coiling and uncoiling', which such reticulations are stretched to contain and delineate.

The linguistic nets in White's art are metaphoric. Michael Cotter's paper on 'The Function of Imagery in Patrick White's Novels' founders on the reefs of indistinct critical terminology. Since one and the same lexical item may – according to its context or 'horizon' in Veronica Brady's phrase – assume a function as either image, metaphor, symbol, or allegorical sign, it is vital to

record of papers read at a Critical Symposium on Patrick White at Flinders University of South Australia in April 1977.

The reader – however expert and intelligent – whose Ariadne's thread into the labyrinth of White's prose is the reality of the understood and social world, necessarily dooms himself to irritation. For example: the puzzle of White's characters appears to have dominated the discussion. Nearly every paper touches upon it, and the student is given an invaluable opportunity to respond to a large variety of promptings from his or her own experience of the novels. Adrian Mitchell's model of character as entity, socially interactive, evolving, making things happen according to his goodwill and capability – the model inherited from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries –, is at variance with alternative perceptions of character, such as the mystic intuition of fluid ego boundaries, and the heroic conception of character as self-fuel. More appropriate angles on this critical problem are offered by Veronica Brady's vision of character as the crucible of 'intense moral passion' in interaction with the circumambient Other, and by Kirpal Singh's reminder of the Aristotelian emphasis on character as 'a function of action, and not vice versa'.

Patrick White himself illuminates the creative process in *The Vivisector*. He records a life lived in confusion, guilt and change, yet always engaged in active interrogation of meaning by the senses and by the creative hand: that is, self-perceiving, self-uttering. The point reached with the indigo vision at the end is central. It is Nothing, hollow as the hub of a wheel; yet seen from this end point the labyrinthine dance of Hurtle's life sets and becomes Mandala, that is, Meaning. The conception here revealed of being as 'a becoming through time' is beautifully expounded in W. D. Ashcroft's masterly essay on 'More than One Horizon'. That the meaning of Hurtle's life is one which has been artfully contrived by his author is of course a key irony which blows the mind with divine laughter (– and where, by the way, is White's titanic laughter in all these rather dour discussions?). The absurd paradox of Hurtle-painting-the-indigo-eye/being-painted-by-the-demiurgic-obvi-indiggoddd, has been novelistically contrived by an author who is – in a perspective which has become all mirror, all eye – in turn being penned by obvi- WHOM?

The relationship, and the tensions, between the world disclosed by the senses; the various explanations with which we 'understand' it; the art that structures it into new perceived and uttered meanings; and the reality disclosed by means of this mutually interrogative process; is at the heart of the White scholar's problem, and at the root of his confusions. It is for their sufficient distancing from the novelistic, mimetic reality that the papers of Veronica Brady (e.g. 'White's tenderness arises more from relationships between the novelist and reader and the characters in the novel, rather than between the characters themselves'), W. D. Ashcroft and Kirpal Singh bite more deeply into both meaning and craft than those who read the mimesis trustfully as a slice of life. Thus it seems to me that the papers by Ron Shepherd (on 'The

differentiate between these functions and the worlds of experience which they energise. The two-pronged metaphor, which energises patterns of meaningfulness, relies on the solidity of the illusions called up by it. W. D. Ashcroft's paper discusses this problem with sureness and authority. Only from solid, honest flint (the world of the senses) can the spark of meaning, or 'transcendence', be struck. Image is flint. Image struck on image, in the instantaneous subliminal shock of metaphor, sparks meaning. But metaphor is a fugitive thing at the mercy of cultural context and habit, dependent on shared experience and attentive attunement of poet and reader. This arbitrariness is shorted in the true symbol. Symbolic metaphors are fixed, yet fluid. The raw flint of symbol sparks in the unconscious, and energises cultural memories beyond our conscious powers of attention and recall.

In commanding such automatic potencies (compare the 'gods' mentioned in the Nietzsche quotation!) the poet may be the conscious, initiate transmitter of a received gnosis; he may be 'inspired'; it is more reasonable, however, to assume, with Kirpal Singh, that in our day he must become an alchemist and a savant. Certainly the critic who would expound him cannot afford to be less than humbly scholarly and respectful in face of the 'extraordinary range of philosophic, mystic, literary and theological systems, schools and traditions' through which symbolic gnosis must be pursued, as Kirpal Singh suggests, by poet and critic alike in our desacralised culture. Critical discussion of symbol systems is fertile, indeed essential; but it needs to be backed by immersion in comparative studies. To be sure, there are shortcuts via William James and Jung, but they offer attenuated vistas. Jung's vast researches into the literature of alchemy, in particular, yielded a catalogue of symbols which undoubtedly ignited Patrick White and many others. They also produced an ad hoc psychological interpretation which is, by its very nature, somewhat reductive, limited, biased. It is my own feeling – which I must record – that 'individuation' is an inadequate formulation of the mystic goal and of the impulse underlying White's poesis, whatever its value in the substitute alternative rigidities of structure. The best, to my mind, simply attend to what is there – both on the page and in their own intelligent responses – and record the process with the honest instruments of their trade.

The volume is invaluable to the academic student of Patrick White and must be highly recommended.

ANNEMARIE HEYWOOD

Randolph Stow, *Visitants*. Secker & Warburg, 1979. £5.50.

Randolph Stow, *The Girl Green As Elderflower*. Secker & Warburg, 1980. £5.50.

Two or three of Randolph Stow's previous novels, published almost twenty years ago, are classics of Australian literature. His readers have cherished them through the author's long 'counterfeit silence' in the hope that one day he would break it. The wait has been worthwhile. With two novels published in quick succession, Randolph Stow has surpassed his readers' expectations and confirmed his reputation as one of the most gifted and original novelists now using the English language.

Because Stow is a poet as well as a novelist, his fiction is sometimes described as 'poetic'. There is a truth in this, but it is a misleading description if it suggests that his novels are made for heightened prose which aspires to poetry. His sense of tone is too discriminating for that, though he does have a rare gift for lyrical fiction. But these new novels are controlled by an essentially fictionalizing imagination which has explored the outer reaches of human experience and returned with disturbing, but now also, regenerative visions. The re-integrative power of this imagination is, in fact, a main theme of *The Girl Green As Elderflower*, which charts its operation with more truth and insight than any of the recently fashionable novels which grandiloquently but disrespectfully play with fiction as a subject.

However, Randolph Stow's novels are usually composed with the delicate precision and subtlety of poems, and demand attentive reading, but this does not make them obscure or difficult, for the reader is induced to enter them through a language which is at once transparent and low-keyed while it is exact and evocative. Both *Visitants* and *The Girl Green As Elderflower* are short, and in their different ways, intricately constructed. They are dense and richly suggestive; yet Stow sacrifices surprisingly little to gain compression. Narrative sequence is respected but not allowed to dominate the establishing of other relations of image, symbol, allusion and mythic suggestion by which these stories evoke wonder, and all is delivered in an understated style which preserves a respect for the power of imagination and is the final touch of art which conceals art. The brevity of these books is the outcome of deep contemplation by an artist who has explored the frontiers of his vision without exhausting it or imposing and interpretation upon the world he discovers. His awe for the forces he releases is too great for that, and he modestly contrives to end both books on similar disclaimers by the twelfth century chronicler, William of Newburgh.

The two novels are different in many ways and illustrate the diversity of his genius. Yet they have a common pre-occupation with the creation of myths and the awesome power (and solace) they can bring into focus.

Visitants dramatizes this pre-occupation by interweaving the accounts of a number of witnesses to a cargo cult outbreak on a Papuan island at the edge of the Solomon Sea. It is, obviously, a perfect subject for a writer concerned with mythomorphic processes and Stow handles it brilliantly, gradually revealing the transformation of western history in the region — from the arrival of d'Entrecasteaux to the aftermath of the war against Japan and the apparition of U.F.O.'s — into a myth of terrifying destructiveness. Incorporated into this are accounts of Islanders and whites clashing, or trying to relate to each other and come to terms with themselves. Stow's gift for projecting himself into the world and minds of the Islanders (three of whom tell more than half the story) is completely

convincing and relocates the reader's cultural perspective so that he is led to see the whites as 'visitants' and the horrors which result from their presence as a revelation of the darkness in civilized man's own nature. The comparison with Conrad is obvious, but should not be pressed to the point of overshadowing the different merits of *Visitants*, and it must be said at once that in some ways it is a better book than *Heart of Darkness*; in the controlled tone of its telling, in its carefully integrated patterning, in the deeper potential of Stow's myth and his insistence in following it to its grim conclusion.

Throughout *Visitants*, with his acknowledged gift for unobtrusive descriptive writing, Randolph Stow vividly evokes the Melanesian Islands and the seas around them. His books have always been imbued with a strong sense of place, and in *The Girl Green As Elderflower* it is a prominent theme. But the place is not a frontier of western civilization, like the dessicated world of *Tourmaline*, the fabled Australia of *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* or the lush tropical islands of the South West Pacific, but 'seely Suffolk' to which two of the characters drink a toast in the closing sentence of the book. In Suffolk the protagonist, Crispin Clare, does not disintegrate, the victim of dark forces, but rather discovers in the legends and folklore of this well-trodden region the means to re-integration. The book is therefore in some respects the opposite of *Visitants*; lighter in tone, pervaded by deftly underplayed humour and peopled by mainly beneficent (or at least neutral) spirits. *Visitants* comes equipped with an epigraph from *The Tempest*, from which Randolph Stow also took the epigraph to his very first novel, *A Haunted Land*, but the allusion is equally relevant to *The Girl Green As Elderflower* with its wild man, ethereal sprites and emphasis on regeneration and the power of art.

The Girl Green As Elderflower is centred in the family and stands in the same relation to *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* as *Visitants* does to *Tourmaline* (though the parallel cannot be pushed very far). Through family, the region and its houses are linked to the past, and in various local versions of the past, but particularly in three twelfth-century Latin chronicles, Crispin reads wondrous stories which become transformed into family legends. These are interwoven with the account of his slow recovery through half a year, from New Year's Day to midsummer, and his engagement with the recently bereft branch of his family, to create a restorative myth, mysteriously resonant, like the bells of Bury, which chime through the book, calling the children of the Antipodes.

BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS

The New Quarterly Cave (vol. I, 1-4; vol. II, 1-4) and *Pacific Quarterly Moana* (vol. III, 1-4; vol. IV, 1-4) 1976-79. Published by Outrigger Publishers Ltd., 1 Von Tempsky Street, Hamilton, New Zealand. Edited by Norman Simms.

In *NQC* (vol. II, 3) Frederick C. Parmee expressed the hope that *NQC* would become 'wildly experimental' and that its contributors would explore every 'creative byway they could find', for what is (was) needed was the 'craziest creativity, devoid of any literary tradition' in order to achieve anything 'distinctly New Zealand'. Has this been achieved? It is true that variety characterizes *NQC*, but I am not so sure that variety is always such a good thing. *NQC* contains almost too much, and yet somehow too little: articles on Hungarian film, Chinese politics, and German

Berufsverbot; Australian cave paintings, realistic New Zealand stories and sketches, poems in English as well as poems in translation (Colombian, Brazilian, Turkish and Polish, Swedish and Swahili), traditional lit. crit., myths and legends.

What you can do in a review is to concentrate on the editorial policies of the quarterly and on some of the articles that relate themselves more or less explicitly to the editorial statements. From these sources one may hope to find out what are the principles for selecting the poems and articles actually published, and even hope to find out *for whom* *NQC* is published. In a Preface to vol. I, 4 we are informed that *NQC* is New Zealand based and that the intention is to 'promote the cause of living literature and culture in a wide sense'. By 'living' is meant the ideas and arts that play a 'vital part in the life and ideas of human society everywhere'. That is quite a mouthful, and who would not find it hard to say what it actually means to promote the cause of living literature — which cause, whose cause? There is no limit, then, to the topics that may be included ('ekistics' for example) as long as they are 'an international good' and as long as they may be read with 'profit'. In vol. II, 3 the editorial is even more explicit and says that *NQC* is based on a 'policy of multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism' and also that culture is seen as including 'all modes of human communication and expression'. (The motto for no. 3 comes from Hugh MacDiarmid.) In vol. II, 4 is another editorial (this time with a motto from Seghers) in which New Zealand is said to be 'a multi-cultural and multi-lingual country' and that *NQC* will contribute to the *growth* of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual community — apparently New Zealand is not aware that it is 'multi'. Also we find expressed a need to re-appraise New Zealand literary history in the light of the presence of oral/written as well as urban/tribal traditions; the usual anxiety of belonging to, or merely being a supplement to, Anglo-American-Australian schools of thought is also voiced. In this connection one may mention that the name Cave refers to Plato's cave, the New Zealanders presumably being the prisoners, whom the editors will show the light. I wonder whether the above representation of NZ society and literary history is true; is NZ multi-cultural/lingual or *ought* it to be? Can a crazy creativity release the NZ prisoners from the cave? It seems to me that the program of *NQC* sounds somewhat pseudo-McLuhanite. Describing the ideal New Zealand as a sort of 'Global Village', in the sense of the Canadian Magus. It is true, though, that the editors try to follow the stated intentions.

Most texts found in *NQC* can be said to contribute to either the multi-cultural or the multi-lingual; it also accounts for the presence of several articles by Jan Knappert on African myth and legends. (Knappert is professor of African languages and on the editorial board.) It is also the reason why we find articles on translation and quite a number of translated texts, amongst them translations from Bulgarian and Turkish, specimens of Cook Islands-poetry, legends from Papua/NG. But how can an article on 'The Pathos and Pageantry of the Jacobin Revolution' or on *Berufsverbot* in Germany or on China on the eve of revolution contribute to a re-appraisal of NZ literary history?

In an introduction to *A Book of New Zealand* the late J. C. Reid (who some ten years ago introduced me to NZ poetry) wrote about the fact that NZ was 'lacking fruitful cultural tensions' and that it (NZ society) 'has also been subject to a deadly uniformity and mediocrity of outlook', but that the Maori 'has provided a leavening influence' and that the influx of 'settlers from Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland and elsewhere has led to a slight, but important, modification of New Zealand

stodginess'. Where J. C. Reid talked about 'modification' (in 1963), Frederick C. Parmee, in the above cited article, talks about tossing tradition out of the window and of beginning to scratch. The sentiment behind Parmee's pronouncements and of the editorial staff (?) is of the same nature as some of the ideas expressed by the New Writers in Australia (Michael Wilding et alii). The idea seems to be that if New Zealand literature is to be re-vitalized the impulse or influence is to come from myths, from indigenous literatures (from the Solomon Islands rather than the British Islands) and, most important, from translations from everywhere and every time; and translations from 'out of context' so that it can be assured that the traditions they belong to (the translated poems) can be obscured. It is telling that a long article is devoted to the poetry of Hone Tuwhare (vol. I, 4). Tuwhare is important in a *NQC* context because he is said to be in contact with that lost world of myth, that is to say, myths 'not learnt from written sources but *felt orally* as part of a *living* tradition?' (my italics). But is this nostalgia for a lost, oral, natural, mythic world not a telling symptom of a thoroughly *modern* alienation from it; a desire for a lost world of presence and the Full Word which is irrevocably lost, if it ever did exist? Is not that part of *NQC*'s project doomed from the beginning? Did not two modern poets of an old civilization — Pound and Joyce — go back to the mythical beginnings of European literature (Homer) in order to re-vitalize it. Can that gesture be repeated?

In 1978 *NQC* changed into *Pacific Quarterly Moana*. No new editorials. It has now become a more 'traditional' literary quarterly. And a better one. It contains competently written articles on for instance 'crime in literature', articles on Australian literature (a so-called General Issue, vol. IV, 4), surveys of the new Latin-American narrative, poems on Indian Ocean Themes and, still, many translations and a special number about translation.

Edgar Morin, the French sociologist, once said that European-American civilization had lost its vitality and he prophesized the emergence of a new one in the Pacific cultural centre; Japan on the one side, California on the other, the nations of the Pacific Ocean in the middle. Could *Moana* be the first sign that Morin's prophecy is beginning to come true? We can only hope so.

HANS HAUGE