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## Book Reviews

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### Abstract

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## CURRENCY'S DECADE: A TRIBUTE

In March this year Currency Press celebrated ten years of publishing Australian plays by launching *Contemporary Australian Drama*, a collection of essays which deals with historical as well as critical perspectives since 1955.<sup>1</sup> In tracing and bringing into focus the main currents of thought and critical studies of twenty-five years of dramatic writings, the book demonstrates not only the consistently high quality of Currency publications, but also the debt of Australian drama to the determined efforts of Currency's directors, Katharine Brisbane and Philip Parsons. Publishing does not create good literature, but it influences it in several ways. Availability of play texts means critical studies and research, and a continuous debate; it means teaching of the texts in secondary schools and tertiary institutions, and an increased awareness on the part of the general public.

Currency Press published about ninety Australian plays in the last decade, a remarkable achievement considering the financial uncertainties of publishing exclusively in an art form which is still considered the step-child of Australian literature. Moreover, although the '70s saw a hitherto unrivalled growth of dramatic writings, the development of our indigenous theatre is still hampered by a traditional tendency to distrust the quality of local products, and by a cultural concentration in a few major cities.

The success of Currency Press is due to hard work, a thorough knowledge of the field, and a strong belief in the merit and quality of Australian drama and its important place in our culture. Currency's strength shows in the judgement of the directors in choosing the texts, and the presentation of the texts chosen; in short, in the quality of the published work as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the 90 or so plays appears in the series, *Currency Plays*, which deals with contemporary drama. The texts are accompanied with photographs and cast lists from the productions, and notes where further comments or information are necessary. The excellent Introductions, many of which are written by the General Editor Katharine Brisbane, are of a consistently high quality in their critical discussion of the plays.<sup>3</sup> While keeping a discerning critical eye on the material, the Introductions promote the merits of the texts, point out their value as literary texts as well as pieces of work written for the theatre, discuss the play, when applicable, in relation to other plays by the same writer, and set it in context with its contemporary scene. However, the Introductions are not specifically aimed at scholars or students, but written primarily with the general public in mind. In pointing to and discussing the Australianisms, the stereotypes or the social aspects, the Introductions propose to raise the interest and heighten the understanding of the general theatre goer and reading public, thus generating a wider awareness of Australian drama and its place and purpose in society. With awareness and understanding come more buyers and more audiences. Ms Brisbane says that the aim of the Introductions is to present to people who are not used to reading

plays Australian characters and situations they can relate to.<sup>4</sup> In pointing to particular aspects of the Australian character and nature, the Introductions play a significant part in heightening the awareness of Australian traditions and culture.

Australian modern theatre needs to be given perspective by the dramatic activities which preceded it. Currency's *The National Theatre* series has done more for the understanding of our dramatic heritage than any literary survey or book about drama. To date, the series has published six plays which span a period of some eighty years of Australian dramatic writing, from Edward Georghegan's *The Currency Lass* (1844) to Betty Roland's *The Touch of Silk* (1928).<sup>5</sup> Often, a play would have only one production, and then the manuscript would be thrown away, thus the majority of the early manuscripts are lost. Finding and editing suitable manuscripts have so far been a mixture of tenacious detective work, infinite patience and meticulous scholarship by the General Editor of the series, Philip Parsons, helped by the British Museum, local and overseas libraries and private collections.

The books in *The National Theatre* series are all outstanding examples of the quality of the research and the scholarship involved in this project. The highly informative Introductions add value and understanding by discussing the plays in context of their social and cultural period. Historical and biographical comments, reprints of reviews of the initial productions, and discussion of audience expectations and reactions make interesting and entertaining reading.

*The National Theatre* series is not a classic series in the usual sense but aims to represent plays which have a place in a national Australian repertory: 'The lack of readily available texts has in the past obscured not only the qualities but even the existence of our older drama, so that in turn we have been deprived of an historical context in which to assess contemporary play writing.' Although there are only six plays so far, the selection of the plays and the long period they span give a good indication of the main currents of early Australian drama. They establish the tenacious identification with British culture and the dependence on traditions of music hall and melodrama as well as the early presence of colonial elements and stereotypes. The melodramas and comedies of the last century tried to define Australian stereotypes and ways of life, but, like other forms of literature, by imposing Australianisms on British characters and traditions. *The National Theatre* series makes us more aware of the fact that the theatre, as well as the romances, convict novels and bush stories, played a significant part in the growth of an indigenous literature, and as such in the development of an Australian consciousness and identity.

The *Theatre Australia New Writing* series is a recent undertaking by Currency Press in co-operation with the magazine *Theatre Australia*.<sup>7</sup> It started with *Theatre Australia* publishing new scripts in the magazine, but the popularity and success of this concept showed the need to expand and reach a wider public; in short, the need to put the plays in the bookshops. Six plays have now been published in booklet form, with a seventh coming out shortly. The title 'New Writing' is consciously chosen in order to keep an option open to include playwrights who have been previously published, but so far the plays in the series are by writers whose work has been produced but not published.

The next ten years will see a continuation of the work Currency Press has done over the past ten years, but also a change of direction. In order to move with the times, they are expanding into other, related areas, and are already launching a series of books on films.<sup>8</sup> A book on the actor and writer Barry Humphries was released in August this year; a book which demonstrates the artistry of Mr Humphries the writer, often overlooked in the enthusiasm of the ingenuity of his talent as a performer.

Ms Brisbane believes that Australian drama may have reached a saturation point and is going to become more conservative for a while. Perhaps the period of excitement and rapid growth is temporarily over and our best plays have been written over the last ten years. But that the panic-like demand for new plays and innovative forms of expression is over, is perhaps a good sign. The last years of massive dramatic expansion have eradicated some of the teething problems which all art forms experience during times of changing directions and search for new forms. Our playwrights, rather than slowing down, may settle down. Australian drama has shown, and Currency Press helped demonstrate, that it is capable of combining maturity, innovation and experimentation.

## NOTES

1. *Contemporary Australian Drama: Perspectives Since 1955*, ed. Peter Holloway (Currency Press, Sydney, 1981).
2. Katharine Brisbane writes that in choosing the texts, they have to consider the market, and that it is one of her regrets that the majority of plays are so-called realistic; *Theatre Australia*, July 1980, p. 14. (Not because these are of inferior quality; there is, however, an imbalance due to the fact that more experimental plays are less economically viable.)
3. Some of the Introductions are by directors who have been involved in productions, or by academics or specialists in certain fields, with particular interest in and knowledge of the issues concerned.
4. This comment is from a discussion I had with Ms Brisbane in May 1981. I am grateful to her for being so generous with her time. Subsequent comments from Ms Brisbane are from this discussion.
5. The plays in the series are: George Darrell, *The Sunny South* (1883); Louis Esson, *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* (1912); Edward Geoghegan, *The Currency Lass* (1844); Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Brumby Innes* and *Bid Me To Love* (1927) (double issue); Betty Roland, *The Touch of Silk* (1928); Walter Cooper, *Colonial Experience* (1868). Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* (1912 adaption) is expected to be released around Christmas. The dates in brackets refer to time of writing or first production.
6. Philip Parsons, 'General Editor's Preface' to the series, reprinted in each text.
7. The plays are published with assistance from The Literature Board.

The plays in the series are: Mervyn Rutherford, *Departmental* (1978); Clem Gorman, *A Manual of Trench Warfare* (1978); Bob Herbert, *No Names No Pack Drill* (1979); Grahame Bond/Jim Burnett, *Boys' Own McBeth* (1979); John Summons, *Lamb of God* (1978); Roger Pulvers, *Yamashita* (1977). The dates refer to first productions.

8. Currency Press is doing a history of the Australian cinema, in collaboration with Angus and Robertson, and a collection of monographs for the Australian Film Institute.

### THREE AUSTRALIAN PLAYS: FROM 1868 TO 1979

Walter Cooper, *Colonial Experience* (1868), Sydney: Currency Press, 'The National Theatre' series, 1979, 59 pp.

David Williamson, *Travelling North* (1979), Sydney: Currency Press, 1980, 88 pp.

Grahame Bond and Jim Burnett, *Boys' Own McBeth* (1979), Sydney: Currency Press, 'Theatre Australia New Writing' series, 1980, 80 pp.

All quotations are from these editions. The dates in brackets refer to first performances.

The second earliest of the plays in Currency Press's *The National Theatre* series, *Colonial Experience* was first produced at the Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney in 1868. Walter Cooper, journalist, actor, playwright, and parliamentarian, was a colourful participant in the cultural life of the Colony in the 1860s and 70s. Australian-born, his success as a playwright was largely due to an accurate estimation of his audience's expectations and tastes. With a sure and satirical eye for local types and situations, Cooper made full use of the British traditions which dominated the theatre, as indeed all artforms of the time. Comic devices like mistaken identity, well-timed exits and entrances, frequent asides and deus-ex-machina solutions are mixed with melodrama's virtuous and valiant heroines and heroes, all with cheerful disregard for unity of form and expression. But the play is also a comedy about life in the Colony, and presents an image of the society in which it was performed. Colonial traits are superimposed on traditional stereotypes, and the story is invested with local situations.

The hero is one Alfred Arkwright, a penniless English gentleman arriving in the Colony to claim his beloved, orphaned cousin Helen, heroine of the play. Their uncle, moneylender Matthew Grudge, is a nasty specimen who has misappropriated Helen's father's will, to which Alfred is heir. Matthew wants Helen to inherit, his son Joseph to marry her, and nobody to know there is any money in fear of competition for her hand.

However, honest Peter Shrivel, clerk to Matthew and armed with a copy of the will, and Captain Versatile Fluent, con-man *par excellence*, are both out to thwart Matthew's plans in their different ways. The plot twists and turns its way through lovers' quarrels and villainous scheming; the hero and heroine are tricked by the villains and the villains are pursued by creditors and bailiffs and each other, until the good Peter exposes the genuine will and the true nature of the versatile Captain Fluent. Everybody is, more or less, forgiven by the happy and now rich lovers, and the moral of the play is summed up in Helen's curtain speech on life's experiences in general and colonial experience in particular: 'in the great game of life, Honest Hearts are always trumps' (p. 59).

The main plot it, however, only a vehicle for the main concerns of the play: the portrayal of *Colonial Experience*. Alfred is a figurehead, the innocent 'new chum' who, totally free of wit and guile, is taken advantage of by those who know how to survive in the new world.

Young Joseph, failed squatter and idle 'gentleman', is the real exponent of the main theme. In a clever piece of dialogue with Alfred, he portrays *Colonial Experience* in a somewhat ambiguous light. He paints a romantic and adventurous picture of the bushman, while simultaneously conveying the reality of hardship and deprivation; a

picture which would delight the audience who could laugh at him for his pomposity and with him for his wit. In a language spiced with local idioms, Joseph describes an Australian bushscape in which men survive by applying equal portions of swearing, drinking, cheating and hard work, all of which need a good measure of will-power and wit. Joseph has neither, and his pipe, the only sustained use of symbolism in the play, is an ever-present reminder of his experiences in the bush, where 'you must learn to smoke like a lime-kiln' (p.25). So he tries to demonstrate his 'manhood' by constantly asking for matches to relight his pipe, but the fact that his pipe always goes out illustrates his incompetence and failure to master survival in the bush.

However, it is equally obvious that Joseph is no fool of a 'new chum'. Captain Fluent cheats him at cards and makes him steal from his own father to repay the debt, but Joseph wins back from others the money he stole and replaces it with interest. He has a basic honesty which sets in relief the villainous machinations of old Grudge and the Captain. When he is cheated, it is by the best in the business, and he has no problems in manipulating the innocent newcomers. Joseph, on the whole, brings Colonial Experience into everyday life.

Despite its ridicule of certain types and aspects, the play is, on the whole, benevolent to its characters in its comic glance at the fortunes and misfortunes of life in the Colony. The dramatic rules of the time were simple: amuse and thrill, bring excitement and laughter into rather bleak and dreary lives. Grudge is thwarted in his villainous schemes but is forgiven and virtually redeemed by the heroine; that he will continue to live by the misfortunes of the poor seems to be forgotten in the general benevolency of the ending. That Fluent can trick Grudge into buying beer for the voters and make him believe it was worth his while when the election is lost, is not just a sign of the Captain's con-manship but part of the moral of the play: villainy must bring delight. Fluent is an ambiguous rogue who continuously gets the better of the dreaded bailiff, but who has to pay his debts to the 'ordinary' working man, the tailor and the shoemaker. He is a loser who is off to new adventures. The election issue, and the ultimate defeat of the villains, although the first is peripheral to the main plot, the second vital, are of equal importance to the moral of the play: they are both part of the audience's revenge for all the victims of the Grudges and the Fluents in society, but theirs is an amused, not a hateful revenge. Colonial Experience was all too real to an audience who did not come to see harsh punishment or the inside of the bailiff's wagon.

Although the reality of Colonial Experience was a far cry from that portrayed in the play, Cooper managed to convey an image of his time which adds to our understanding of the period. Despite its weaknesses of structure and its mixture of form and subject matter, *Colonial Experience* is an interesting play. It is rich in language, its dramatic dialogue shows a sure grip of the comic material, and its exploitation of local as well as traditional material shows that the theatre was alive and kicking, providing an outlet for many of the social and cultural issues of the time.

For those who are familiar with David Williamson's work, *Travelling North* should come as an exciting change. The image of a stereotypical society is rejected for a more complex portrait of human relationships.

*Travelling North* is about someone actually going through the process of dying. In this process of dying, septuagenarian Frank Brown, communist candidate in Toorak in the '30s, advocate of human rights and equality of the sexes ('You're my companion, not my slave' (p.8)) is confronted with his own tyrannical and arrogant attitudes. Living in 'sin'

with 20 years younger Frances whom he has just met, Frank is still at war with the world in general, and his own children, Frances's daughters, his neighbour and his doctor in particular. Frank likes to be at war with everything; he thrives on the image of himself as the rebel who fights vulgarity and stupidity, and particularly beliefs contrary to his own. He is a man who takes himself and his ideals seriously, a 'know-all' always teaching other people their business.

But Frank is also a frightened old man, afraid to die, afraid of losing his sexual power. In a curious way he and Frances are good for each other. Frances loves Frank *because* he is selfish and demanding and sick, not despite of it. A middle-aged woman riddled with guilt for the way she feels she neglected her own family, she atones for her selfishness by putting up with Frank's whims and his absorption in himself — up to a point, that is. She nurses him the way she did not her children, but she also leaves him, the way she did her children. The gentle, unassuming Frances can understand the egocentricity of Frank; she herself has always been in conflict between her role as a mother and wife, and her needs as an individual. The play is as much about the growth of Frances as it is about the dying of Frank.

The structure of the play is designed to emphasize the development of the two main characters, from two elderly people who fall in love, to a man and a woman who spend three years discovering themselves through each other. In thirty-three short scenes divided into two acts Frances and Frank's lives are exposed in brief glimpses which juxtapose the cold, unfriendly Melbourne from which they move, with the warm and friendly north where they retreat to live their own lives, free of family intrusion and responsibilities.

The scenes in the small community up north often act out and extend the meaning of the scenes down south. The structure illustrates how people and environment play their different parts in the development of the two main characters. Their increasing self-consciousness and knowledge of self and of each other are highlighted by their reactions to their surroundings, and in the way their surroundings react to them. Frances and Frank have to cope with more than a new life with each other, they have to cope with the ghosts of the past, with the ever-present climate of Melbourne intruding into the sunny north.

In the cold south, human relationships, whether concerning man and wife, parents and children, or neighbours for that matter, consist of one long battle for supremacy and recognition; a battle with the Self in focus. Yet it provides revitalization and continuance through culture, marriage and grandchildren. Up north, the climate and the solitude — revitalizing tonics — produce closeness and communication but also Frank's first heart attack, a temporary break-up between him and Frances, and the persistent Freddie, who believes in frequent neighbourhood relations, loud shirts and the glory of the Vietnam war, and who builds them a monumental Aussie barbecue as a surprise.

The arrogance of Frank is highlighted by his contact with Freddie and with Saul, the local G.P. The intruding Freddie is an unselfish little Aussie battler whose heroic war exploits are never bragged about and whose eagerness to help and refusal to be offended set in relief Frank's rudeness and dogmatic attitudes. The interludes with Saul demonstrate Frank's obstinacy and irritating streak of pomposity. Rebelling against the doctor's methods of treating his heart condition, Frank takes it upon himself to test the variety of drugs in Saul's medical book, only to come to the same conclusion as the doctor's initial treatment, after months of trial and error.

But Frank's stubbornness is also an expression of his thirst for knowledge and his

rebellion against social and professional attitudes which neglect to take the human factor, the individual, into consideration. The preoccupation with his illness and the demands on Frances and his friends are also part of a spirited fight against loss of mobility and death. Frank never gave in gracefully, and he fights the battle his own way. Against doctor's orders he manages to give Frances a second honeymoon and a wedding night worthy of a young man. He leaves not a bottle, but a magnum of champagne ready for the celebration of his death.

Frank mellows gradually, not just of old age or warm climate, or by being with people who care, but also because he recognizes that he, too, cares for and needs them. Clever use of dialogue and action to complement each other demonstrates the coexistence of the old, stubborn Frank and the new, more flexible one. He admits to his daughter that in his preoccupation with the world in general, he forgot to look at it in particular; but when the exact words are repeated to Frances in a different situation, we suspect that his admission is more a gesture than a humble acknowledgement of guilt or fault. However, the play's actions convey how he gradually accepts his responsibility to the 'particular', to the people around him, and his own need of them. He marries Frances, although he maintains he has never believed in the institution of marriage; Freddie's monstrous barbecue continues to adorn their garden, and Frank participates in the rituals connected with it; he uses the reclining vinyl chair with all its gadgets, vulgar but comfortable.

Ironically, Frank dies in the gadget chair and is toasted by the mourners around the barbecue, symbols of the lack of taste and the adherence to social rituals which he has fought against all his life. But he still has the last word. As Frances, Saul and Freddy drink the magnum of champagne, Frank's dead legs push the footstool down with a sharp sound, causing Saul to voice what they all feel: 'My God. I thought for a second that the old boy had come back. Much as I loved him I couldn't have taken another three years.' (p.88).

Since Bond and Burnett's *Boys' Own Macbeth* opened in Sydney in July 1979 it has been extensively performed; it has been in all the other states, it had a revival in Sydney by public demand, and started a three-month season in Los Angeles in April this year. Its popularity is not difficult to understand; its ingenuity of themes and story, its exuberant and colourful characterisation, its musical numbers, slapstick comedy and satire of the sacred cows of society as well as the theatre make for an entertaining evening of fun and games. But like Bond's outrageous conception 'Auntie Jack', *Boys' Own Macbeth* is cruelly funny. Behind the farcical send-up of the classics, the teaching methods in schools, and the Old School Tie syndrome runs a dark, nearly savage satirical portrayal of corruption on all levels, in personal as well as public affairs.

The effectiveness of the comedy is heightened by a heavy emphasis on audience participation. Constant references to the audience as part of the class involve the spectators to the extent where they even do what the Headmaster tells them. But while the audience responds more readily to the comedy by taking part in it, they also, and uncomfortably, become part of the immature pranks and the manipulations and exploitation; the theatrical mirror is double-sided. Like the play's performance of *Macbeth*, *Boys' Own Macbeth* becomes in itself a play within a play.

As the subtitle says, this is 'A Rotten Tragedy'. *Boys' Own Macbeth* is the destruction and tragedy of *Macbeth* turned into comedy and satire. But the fun and games are always accompanied by a sense of foreboding, of destruction which goes beyond childish pranks.

The colourful dialogue, the musical numbers and the burlesque are undermined by a chilling sense of manipulation and corruption.

In the manner of a Joe Orton farce, the clichés, traditional sex jokes, reversed meanings and grotesque situations become the comic means by which the play satirises the conventions and attitudes of an unhealthy society.

*Boys' Own MacBeth* is a very clever play about the games people play. The schoolboy antics are funny but also frightening when performed by a 42-year-old father and his 28-year-old sons. It is this incongruity of the characters and their actions which creates the absurd and mock-heroic comedy of the play; a comedy which exposes the grotesqueness of our contemporary society: uncultured, devious, exploitative and immature. The use of homosexuals and Jews as butts for the farce does not make fun of the Gay Movement or the Jewish community but satirises a society which, through fear and ignorance, makes such groups stock figures of fun and ridicule. The play laughs at our concepts of sex and racism, at our prejudices and insularity — for this is the boys' own *Macbeth*.

MAY-BRIT AKERHOLT

Barbara Hanrahan, *The Peach Groves*. U.Q.P., 1979.

Peter Carey, *War Crimes*. U.Q.P., 1979.

Thea Astley, *Hunting the Wild Pineapple*. Nelson, 1979.

Frank Moorhouse, *The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets*.

Angus & Robertson, 1980.

These books illustrate some of the vitality and diversity of recent Australian fiction. *The Peach Groves* is the first of Barbara Hanrahan's novels I have encountered. It made me sorry I missed the four earlier titles, but glad they are still in store for me, for I am very susceptible to her way of telling a story. In this novel, a vividly imagined world of middle-class Victorian families at odds with their passions in the antipodes is disclosed as it impinges on the consciousnesses of some of its inhabitants, chiefly pre-pubescent Ida, but the narrative is flexible enough to modulate now and again to other viewpoints. Without a trace of awkwardness or the suggestion of force, it generates out of Ida's perceptions a rich cluster of images and symbols which give substance to the story.

Ms Hanrahan handles this mode of subjective narrative, which combines psychological insight with poetic intensity, with great accomplishment. She creates a convincing impression of historical verisimilitude, while discovering in the relation of the story to its setting — a New Zealand summer centred on the celebration of Christmas — a wealth of suggestions and implications. Every detail of the fluently articulated story adds to the sense of mounting passion which breaks through at the end to reveal the vanity of the attempt to transplant nineteenth-century European civilization in the antipodes. The *Peach Groves* neglected in the wilderness, which give the book its title, focus some of the disturbing implications of this theme, but at the heart of the story is Tempe, the part-Maori girl, whose passion and faith in the power of Nature procures the reverse of European pretensions, in a culminating scene which is a triumph of plotting and symbolism.

This is the book of a gifted writer who reveals through the subtlety of her narrative great insights into the sources of some of the paradoxes of life in the antipodes.

If Barbara Hanrahan traces some of the traumas of white civilization in its antipodean beginnings, Peter Carey prefigures some of its grim endings. *War Crimes* succeeds in maintaining the extraordinarily high standard he set with his first collection, *The Fat Man in History* (1975). He has found a voice and created a mode in which his fertile imagination is matched by a precision and economy of language and narrative invention, capable of finely crafted very brief pieces but at its best in stories sustained over about 30 to 60 pages, like the title stories in both collections and *The Chance*, *Kristu-Du* and *Exotic Pleasures* in his latest book. These are true short-stories, which combine density with clarity, yet in their suggestive power they have the weight of novels.

One source of this power is the way Carey's imaginative flights into strange worlds are anchored in a strong sense of social and psychological reality. His visions are like fragments of the familiar world detached from the flow of documentable experience and allowed to drift, yet his narrative is so cunningly paced, and couched in a prose that even in its smallest touches strikes exactly the right note, that it is often difficult to place the point at which a story crosses from familiar experience into the realm of vision or dream.

Peter Carey's re-orientations of experience move in all directions from the axes of realism — backwards, forwards or sideways — but quite a few of the stories in *War Crimes* evoke worlds projected a short distance into the future. Like *The Chance* they sometimes have the flavour of science fiction, but this is coincidental. Carey is essentially an artist with a disturbing vision of the mysterious and unknown in the known, so that even when his stories are set in the future and contain creatures like Fastalogians, their impact is to disturb our sense of the present. He is a writer who senses that our existence is determined as much by possible grim futures as by the past.

After just these two short collections it is possible to speak of a Peter Carey world, which recurs in some, if not all of his stories. It has a strange resemblance to Australia and its inhabitants to Australians. Their distinctive mannerisms are incisively observed, their forms of thought and speech are registered with an exact ear for accent and idiom, they move in recognizable natural settings through an environment of familiar artefacts, yet Carey manages to endow everything with a quality of frightening remoteness and alienation. He is a rare case of a genuinely surrealist writer whose vision is rooted in an exact sense of reality and whose invention is motivated not by gratuitous or merely subjective fantasy, but by an original and disturbing perception of the way the 'ordinary reality' upon which we all depend can deceive us while it seems to reassure us.

Frank Moorhouse's vision, on the other hand, is underpinned by a fine sense of the recent past and an evident wish to recover some of its unrecorded secrets. Previous books developed the discontinuous narrative to the point where it was not simply a string or cluster of stories on the way to becoming a novel, but a distinct and in many ways more interesting form, which, through shifts in angle, focus and narrative mode, can chart a region and milieu in depth, while preserving the intensive economy of the short story. His new book is a fascinating evolution of the genre. Four miniature discontinuous narratives are juxtaposed, adding a further dimension to the world described in his earlier books. Its frontiers are extended, connections between its main centres are explored, and new regions discovered.

Secret history has been an incidental theme of some of Frank Moorhouse's earlier writing, exemplified by the pre-occupation (which he shares with Michael Wilding) with the way stories may be ways of concealing the truth, rather than disclosing it (though they

might then inadvertently reveal something else about their tellers). In this book, secrecy is the central subject and main connection between the four disjunct parts. The theme is explored in a variety of ways: in the first section, Irving Bow, the proprietor of the Odeon Cinema has a secret which he conceals under a verbal fluency which is beginning to show dangerous lapses; the narrator of the second sequence secretly broaches another's family secrets; in the third, despite the narrator's promise of discretion, a secret leaks out; the fourth explores the secrecy which is a condition of life for homosexuals.

This concluding sequence is the title-piece of the book, and it makes the dominant theme quite explicit. This is not homosexuality, nor even sexuality in general, but the way in which life as a public person involves (for most people) private secrets. Not trivial secrets which can be voluntarily kept or revealed, like membership of the Freemasons or the C.I.A., but certain facets of human nature for which society provides no channels of expression. It happens that in the forms of society in which most of us move some of these secrets have to do with sex, and a number of Frank Moorhouse's stories are perceptive accounts of the ways people manage this part of their nature in relation to the public and private dimensions of their lives. Yet one of the successes of *The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets* is that it suggests the general implications of this problem while exploring in detail the odd ways in which public values and behaviour shift around it.

This is achieved by combining strong thematic coherence with wide stylistic variation. In each section, the tone and narrative strategy is modelled on the idioms of the milieu portrayed, and this results in many delightful touches, like the exchange between Irving Bow and T. George McDowell on correct cinema etiquette or the discomforting of Markham by the word *Teleosis*. At certain points, however, it runs the risk of being misunderstood, particularly in the last section, where the idiom of homosexual erotica, being for most readers (one presumes) such a highly-charged, taboo subject, it is almost bound to overpower a balanced response to the narrative. Yet Frank Moorhouse seems to run this risk quite deliberately, as if to challenge the reader, and this is completely justified, for without this part of the book the full implications of his theme could never have been developed.

Homosexuals inevitably have secret lives, which not only give rise to fantasy, but are also supported by sub-cultural myths, such as the one about the heritage of their kind in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* and the story of David and Jonathan. *The Everlasting Secret Family* explores a private version of this myth, but goes beyond it in its implications, to suggest that a secret life may be important. It is not always desirable to let it all hang out, not even possible if society does not want to know, and perhaps it is best to live with one's secrets by exploring the space between them and the public personality for its creative potential. That, in a witty and allusive way, seems to be what the book is saying.

The possibilities of discontinuous narrative to open up a variety of suggestions around a theme (rather than exhaust it, as novels are inclined to do) are splendidly exploited in Thea Astley's recent book, *Hunting the Wild Pineapple*. It is a sequence of stories told by Keith Levenson, who first appeared as a teenager in *The Slow Natives* (1965). He is now about twenty years older, simply known as Levenson, and adrift in North Queensland recording the human and natural geography of that tropical paradise.

Thea Astley portrays Levenson with great insight, and he emerges as a very complex character who veils his sensitivity with irony, which he sometimes consciously drops, to allow us glimpses of his vulnerability, and becoming self-conscious of this, reverts again to irony. His thoughts and perceptions are expressed in a blend of vivid images, encyclopedic comparisons, knowing allusions to high and low culture, colloquial vulgarisms and

abbreviations and even traces of ockerism he deplores, all of which is simultaneously self-deprecatory and self-conscious. He is a story-teller who draws attention to himself, sometimes apologizing, sometimes explaining, throwing in scraps of learning, aware of the power of some of his own images and symbols and given to brilliant flights of fancy, like his account of the tropical landscape as it would appear to a man who is a professional composer of cryptic crossword puzzles. Yet, at the same time, he is acutely aware of the world around him, with a perceptive sense of human feeling and motive which amounts to empathy. He calls himself a 'people-freak', betraying with the word itself something of the defensive manner in which he cloaks a sensibility which can be painfully aware of others' feelings even as he presents their behaviour as comic.

Leverson is developed convincingly both as narrator and character through a sustained and elaborate interplay between his role and the form of the book. Given his sensibility, and his complex and self-conscious personality, story-telling comes to him as a natural, and indeed essential activity. It is a process of self-discovery and integration, of coping with his anxieties and expressing his powerful sense of awareness and vivid imagination. Whether his stories circle around himself, depict the peculiarities of society in his tropical Eden or are visionary accounts of other lives, they reveal the inner complexity of their narrator. 'Let me draw you a little map' he says at the beginning, and from then on, the book is pre-empted by images of maps and exploration, but in providing the reader with a lively map of the North Queensland coast, Leverson charts his own emotional and spiritual geography.

*Hunting the Wild Pineapple* is a fine imaginative achievement. Through the creation of Leverson, who is placed at the heart of the book, Thea Astley integrates it into something more than a cluster of stories, and captures the life and landscape of another region of Australia with great originality.

BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS

Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981.

*Flaws in the Glass* is a welcome book, for White does not appear very discernibly in his novels: he remains a reserved personality there. Furthermore, the contemporary world does not appear much in his writings other than in the two Sydney novels *The Vivisector* and *The Eye of the Storm* and some of the short stories, so that one looks to the self-portrait in order to determine his relationship to the contemporary world. It is in this respect that the self-portrait is most successful, especially in its third section, which is a rather loosely ordered collection of White's reactions to people and events in Australia over the last decade.

Here he speaks of the various celebrities — writers, painters, theatre people, men in government — whose lives touch his because he is the most distinguished of Australian writers and comes from an affluent Sydney family. He introduces this section with an account of a luncheon with the Queen when she visited Australia in 1963; he speaks unkindly of her, perhaps feeling that she paid him insufficient attention and may not have read the copy of *Voss* he had been assured lay beside her bed. In what amounts to an extended Gossip Column he goes on to write of his friendship with Sidney Nolan and

theatre director Jimmy Sharman (who has paid much attention to White's rather mediocre plays). Despite White's extensive list of notabilities and touting of his friendships, his contacts seem surface rather than close; he does not succeed in conveying an image of himself as a warm person, but then Australia is not a warm society. His story of his quarrel with the Kerrs is ugly because it could ruin their career. White recounts his part in the Moore Park affair probably because it represented his entry into public life, in a successful bid to prevent the demolition of his street in favour of a giant sports stadium. He also gives an account of the day that he learned of his Nobel Prize in 1973. These indulgences in vanity are harmless enough, much more acceptable than the snobbery that also emerges in this part of the book; but what is important is that we have a picture, however incomplete, of White's social and political life.

Along with Joyce and Faulkner, White is one of the greatest novelists in English in this century, so one considers very seriously whatever he has to say about himself. What kind of a man could write novels so disparate as *The Tree of Man*, which is so sympathetic to its two main characters, and *The Twyborn Affair*, which is so lacking in sympathy for any of its characters? Either there has been a darkening of vision over the 25 years that separate the two works or White is a man contending with unreconciled contraries. Acting against the former interpretation is the chronology of his more positive novels: they appear late (like *The Eye of the Storm* and *A Fringe of Leaves*) as well as early. One is also struck by the fact that in his middle period (1961 to 1970, *Riders in the Chariot* to *The Vivisector*), in which he portrays various kinds of visionaries, he strips these visionaries of any personal attractiveness or dignity even as he endows them with an exalted sense of vision. One is driven to the conclusion that White is a man of unreconciled contraries, rather like his own Theodora in *The Aunt's Story*. From the novels we come to *Flaws in the Glass* hoping to find evidence of the cause of these contradictions or a final resolution of them. We find neither clear cause nor resolution of the contraries, but rather corroborating evidence of them.

Of the contraries that persist in dividing White two are especially striking: the opposition between his egalitarian sentiments and his snobbery, and the opposition between his spiritual aspirations and his immersion in the cruder aspects of physicality. White writes a good deal in the first part of the book about his long friendships with the family servants and on one occasion describes an affectionate crying jag between him and Eliza, 'two such simple souls'. This simple man, however, is at odds with the social lion who parades his distinguished acquaintances in the Gossip Column section. The picture we get in *Flaws in the Glass* of a man divided between a love of unsophisticated people and a cultivation of the *haut monde*, though, is maybe more accurate than the one we get from the novels, where he seems to reject the mass of humanity. The White of the novels may be blacker than the White of everyday life.

The other opposition in White is between his spiritual and esthetic sensitivity on the one hand and his obsession with the crudities of human physicality on the other. Even as he exalts the spiritual vision of such characters as homely spinsters and idiots and responds to the bejewelling effects of sunlight on preserved cumquats and of moonlight on furniture he presents an array of farting characters such as we do not meet in any other serious English novelist. It is not a sufficient artistic justification to say as White does in this book, 'Well, we do fart, don't we?' He himself exempts his visionaries from the need to fart, which suggests the very opposition between spirituality and physicality that we have noted. Perhaps White harbours a resentment that life does not measure up to its highest possibilities.

White is a man of many fragments, as he acknowledges within the self-portrait. The book lets us see some of his several lives more directly: the dead inside him (his parents and some deceased friends) and the living conflicts. Although he calls himself vain, his writing of this book is more a gesture of humility than an indulgence in vanity. White, unlike so many famous people who write their own biographies, does not try to vindicate his life, but is content to reveal an imperfect human being.

ROSE MARIE BESTON

Bruce King, *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World*. Macmillan. 248 pp.

Yasmine Gooneratne, *Diverse Inheritance*. Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English. 173 pp.

The writing of broad literary historical surveys becomes ever more difficult and ever more dubious an undertaking. It is bad enough with a single country's literature. It is harder still to deal with that of several, as does Bruce King in this latest attempt at Commonwealth Literature, a now slighted term but still the best we have for what we mean by it. For though Professor King's title avoids the phrase and adopts its fashionable successor, there is, let us not deceive ourselves, a note of condescension even in the word 'new'. And there are many, I know, of my friends in the Commonwealth who would not thank him for his sub-title either with its implications of a certain parochialism.

I find that sub-title both accurate and confidently substantiated in his third chapter 'New literatures and nationalisms'. In that chapter King shows both the necessary initial dependence upon metropolitan culture and the several ways in which Commonwealth writers have adapted that culture in the creation of their own. His references to pioneering literature are some of the best in the book. Undoubtedly and understandably the metropolitan heritage is suspect and has often been rejected, but Nanga in *A Man of the People*, whom King quotes, reminds us of the unwisdom and indeed frequent meretriciousness of such a stance. Nevertheless, it is true, as King observes, that there are other important strands, not least in African literature.

King's method is not to try to cover everything, but by judicious selection and extended treatment to deal with authors whom he finds both representative and crucial to his theme. Thus we have Achebe, Soyinka, Naipaul, Harris, Walcott, Brathwaite, Sargeson, Narayan and Robertson Davies with a final chapter on *Guerrillas, The Adaptable Man and Heat and Dust*. I have omitted the Australian chapter which he sub-titles 'Richardson to A.D. Hope and the middle class'. That sub-title will illustrate his difficulty and hint his inevitable shortcoming. Similarly, for this reviewer Narayan was not enough for India nor Robertson Davies for Canada, and other readers might, for instance, have other names than Naipaul and Harris for the West Indies. This is simply to show the magnitude of the task and the possibility of other paths up the mountain. Nevertheless, and despite occasional errors (surely R.A.K. Mason is known for other things than Georgian verse; and 'mateship', not 'matesmanship'), Bruce King has provided interesting vistas from the peak.

If Bruce King attempts the panorama, Yasmine Gooneratne works minutely in the village on the plain — or rather in two of them, for her diverse inheritance is principally concerned with Sri Lanka of which she is a native and Australia where she has settled with an occasional look from the one across to India, more briefly still from the other to New Zealand. Like King's, her title is also worth stressing. It is a diverse, not a divided, inheritance, and the book displays all the sense and sensibility of one who has written so perceptively of Jane Austen and her novel of that name.

The danger of writing several essays on an area so small in comparative Commonwealth terms as Sri Lanka is that the result might appear local and provincial. Mrs Gooneratne does indeed bring out the local in her feeling both for geography and history, but, like Jane Austen with her villagers, the outcome is not parochial but a sense of the universal within the particular. She extends the Sinhalese outwards. Her essays on Sri Lanka cover past and present, British and native, literary and political. For the rest, she has chapters on Douglas Stewart's 'The Silkworms', this a sustained piece of practical criticism, David Campbell and Jhabwala's *Heat and Dust*. Her criticism is balanced, enlightened and enlightening.

ARTHUR POLLARD

Jürgen Schäfer, ed., *Commonwealth-Literatur*. Düsseldorf, Bagel/Bern & München, Francke, 1981. 244 pp, SFr.26.00 (Studienreihe English, Vol. 43)

This is a welcome book. It is likely to be most serviceable to readers who are new to the subject, who feel the need for a sketch of the whole territory and who seek encouragement to read more. Of course most of it has been said before — but perhaps not in German, or not so well.

The main body of the book consists of eight chapters. The editor devotes a chapter to a detailed discussion of certain theoretical preliminaries concerning the 'new' national literatures in English. Then there are chapters on Australia (Preissnitz), New Zealand (Wattie), Canada (Goetsch), the West Indies (Breitinger), South Africa (Edmands), West and East Africa (Riemenschneider) and India (Stilz). Smaller regions are not dealt with, which leads to the exclusion of a few very good writers like e.g. Albert Wendt.

Of course there are questions of emphasis, but this may be mainly a matter of personal taste. Sometimes colonial literature is dealt with at great length at the cost of contemporary literature. The Australian section e.g. does not mention Les Murray, David Williamson and Frank Moorhouse, which means that an exciting segment of Australian literature has been excluded. And the beginning student's view may become lopsided when ten lines are devoted to Stuart Cloete, while Margaret Laurence gets a bare mention of her name. There are further slight inconsistencies: there is a longish section on Anglo-Indian literature, but no mention of Jean Rhys in the West Indian chapter. There is a section on Franco-Canadian writing, but hardly any reference to Francophone writing from Africa or non-English literatures of the West Indies.

This book may be more useful to the beginner than the similar books by Walsh, Bruce King and the earlier German effort by Kosok & Priessnitz because of the inclusion of a thirty-page bibliography (which does not list texts mentioned in the main body of the book, but important anthologies, series and secondary material). My primary criticism here is of the editing: Why are the national sections differently organized and why different things included? e.g. the New Zealand bibliography is divided into two parts only; the African section has some thirty sub-divisions. Some refer to books only, others to articles in journals and even dissertations only available on microfilm. In spite of this the bibliographies are genuinely useful (even when some titles are absent that one would have expected to find, like Narasimhaiah's *The Swan and the Eagle* or the books on the African novel by Palmer and Cook, Judith Wright's *Preoccupations* or Gray's *Southern African Literature*).

The proof reading in the main body of the book is good and there are very few typos (e.g. G. W. Desani, and the name of Alf Wannenburg is constantly misspelled). Far less care has gone into the footnotes, the bibliography and the index. On p. 201 the editor of the present volume is made into Jürgen Schäffer, on p. 195 there is a reference to Bruce when Bruce King is meant. And I wonder if Ngugi ever wrote under the name Ngugi Wa Tiongo. I do not know if Larson changed the title for the second edition of his study on African fiction, but it was certainly published at Bloomington and not at Indiana, as Keesing's book was published in Milton, Qld. rather than Hongkong. And is the title of the book edited by Ramson not *English Transported* rather than *Transported*? These are examples and not an exhaustive list of mistakes.

I think that there are about two dozen dubious dates in the book: Was K.S. Prichard not born in 1883 (not 1893), Xavier Herbert in 1901 (not 1911), Arthur Nortje in 1942 (not 1946)? Was *Capricornia* not published in 1938 (not 1937)?

I have another quarrel with the editor about the index: With some authors as many first names as possible have been hunted out, e.g. Edward Fairly Stuart Graham Cloete, while others receive initials only (e.g. C.J. Driver). Why not use one system throughout? And if full names are given, why not use brackets to indicate under what names these people normally published their books, e.g. E(dwin) J(ohn) Pratt, (Theodore) Wilson Harris, etc.?

But these are minor flaws in a work which will surely be immensely valuable to German students of Commonwealth literature.

KLAUS STUCKERT

Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1979. 247 pp. £6.95.

The critical emphasis of book-length studies of Caribbean literature has shifted in recent years from introductory surveys and overviews, such as Louis James's *Islands in Between* (1968) and Ivan Van Sertima's *Caribbean Writers* (1968), to studies of individual authors like Hena Maes-Jelinek's and Michael Gilkes' of Wilson Harris, Landeg White's and

Robert Morris's of V.S. Naipaul, Louis James's and Thomas Staley's of Jean Rhys, and Robert Hammer's of Derek Walcott. Given this current critical trend (an indication surely that individual Caribbean writers now have substantial canons and deserve full-length treatment), *West Indian Literature*, a collection of essays by various hands intended as an introductory survey, comes as a surprise — but then, such popular literary surveys (the book belongs to the Macmillan series on new literatures written with the 'general reader' in mind) are periodically necessary. As the editor says, these essays were commissioned because it was felt that 'an up-to-date introduction to Caribbean literature in English' was needed. 'There is still an insufficient body of useful commentary and historical information readily available for the general reader and student.' Adhering to the requirements of the Macmillan series, *West Indian Literature* seeks to provide a survey of the literary history which relates the creative writing to the social and historical background and offers concise introductions to major authors and briefer assessments of secondary and younger writers. Notwithstanding its intractable unevenness and lack of cohesion (not altogether unexpected in a work in which many have participated), the book serves its purpose well.

It has two parts. The first is a socio-historical introduction to and a chronological survey of West Indian literature in five chapters entitled 'The Background', 'The Beginnings to 1929', 'The Thirties and Forties', 'The Fifties', and 'Since 1960: Some Highlights'. The other chapters discuss individually six novelists (Edgar Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris, and Jean Rhys) and two poets (Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite). Bruce King gives a brief preface to these thirteen chapters which is essentially an outline of the various essays and a brave attempt at imparting some continuity and cohesion to the book.

The first essay, by Rhonda Cobham, provides the reader in twenty pages with a quick sweep of Caribbean history and even manages to squeeze in discussions of events considered significant to Caribbean literature (such as the exposure of the early writers to European society during the war) and of the various peoples and groups of the Caribbean (the East Indians, the Rastafarians, the Black Power advocates, for instance). She draws as much from the creative writers' journals and autobiographies as from historical works for her information. The four subsequent chapters which constitute the chronological survey focus on the secondary writers; the major authors (who have separate chapters to themselves) are not discussed here. This, supposedly, was to avoid repetition and duplication, but it distorts the chronological survey and makes dubious its usefulness. Moreover, some of the secondary authors who appear in these chapters and whose creative lives span several decades (Claude McKay is one) are subjected to piecemeal treatment when their careers are chopped up chronologically and distributed among the various chapters and critics.

The different approaches and emphases of these four chapters point up the lack of continuity and cohesion. Anthony Boxill's 'The Beginnings to 1929' and Reinhard Sander's 'The Thirties and Forties' combine a cataloguing of books with brief analyses of representative works. Boxill, discussing a period wherein the writers are primarily precursors and progenitors, is hard-pressed to find much of literary significance to say about their works. Sander discusses a more creative period, and he mingles sound observations on Mendes' and James's fiction with bibliographical details of the influential and incubative little magazines *Kyk-over-al*, *Focus*, *Bim*, and *Beacon*. Sandra Paquet has the task in a short chapter on the fifties of introducing the works of V.S. Reid, Roger Mais, John Hearne, Andrew Salkey, Ian Carew, Martin Carter, and Eric Roach. She puts

the emphasis on the writers' awareness of the social conditions of their particular place and time. Her analysis of their works is restrictively thematic. More comments on form and more evaluation would have been useful in this introductory piece. Edward Baugh eschews the sociological approach in 'Since 1960: Some Highlights'. He has some extremely fine readings of the works of the novelists Michael Anthony, Austin Clarke, and Garth St Omer, and of the poets Mervyn Morris, Anthony McNeil, Dennis Scott, and Wayne Brown. He even contrives to make comparisons with the more established writers (Clarke, for instance, with Selvon). Baugh evidently needed more space to do justice to these younger talents. The editor apparently allowed equal number of pages to the four survey chapters; it might have been better to have allocated space in proportion to the number of talents present in each period.

The novelists and poets honoured with separate chapters are those the editor and contributors considered the major West Indian writers. One could hardly fault their selection, though there are other names worthy of consideration. (It is interesting to note that ten years earlier Louis James's *Islands In Between* devoted chapters to Mais, Reid, Lamming, Walcott, Salkey, Hearne, Naipaul, and Harris. James's book, however, reflected the critical interest of the contributors rather than an editorial intention of selecting the important writers.) Devoting a chapter to Mittelholzer is appropriate. He needs to be reclaimed from the heap of popular fiction to which he has been relegated for too long. Faced with more than twenty books, Michael Gilkes succeeds in giving a fairly comprehensive survey of Mittelholzer's works, selecting *Corentyne Thunder*, *The Life and Death of Sylvia*, *Morning at the Office*, and the Kaywana trilogy for more detailed consideration. Though Gilkes points to Mittelholzer's merits (the pioneering exploration of the West Indian's psychic imbalance, the vital portrayal of the natural setting), he is not always at ease when analysing the works of a writer he agrees is a novelist *manqué*. Another writer whose importance as a pioneer is unquestioned but whose works have not been analysed closely until recently is Selvon. Michel Fabre's introduction to his novels is clear and straightforward. He analyses each novel (the stories are ignored) putting the emphasis on *A Brighter Sun*, *The Lonely Londoners*, *Turn Again Tiger*, and *Moses Ascending*. Fabre is particularly sound in his analysis of *A Brighter Sun*. Jean Rhys — whose inclusion here might be questioned by some who see her as belonging more to British literature than to Caribbean literature despite her Caribbean experience and *Wide Sargasso Sea* — is given short-shift by Cheryl Dash's interpretation of her as a novelist concerned with minorities (women, and whites in the West Indies). This is one aspect of Rhys's writing which could be persuasively developed perhaps, but it is much too narrow an approach to make Dash's chapter anything more than a sketchy introduction to the complexities and riches of Rhys's novels.

The chapters on the writers who unquestionably constitute the core of any survey of Caribbean literature — Naipaul, Harris, Lamming, Walcott and Brathwaite — provide more or less comprehensive introductions despite the limited space. Hena Maes-Jelinek's essay is a useful exegesis of Harris' novels. The uninitiated reader would do well to keep her study handy when reading Harris. Maes-Jelinek allots a fair space to *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris' better-known and most accessible novel which 'contains in embryo all further developments'. Ian Munro's introduction to George Lamming and Bruce King's to V.S. Naipaul both have a thematic emphasis with little comment on form. Munro comments perceptively on Lamming's view of experience, but he is not always alert to Lamming's weaknesses — the opaque passages and the occasional persistent allegorizing, for instance. King is aware of Naipaul's complex vision but his essay tends to portray

Naipaul more as a social historian than as a novelist. He sees *A House for Mr Biswas*, for instance, more as a socio-historical portrayal of the East Indian community than as an exploration of the struggles of the little man. King discusses the novels chronologically, and it should be noted that he misplaces *The Loss of El Dorado* (published 1969, not 1965) before instead of after *The Mimic Men*. The poet-critic Mervyn Morris (whose poems are discussed elsewhere in the book) writes a very sensitive introduction to Walcott's poems and plays, showing how pervasive is this poet's energizing ambivalent vision of life. Michael Dash proffers the thesis that Brathwaite's poetry focuses on human, personal, and artistic themes, and that he is not a political or folk poet. In so doing, Dash, though he acknowledges at one point that there are conflicting attitudes and tones in Brathwaite's poetry, imparts to him a voice that is too even and consistent. Incidentally, was *Rights of Passage* changed to *Rites of Passage*, the title used by Dash throughout his essay?

These studies of the major writers function as eight separate entities. No effort is made to correlate them with each other or with the earlier chapters. Consequently, the reader finds that on page 24 the major theme of Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* is 'the Indian-African question', while on page 111 it is the 'initiation into manhood and into a measure of intellectual and social awareness...' On page 178 Naipaul's 'characters and their society are seen both from inside and outside, without excesses of criticism or sympathy', while on page 211 he is linked with writers who respond to the West Indies with 'violent protest or inveterate cynicism'. Introductory literary studies are always useful, more so when written by one author. Written by several hands, they tend to become — in defiance of the best editorial efforts — uneven, unconnected, and lacunal. Such, unfortunately, is the case with this book, which nevertheless is a welcome addition to Caribbean literary criticism.

VICTOR J. RAMRAJ

A.J. Seymour, ed., *A Treasury of Guyanese Poetry* (Georgetown: National Lithographic Co., 1980). 233 pp. n.p.a.

One of the most outstanding publications free of government rhetoric to have come out of Guyana recently is this collection of poetry. Embracing 150 years of the best poetry of the region, it seems likely to be one of the most comprehensive collections to appear in the Caribbean indicating that the creative spirit is alive and well. Apart from its eleven thematic sections, the collection contains two chronological divisions: from 1830 to 1930; and from 1940 to the present, the latter 'marking the emergence of the modern Guyana', as A.J. Seymour puts it.

Section I deals with people: with the blend of the six races of Guyana, which every school child in the country has ingrained in him from the moment he can read or write, despite the fact that the two major racial groups — the Indians and the Africans — have been at loggerheads with each other for most of modern Guyana's history. The people are described as being impoverished and labouring; the image of desolation and hardship, poignantly presented in Ian MacDonald's 'Usman Ali, Charcoal Seller', is juxtaposed and contrasted with the antipodal view of Guyana stemming from colonial vestiges which suggests that Guyana is still a halcyon land where all is splendid, and reinforces the Elizabethan notion of an idyllic El Dorado. The next section deals with love, both romantic

and natural. The two best poems here are Kenneth Taharally's 'Sweet Love, I Live Dreaming', and Hugh Todd's 'To My Wife'. Both of these express with clarity the sincerity of emotion; they even go beyond, encompassing an element of mysticism. The other poems show love in the Victorian sense, displaying all the stock phrases, stock conceits, and banal apostrophizing that one usually finds in a 'treasury'.

The children's thematic section, though the smallest, contains some of the best poetry. Here one finds Seymour's own 'One Day I fashioned a Royal Dream', with its charming mood of fantasy, magic, and simplicity, as well as Wilson Harris's very well-known poem, familiar to nearly all of Guyana's school children, 'Tell Me Trees what are you Whispering'. Most of the pieces are evocative of mood, feeling and landscape: like Martin Carter's 'For My Son', another familiar poem. The Nature Poems section makes similar evocations with unmistakable aesthetic resonance. 'Stanzas in the Water' by the pseudonymous Colonist matches the finest of the English Romantic poets. The romanticism persists in Seymour's own 'Carrión Crows' — vulturine scavengers — which in the author's eyes are perceived in flight 'winnowing the air like beauty come alive'. Nature is seen essentially as beautiful, rarely is it seen in any palpably harsh or virulent sense to be conquered by man's will. The notion of paradise persists, with the various place names now and again transmuted to song as part of the overall idealizing tendency — which could more or less be due to the editor's own poetic preference in this anthology. The most significant poem in this section is David Campbell's 'An Arawak Indian of Guyana'. Campbell calls up the idea of a conventional paradise in unique terms, seen essentially in the final stanza of 'Sun Wheel' where he is able to fuse Amerindian shamanism with Christian imagery as he expresses his own despair, a despair based partly on his own uprootedness:

I see no crucifixions in this jungle  
The passion flower sways soft on the south wind  
And deer and sloth and cat and anaconda  
Circle slowly in the green cathedral.  
The secrets of the sun children all round me  
Wait to save the wild world far away  
But blinded by the snows of the north country  
So long away I lose my way and stumble...

The historical section depicts Guyana's past of slavery and indentured servility. On the whole, the poems are about the suffering of the slaves as in 'Van Hoogenheim', or are tributary, in the case of the first East Indian immigrant woman by the late poet, Rajkumari Singh. But, as with the large number of poems in the previous section, these simultaneously combine lamentation with a hortatory tone.

The most vital section is 'Protest', which contains the best of Martin Carter's poems. Here the feelings are much stronger, more resonantly expressed. In Carter's 'I Come from the Nigger Yard' and 'University of Hunger' we see protest of the most poignant kind combined with lyricism and surrealism. Carter is often the wounded poet:

I come from the nigger yard of yesterday  
leaping from the oppressor's hate  
and the scorn of myself.  
I come to the world with scars upon my soul  
wounds on my body, fury in my hands.

The haunting lines combined with unique cadence and imagery make it a marvellously compelling poem.

The long streets of night move up and down  
baring the thighs of a woman  
and the cavern of a generation.  
The beating drum returns and dies away.  
The bearded men fall down and go to sleep.  
The cocks of dawn stand up and crow like bugles.

is they who rose early in the morning  
watching the moon die in the dawn.  
is they who heard the shell blow and the iron clang  
is they who had no voice in the emptiness  
in the unbelievable  
in the shadowless.  
O long is the march of men and long is the life  
and wide is the span.

Carter is a revolutionary poet who combines activism with his writing and more than once he has been in trouble with the security forces of the country who harassed him unnecessarily.

The next three sections comprising elegies, philosophy, and religion follow the timbre of the previous ones. The poems here worthy of attention are Jan Carew's 'Requiem for my Sister', a somewhat overly long poem describing the author's truths about life, going back to history and religion ('Our people bore the mark of Cain/ Bodies were hollow logs of bone, the skin stretched tight as a drum...'), and Kenneth Taharally's 'My Brother with the Lightning of his Hand'.

Of significance in the religious section is Wilson Harris's poetry — deriving from that author's long poem, 'The Sun', which uses as its matrix Greek mythology, fused with his personal vision and Christian resonance to express an almost primeval utterance couched, as it is, in a sophisticated frame of reference.

The final section — Narrative — has the two significant poems, 'The Legend of the Kaieteur', by Seymour, and the much-neglected 'Ruth', by Leo Martin, one of the pioneering voices of Guyanese poetry.

The *Treasury of Guyanese Poetry* is a significant collection which has put together in book form much of the best of Guyanese poetry, coupled with an index of writers and first lines to help the casual reader as well as the scholar to identify quickly the poems of his choice. Perhaps, because most of the best poems have already been published in one form or another and are thus fairly well-known — especially to a Guyanese readership — another collection in a few years' time with selections from some of the more up-to-date works by the newer voices should be undertaken to give a more solid picture of the strength of Guyanese poetry. In such a book, for instance, those writers who are expatriates, and who have made advances in their technique, would add an even more significant value to the thriving spirit of Guyanese poetry.

CYRIL DABYDEEN

Peter Wolfe, *Jean Rhys*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980. 186 pp., \$10.95.

Peter Wolfe's study of Jean Rhys is one in a recent spate of critical works on the writer whose small cult following is increasing rapidly in the U.S. and the U.K. Indicative of the growing recognition of Rhys as an important twentieth-century literary figure is the Modern Language Association's decision to authorize a special session commemorating her work during the December 1981 meetings in New York City.

Wolfe clearly defines the threefold aim of his book as seeking the unity of Rhys's individual works, defining her artistry through her whole development, and comparing this development to that of other women fiction writers of our century. He examines Rhys's relatively short canon in chronological order and credits his methodology with revealing Jean Rhys as a developing artist. Wolfe sees in Rhys's early books the roots of the technical control of her later phase — a control which he perceives as strengthening Rhys's vision 'while sharpening her narrative economy'.

Wolfe writes with vigour and authority in a colloquial prose style using contemporary American English and the language of popular psychoanalysis. He pays substantial attention to stylistic and structural concerns and subscribes to the general critical appreciation for Rhys's prose economy, control of tone, and freedom from sentimentality. Writing from a Modern Literature point-of-view rather than from a Commonwealth Literature perspective, Wolfe dwells less upon the West Indian aspects of Rhys's biography and fiction than do the earlier critical overviews by Louis James and Thomas Staley.

It is evident that Wolfe has thoroughly reviewed extant criticism on Rhys and he incorporates into his book the most useful items from his research. This makes the book especially useful for Rhys students and teachers because it serves the secondary function of presenting in context recent British and American views of Rhys's writing. Despite Wolfe's evident familiarity with secondary sources, his selected bibliography is disappointingly short; it contains only a dozen citations, most of which — like A. Alvarez's *New York Times Book Review* piece and V.S. Naipaul's *New York Review of Books* item — are well-known and frequently cited elsewhere.

In addition, a Chronology precedes the text, but it is curiously uneven. For example, while it dates the death of Rhys's second husband, it fails to date the deaths of her first and third husbands. And while it dates Rhys's W.H. Smith literary award and her Arts Council of Great Britain Award for Writers, it neglects to note that Rhys was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1978 for her services to literature. Further, the dating of Rhys's moves to Cornwall and to Devon — important material for establishing a reliable Rhys biography — are questionable.

Wolfe opens his analysis by grouping together the collected short stories of Rhys's early and late careers, tracing common denominators. He also discusses the uncollected stories 'I Spy a Stranger' and 'Temps Perdu', but he misses the ambivalence of the latter by forcing it into his overview of Rhys's 'dreariness and dislocation'. He adds a valuable dimension to Rhys criticism in his analysis of *Quartet*, Rhys's first novel, by relating it to Ford Madox Ford's novel *The Good Soldier*. He shows, too briefly perhaps, how both novels reflect the circumstances of the Ford-Rhys affair, thereby providing a framework for future scholarly examination.

Identifying death as the thematic connection between *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark*, Wolfe focuses upon the Rhysian heroine's fall from virtue into

prostitution. Although he acknowledges that much of *Voyage in the Dark* 'consists of Anna's recollections of her island girlhood', Wolfe ignores the West Indian material of the novel, choosing to stress instead the heroine's 'real world' career. Citing Ralph Tyler, Sara Blackburn, V.S. Naipaul, Francis Wyndham, A. Alvarez, Judith Thurman, Francis Hope, Elgin Mellow, Marcelle Bernstein and Mary Cantwell on *Good Morning, Midnight*, Wolfe agrees with the critics in praise of the fourth novel and concludes that it 'marks a peak for Jean Rhys'.

Wolfe moves through Rhys's West Indian classic, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in the order of its narrative events. He concentrates upon the sexuality in the novel, lapsing into unfortunate cultural clichés about white men lusting after black women and 'civilized English minds' that 'cannot cope with the tropics'. Following his restatement of the novel's narrative line, Wolfe ties Rhys's novel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. He shows the consistency of Rhys's portrayal of Rochester with Brontë's and he identifies Rochester as the important link between the two novels, convincingly showing how 'the Rochester of *Sargasso* calls into question posterity's attitude toward him'.

Whereas Wolfe goes behind *Wide Sargasso Sea* to the novelist, asserting that Rhys questions Rochester's sexual maturity, Wolfe does not go beyond the characters of Brontë's novel to Brontë herself. Of great value in this respect, as an example, is Michael Thorpe's recognition ('The Other Side', *Ariel*, July 1977, p. 101) that Brontë's mad Creole woman is an expression of the matter-of-fact racial prejudice that Brontë shared with her Victorian audience. Indeed, Brontë's Bertha Mason Rochester is an extension of the same stereotype Brontë invokes in *The Professor* where she describes one of her student characters as having 'loose ringlets of abundant but somewhat coarse hair over her rolling black eyes; parting her lips, as full as those of a hot-blooded Maroon, she showed her well-set teeth sparkling between them'. This, in turn, reminds the reader of Thackeray's passionate West Indian student in *Vanity Fair* — 'Miss Swartz, the rich woolly-haired mulatto from St Kitts'. It is such British social and literary condescension toward colonials and foreigners that stimulated Rhys to liberate Antoinette from the attic where Brontë had imprisoned her.

ELAINE CAMPBELL

Michael Anthony, *All That Glitters*. Andre Deutsch, London, 1981. 202 pp. £5.95.

I see myself principally as a story teller. In other words I am not aware that I have any message. I think both the past life and the fascination of landscape play a most important part in my work.

Michael Anthony

Michael Anthony's strength as a writer lies in his capacity to recreate, with remarkable freshness and sensibility, places, characters, and events from the Trinidad of his youth ('past life') and to evoke beautifully the landscapes of his native country. His art of memory, vivid and unsurpassed, is what strikes the reader in his latest novel *All That*

*Glitters*. It records a few weeks in the life of a thirteen-year-old boy, Horace Lumpres, who lives with his widowed mother in Mayaro, a village on the Atlantic coast of Trinidad. *All That Glitters* is narrated in the first person, and from beginning to end the experiencing consciousness is that of the boy. People and places are seen 'objectively' through his eyes and subjectively in terms of his responses to them. Horace is a perceptive and inquisitive boy, but given to dreaming and 'imagining' which often makes him fail to see details that are right under his nose. He reveals a marked uncertainty about adult motives, actions, and relationships, as when he is initiated in the scheme against the villain of the book, Sergeant Cordner:

Uncle had got worked up and now his eyes were bloodshot and fierce. I was feeling fierce, too. I had realised, of course, that Sarge wanted to disgrace Cordner, not so much because of the gold chain itself, but for a reason which I was not very clear about. Or was it really because of the gold chain and because of us? I did not know. Whatever the reason, though, that gold chain was not lost, but was there, in Tobago with Cordner, and we should soon hold it, glittering, in our very hands. My heart was thumping as I stood there. I could hardly wait for the dawn to break.

However, Michael Anthony's artistic control is so tight that never once does he impose an adult's perception on his child narrator.

*All That Glitters* tells the story of the return of Horace's favourite Aunt Romeen who brings into the world of Mayaro not only her warmth, love and affection, but also the gift of a gold chain which could make the family's dreams of a better and richer life come true. However, the chain disappears under mysterious circumstances and it is the unravelling of this crime that constitutes the bulk of the novel. We follow Horace in his desperate attempts to throw light on the mystery and to make 'sense of all the nonsense' that he feels surrounds him. But the novel is not a detective story; it is primarily an exploration of family affections, rivalries and jealousies, and an account of a boy's groping towards an understanding of life and life's 'little ironies'. At the end of the novel Horace has come to understand a certain section of his community, but there is no attempt on Michael Anthony's part to suggest that the boy has reached maturity. He is in the process of growing up, of learning about life and the true values of life; when we leave him he has grasped the meaning of 'all that glitters is not gold' (in all its aspects); the proverb to him is no longer just a sentence to be analysed and parsed in grammar classes.

*All That Glitters* will remind readers of Michael Anthony's early novel *The Year in San Fernando*. It offers an equally brilliant evocation of childhood experiences, showing the difficulties of growing up and coming to terms with the various forces that shape the individual, changing his attitude towards himself and the world at large. Built-in with the account of the boy's development is a pattern of growth of the West Indian consciousness, of a growing into awareness of the West Indies as a nation. Michael Anthony has once again proved himself to be a master of the 'childhood novel' which is an important and integral part of the literary tradition of the West Indies. He has a good ear for the spoken language, and this, combined with his character portrayal and description of place, makes *All That Glitters* a book well worth reading.

ANNEMARIE BACKMANN

C.K. Stead, *Five for the Symbol*. Longman Paul, Auckland, New Zealand, 1981. 167 pp.

Commenting on the title of his latest volume, Carl Stead writes: 'Perhaps the best symbol for this collection of stories is the pentagram, a five-pointed figure which can be drawn without lifting the pen from the page... The five points of the star go in five directions yet they are unified. There is one centre, one »subject«, one symbol.' The author has pursued his quest for meaning through various media: his poetry has received much praise with *Whether the Will is Free* (Paul, 1964), *Crossing the Bar* (Auckland and Oxford University Press, 1972), *Quesada* (The Shed, 1975) and *Walking Westward* (The Shed, 1975). He has also edited the second volume of *New Zealand Short Stories* (Oxford University Press, 1967), *Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield* (Penguin, 1977) and published a casebook on *Measure for Measure* (Macmillan, 1971). In academic circles he holds a well-deserved reputation for *The New Poetic* (Hutchinson, 1964), a critical examination of the evolution of poetry from Yeats to Eliot. In the field of fiction, he has written *Smith's Dream* (Longman Paul, 1971), a novel which imagines New Zealand overrun by a ruthless dictator who has managed to cultivate the acquiescence if not the acceptance of his fellow-citizens. The hero, who thinks he has escaped from it all on an isolated island of the Hauraki Gulf, is forced into unwilling, then active involvement.

*Five for the Symbol* has no explicit political content. It is organized with three masculine and two feminine narrators, thus explicitly evoking Pythagorean connotations, five, the 'perfect' number, representing the marriage of the first masculine number (3) with the first feminine number (2). Written between 1959 and 1979, the stories deal with the problems, both personal and social, which a young New Zealander has to face. In 'A Race Apart' (1959), a record-winner Kiwi athlete takes up a job as a chauffeur in an English country mansion. The epitome of British gentry is made to meet an antipodean type, the fit sportsman who has 'made it' to the 'old country'. These characters could become amusing clichés in a gentle comedy of manners. C.K. Stead certainly enjoys the minor scandal caused by the discovery of the champion skipping about in the fields with the aristocratic daughter of the family. Yet the lightness of the tone is usually counter-balanced by a genuine interest in the meeting of two worlds which shed light on one another's foibles. The reader follows the plot through the eyes of the Lady of the House who, like her creator, builds up her story with tiny particles of memory which, on the point of turning into perfect constructions, run the constant risk of instant annihilation: '...each memory I watched was like a metal sphere, in orbit around me. The sphere existed, indissolubly itself, and I had no idea what its circumference closed upon. But I felt that the threat of destruction hung about it' (p. 23).

In 'A Fitting Tribute' (1964), the woman narrator tells of her lover, a great man whom everyone reveres because he has made New Zealand famous; he has equalled Icarus in his dream to fly with his own wings made up, this time, of parts from pilfered umbrellas. Julian Harp has disappeared over the volcanic cone of Rangitoto into a world of disincarnate public adulation. In a country which has suffered for so long from colonial complexes, every description of the life of a great inventor which might make him less than superhuman is obliterated. The self-centred dreamer has sacrificed the lives of his girl-friend and child and has thus gone into history. C.K. Stead's story gently satirizes New Zealand's propensity for worshipping heroes of the 'Man Alone' type. Julian Harp belongs to the public and the public will not see the unpleasant side of the character. 'But if you ever came out of a building and found your umbrella missing you might like to

believe my story because it may mean that you contributed a strut to the wings that carried him aloft' (p. 62).

'The Town' (1974) draws heavily on the Mediterranean landscape and English-speaking community of Menton in which the author spent some time as a Katherine Mansfield Fellow. Through different strands of fragmented stories which all centre on the accident in which the narrator's Fiat overturned and caught fire, a whole community of exiles, estate-agents and crooks is described. This new journey of apprenticeship appears as a mystery tale which is explored through disjointed flashes of perception. Perhaps because of the relative foreignness of his material here, C.K. Stead does not sound as convincing and as profound as in the other stories. 'The Town' does not always avoid stereotypes. In spite of this the problems of loneliness and of difficult human intercourse are examined in very moving terms.

'A Quality of Life' (1969) is the masterpiece of this fine collection. The narrator, a novelist, is about to burn the story he has written of his impossible love for young Veena who is engaged to a successful businessman. Far from opposing the 'good' intellectual and the 'bad' capitalist, the author manages to fashion his characters into extremely complex creations, touching but also ridiculous at times in their naïve youthful self-assurance. The men realize that a woman is more than merely a prey which one chases to prove one's 'normality'. As the story develops, certainties gradually crumble. A subtle link builds up between the narrator and Veena, which transcends their blundering and finally unsuccessful attempts at linking up. An intimate and complex relationship is formed through and beyond the flesh. The narrator finally realizes that his novel has been mostly an attempt to cure his disappointments in life: 'As I took it to the incinerator I wondered why I had ever supposed I could possess in art what life had denied me' (p. 138).

'A New Zealand Elegy' (1979) traces the development of a friendship between two Auckland boys who come to political and sexual awareness with the onset of the Korean war. Their dreams of a better society form the background of their rivalry to be the first to 'fuck' a woman. Their teen-age fantasies end tragically with the accidental death of the narrator's pal who rides his motor-cycle into the back end of a truck where Marion, the sexually arousing neighbour, is embracing her lover.

In these stories, C.K. Stead exposes certain socially transmitted features which reproduce fixed patterns of behaviour. Growing up involves learning the necessity to abandon simple answers in favour of complex questions. Humour and a desire to pursue his questioning as far as it leads him enable the author to raise fundamental issues and to deal with them brilliantly. Because of their emblematic quality, these five sketches enrich our understanding of contemporary New Zealand much in the same way as Frank Sargeson's stories help us to understand the atmosphere of the thirties.

J.P. DURIX

Maurice Gee, *Meg*. Faber & Faber, 1981. 251 pp. £5.95.

Despite the fact that he had written four novels and one collection of short stories (all published in England) Maurice Gee remained virtually unknown outside his native New Zealand until the publication of *Plumb* in 1978. This novel not only won him three major

awards in New Zealand but also the James Tait Memorial Prize in Britain. It told the story of George Plumb, former Presbyterian minister, Christian Socialist, militant pacifist and finally freethinker — searching always for the truth and following the dictates of his conscience no matter what the consequences either to himself, his wife or his twelve children.

*Meg* is a sequel to *Plumb*. The narrator is the youngest daughter, Meg, and she, like so many of Gee's characters, looks back to the past in order to define and understand her place in the present. Through a series of flashbacks and reminiscences she tells the story of the other Plumbs — not all of them, for several had left for America and one had died — but of those who remained in New Zealand. It is on the whole a depressing picture. Gee continues to explore the theme which has become central to his work, that of personal relationships, their subtle cruelty, even their savagery, all of them conducted within the structures and confines of the nuclear family. The central figure of the father continues to hold them together. They were all conscious of being Plumbs and that to be a Plumb was to be special. Even Alfred who had changed his name when his father banished him because of his homosexuality gives his name as Plumb when he is being kicked to death by a pack of gay-bashers.

At the conclusion of the novel Meg's brother Robert dies. Their father had written the sermon to be read at the burial. It read as follows: 'Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.... Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return ye children of men.' George Plumb would fail to see the irony here but in one way we could say that this is what the book is about. For it shows all the children living in the shadow of their Old Testament patriarchal father, unable to free themselves from him or the Puritan morality that dominates so much of New Zealand life. Plumb continues to dominate their lives as in a way he dominates *Meg* and even this review. It doesn't quite measure up to the quality of *Plumb* but it is still a fine novel well worth reading.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

Nelson Wattie, *Nation und Literatur. Eine Studie zur Bestimmung der nationalen Merkmale literarischer Werke am Beispiel von Katherine Mansfields Kurzgeschichten*. Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, Bonn, 1980. DM36.00.

Is it possible to detect national features in works of literature? and if yes, is it useful to do so? These are the questions Nelson Wattie sets out to answer in his study of *Nation und Literatur*.

The relationship between nationality and literature has been obscured by the effects of nationalism, and Nelson Wattie recognizes the necessity of distinguishing sharply between the terms 'nationalistic' and 'national' and of applying only the latter in literary criticism. The literary critic must 'avoid bringing preconceived ideas into the interpretation of literary works by first determining the characteristics of a nation and then seeking them in the works'. What he should do — and this is more difficult but also more

rewarding — is to examine the 'characteristics of the works and then decide which of them may justifiably be called 'national'. It is, of course, important to realize that a 'nation' is not an objectively definable entity; however, it is Nelson Wattie's thesis that every work of literature through its internal characteristics may imply that it is a part of a national literature and 'in doing so contribute to the constitution of that literature'.

*Nation und Literatur* falls into two main parts which correspond to Nelson Wattie's twofold aim:

Die vorliegende Arbeit will das Phänomen der nationalen Ambiguität bei solchen Schriftstellern (d.h. Schriftsteller ohne eindeutige Nationalität) untersuchen, weil man sich dadurch eine Klärung der Frage der nationalen Merkmale literarischer Werke im Allgemeinen erhoffen kann. Die Untersuchung von Mansfields Kurzgeschichten im zweiten Teil ist deswegen als exemplarisch für das Problem zu verstehen, das im ersten Teil in allgemeiner Form besprochen wird.

In the first part of his study, which contains a rather theoretical discussion of general problems of literary theory, Nelson Wattie defines 'national literature' as 'die Summe der literarischen Werke deren nationale Eigenschaften vorwiegend einer bestimmten Nation zuzuordnen sind'. Realizing the difficulty — or impossibility — of dealing with a national literature as a whole, he goes on to define and clarify what is meant by 'nationale Eigenschaften eines Werkes' (national features/characteristics of a particular work of literature), and to work out a method for determining the 'nationality' of a literary work. He chooses four areas/criteria which must necessarily be examined if one wants to establish the nationality of a particular work: the author, the language, the content, and the reader. In each of the four areas it is, however, possible (and desirable) to distinguish between several layers of locality: (1) the national layer, (2) the individual/personal one, and (3) the international/universal layer. Adopting this 'Schichtenmodell' as a basis for the presentation of the problems, Nelson Wattie endeavours to avoid the following dangers: the leaving out or suppression of national features (first layer) where they exist; the over-evaluation of such features at the cost of the literary qualities pertaining to the individual writer (second layer); or literary qualities of a more universal nature (third layer).

In the second part of the book he goes on to illustrate the above points (author, language, content, reader) by the short stories of Katherine Mansfield whom he considers an interesting example because of her 'national ambiguity': some readers/critics see her as an essentially English writer, others as a New Zealand one. This section offers some lucid and valuable analyses of a number of her stories, interesting readings because of the new and somewhat untraditional approach to her works. Nelson Wattie tries to refute the generally accepted image of Katherine Mansfield as a rebellious young girl. He shows that the theory of two 'breaks' in Mansfield's life — her rejection of New Zealand and later her return and renewed attachment to it — is an untenable one. Her relationship to her country and her home were tense and ambivalent, but they remained essentially the same throughout her life. There is no proof (in her works and journals) of her rejection of her home country in 1907-08. Her journey to England was not a rejection of the New Zealand nation within her, but only of her family and other New Zealanders like her family. In his analysis of the narrative structure of Katherine Mansfield's short stories, Nelson Wattie shows that the author is 'ironically detached when handling English, French or German situations, but emotionally involved when handling New Zealand ones'.

Nelson Wattie's study is a valuable contribution to the general theory of literature as well as to the field of Commonwealth literature. It is a very scholarly work and as such probably of more interest to the 'expert' than to the 'general reader'. The notes and bibliography shows thoughtful selection of material and a comprehensive range of reading. One may say that his main achievement is to have shown the value of such an approach to literature. His approach (based as it is on a 'Schichtenmodell') can offer new and valuable insights into the nature of literature. It is a useful approach, especially in cases of 'nationaler Ambiguität der Schriftsteller'; one must, however, bear in mind, as the author rightly points out, that

the national features, although sometimes of major importance, are by no means the whole work. They stand between individual, personal features of style on the one hand and international or even universal features on the other. Not by denying these other layers as the nationalists do, nor by denying the national layer as anti-nationalists may, but by a sober critical assessment of the density of all layers and their relationship to each other, can one hope to attain an objective and accurate picture of the 'local features' of a work of literary art.

His study must be regarded as a welcome addition to the works of criticism on one of New Zealand's major literary figures.

ANNEMARIE BACKMANN

Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, *Katherine Mansfield*. Macmillan Commonwealth Writers Series, general editor A.N. Jeffares. Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1981. 150 pp. £4.95 paperback, £10.00 hardcover edition.

Katherine Mansfield has had her devotees since the 1920s, and for many years the cult was fed by John Middleton Murry, her husband and editor, whose selections from her letters and notebooks constructed an image of her which was to a large extent a fabrication. The unhealthy web has been cleared away over the past two decades thanks to the work of a handful or two of biographers, editors and critics. More work is in progress, but this is a good moment to take stock of the situation, and that is what Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr do in their recent study, published in the Macmillan Commonwealth Writers Series.

As an independent critical study the book is excellent, showing great familiarity with Katherine Mansfield's work and its background, and offering a number of very perceptive readings of her stories. Whether it will serve as a useful guide also for students in secondary schools and liberal arts colleges (as the publishers' blurb claims) is another matter. The authors seem to be addressing a university audience, and only occasionally cast uneasy glances — in the Notes section — in the direction of the less initiated reader, who needs to have words like 'leitmotif' explained to him but is expected to take 'deserts of vast eternity' (page 77) in his stride.

The book is divided into four chapters. The introduction gives some biographical information, describes the literary milieu Katherine Mansfield moved in, and rather sketchily discusses some of the problems facing the scholar interested in her life and work. The remaining chapters take up a selection of the stories in chronological order, thus tracing the development of the artist. The interpretations of individual stories are always thoughtful and often contain penetrating insights. All the major stories receive careful treatment, although 'The Fly' (a 'flawed' story) is given short shrift. The two authors throughout concentrate on symbols rather than character, in keeping with their well-made point that the strongest literary influence on Katherine Mansfield was the Symbolism of the 1890s and later, not Chekhov. Hence — in this context of criticism too — the importance of her New Zealand childhood (page 16):

There is no doubt that she worked at her highest creative level on material that was removed from her in space and time. This is because she was a Symbolist writer, interested not in social contexts and realities, but in the imaginative discovery or recreation of the ideal hidden within the real.

ANDERS IVERSEN

Zulfikar Ghose, *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script*. Austin and New York: Curbstone Press, 1981. 158 pp. \$4.95.

In his 'Author's Note' Ghose quotes from Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty', and Malcolm Lowry's '...what the story is all about, who the protagonist may be, seems of less account beside the explosion of the particular moment...' As such, some of the familiar contemporary mythology and popular culture (Western) are recast in eight continuous, *interterminal scripts* subtly phased into one another, with the characters and situations multiplying and recreating themselves as if Nature had been spawned by an Intelligent Camera. As narrative, the *script* is a clever device allowing the fish-eye use of the familiar lens to achieve simultaneity — and a reduced time-scale in which to make things happen; similarly, a good deal of stage-direction, the commentary, can be incorporated in the story without a traffic hazard; in short, the functions and freedoms of 'photographic memory' (p. 140), which can, at the same time, pick out *the particular moment*.

So our narrator, Walt, reads a *text* in a London newspaper: that, in connection with a recent kidnap-rape-murder case, 'Inspector Hulme is leading the investigation into the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the case which involves such puzzlingly disparate factors as a desert tribe, jet-setting movie stars, and the world of art' (pp. 7-8). Hulme's case was supposed to be between London and Tunis. But the same Hulme turns out to be Walt's double, foil and collaborator, when Walt himself is engaged in his criminal/ human/ artistic *investigations* on the American continent. Foul perversions of sex-and-marriage, the craze for money, the futility of dogmas, and the debasement of land and 'nature' by human avarice and possessiveness are not all entirely new in Ghose as fit themes for fiction, but this new novel, his seventh, marks an advance in story-telling and gives all he touches a contemporary focus: 'This is California, sweetie, it's the end of

the world. Their fantasies, reality and scripts are all mixed up...' (p. 148). The search for gold in the desert is a recurrent theme, and several strands of identity, time and place — the immutable *essences*, come together at the end as Walt, upon being asked 'what have you found, gold?', replies to Rosemary with a positive (though non-committal) 'Maybe'. How Walt finds it in the American earth is perhaps the main story:

I went to the stream and, lying on its bank,  
lowered my face to its rushing water, scooping  
up the water in cupped hands and splashing it  
to my face.

— So that's where you are! I heard Rosemary's  
voice behind me. I was afraid you'd taken  
fright and run away, she added, coming up to  
the stream, too.

— From this? I said, speaking into the clear,  
cool water in my hands. (p. 158)

No, that was only that *particular moment*.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

Jack Mapanje, *Of Chameleons and Gods*. Heinemann, 1981. 80 pp. £1.95.

In an article in *Kunapipi*, Vol. I, No 2, 1979 about the new Malawian poetry Angus Calder traces the publication history — or perhaps rather deplores the lack of it — of this group of poets who have suffered the curious fate of having been made the subject of serious literary criticism before they have gone into print on any significant scale, and he hints that 'happily, it now seems quite likely that a major multinational will produce either a volume by Mapanje, or an anthology, or even both'. Well, the cat is out of the bag: the multinational was Heinemann, and they opted for a volume by Mapanje. The 1971 promise of a small locally printed anthology has taken ten years to reach the dizzy heights of a multinational.

The reasons for this are to be found in the machinations of politics and business and certainly not in the quality of the poetry, which is excellent. One obvious problem is the Malawian censorship which rules out direct political comments. Jack Mapanje comments on this indirectly in his brief introduction. After having stated that the poems are an attempt to 'find a voice or voices as a way of preserving some sanity', he continues 'Obviously where personal voices are too easily muffled, this is a difficult task'. Hence the chameleon of the title.

Curiously enough, Jack Mapanje's voice seems a good deal more personal than that of his more fortunate colleagues, the writers in East African countries with little or no censorship, and the Southern African writers in exile. Angus Calder suggests that the necessity to avoid being strident and glib about obvious 'social' and 'political' themes

accounts for the greater care with poetic expression, and Adrian Roscoe (*Uhuru's Fire*, C.U.P., 1977) finds that Malawian poetry 'prefers a quieter tone and a less public posture than its East African equivalent' (pp. 135-36).

I do not wish to turn this review into a eulogy for censorship, but both the poetry itself and Jack Mapanje's comment seem to bear this out. A major theme in the poetry is a criticism of the country's political development since Independence, including such well-known themes as corruption, the degradations of city life and misuse of power. These criticisms are, however, couched in traditional terms or suggested as analogies to local myths. 'Song of Chickens' is an example of this:

Master, you talked with bows,  
Arrows and catapults once  
Your hands steaming with hawk blood  
To protect your chicken.

Why do you talk with knives now,  
Your hands teaming with eggshells  
And hot blood from your own chicken?  
Is it to impress your visitors?

This mixture of Gods and Chameleons induces a quiet tone, not just out of fear, but out of a sense of responsibility and perhaps even personal failure at the poet's impotence in the face of the powers that be. 'The New Platform Dancers' starts with an affirmation of the poet's/ persona's personal worth:

Haven't I danced the big dance  
Compelled the rains so dust could  
Soar high above like when animals  
Stampede?

The negative question which is a distinctive stylistic feature of the poetry, turns the self-affirmation into a question of self and a plea for acceptance, and the poem ends on a note of quiet despair:

Why do I sit still  
Why does my speech choke  
Like I have not danced  
Before? Haven't I  
Danced the bigger dance?  
Haven't I?

Irony and bitterness seem obvious answers to such a situation, but although these sentiments are present they are not the dominant tone of the poetry. There is a tenderness and a concern with the lives of ordinary people which can not be attributed to the benefits of censorship, but must be the poet's own contribution. Protest can take many forms, and in Jack Mapanje's pen it can even take on the form of beauty. 'Requiem to a Fallen Son' epitomizes these virtues. It describes the joy at the birth of the 'fallen son' in terms of a traditional village celebration, and it leaves the protest and the hurt as an implication

which gains its strength from the beauty of the poetry in describing the event. It says more about the quality of Jack Mapanje's poetry than any critical praise.

...For I saw, I felt, I smelt nothing  
But the happiness of men and women  
Reeling to taut drums  
Roaring in jubilation of your birth, Son.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Buchi Emecheta, *The Moonlight Bride* and *The Wrestling Match*.  
Ibadan, O.U.P. in association with University Press Ltd., 1980. £1.50  
each pb.

Buchi Emecheta, writing from a continent with few women authors, is becoming a better novelist all the time. Like many good writers her work is beginning to separate into two distinct strains, in her case adult fiction and stories for children. In both she has an ability to seem dateless and yet apt for the modern world. Indeed, her most recent novel for adults, *The Joys of Motherhood*, has more to say about African womanhood today, though it takes place forty and more years ago, than almost any other Nigerian work published in the last few years — certainly more than the semi-autobiographies, *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*, which established her reputation. Emecheta's first two books drew on her experiences as a mother of five children, newly arrived in London from Nigeria and obliged to take on the British social Welfare system without the support of a partner. Her writing for adults has been unaggressively feminist, but now she is turning more frequently to story-telling aimed specifically at children. Several Nigerian authors, including Chinua Achebe and Cyprian Ekwensi, have had the versatility to appeal both to grown-ups and to children, but Buchi Emecheta seems especially at ease with her young readers.

*The Moonlight Bride* and *The Wrestling Match* are ideal reading for any child between about six and sixteen — a wide age range because the tales are short, quickly paced and about sympathetic young people whose ages are not precisely stated. In most African households where books in English are to be found, they are unlikely yet to have reached that Polly Toynbee-esque Utopia where little boys play with dollies and little girls with Lego garages. One is probably safe, therefore, in recommending *The Wrestling Match* to young men and *The Moonlight Bride* to young women. Both tales are about preparations, for a fight between villages (which ends in confusion) and for a marriage (which promises harmony). Both carry a hint of allegorical morality — that war has no victors and that beauty is in the eye of the beholder — but I doubt if many readers will feel that they are being preached at.

There is more skill in Buchi Emecheta's story-telling for the young than many people probably realise. I have been privileged to hear her at the Africa Centre in London holding enthralled a room full of five-year olds as she recreates the Ibo tales of her own youth. Her audience for *The Wrestling Match* and *The Moonlight Bride* is likely to be a little older but also predominantly African. They will respond to the lack of fuss and to

the total absence of false drama in her stories. Though one character accidentally has her ear cut off by her doting father there is virtually no exaggerated incident here. The tales hold our attention because ordinary young people are experiencing normal reactions to special but not unlikely occasions. We have mystery (who is the bride to be?), comedy (the ear), excitement (deadly snakes) and, especially in *The Wrestling Match* with its reminders of the Nigerian Civil War, an element of unsententious moralising. These are stories for readers who have never heard of Starsky and Hutch, who can still feel a thrill in dressing up, and who look on parents as rather bossy but in the end to be obeyed because they usually know best.

Though Buchi Emecheta's readership for these two books is likely to be mainly African and juvenile, she deserves to be read elsewhere. She has a vivid capacity to render Ibo society through small descriptive details without making her tales of interest exclusively to Ibo readers. I doubt if anyone would find the names or the customs a serious stumbling-block to their enjoyment of *The Wrestling Match* and *The Moonlight Bride* because the behaviour of the characters rings so true. On the other hand, these are not sophisticated tales either in their subject or the method of their telling and for that reason an adult unfamiliar with Emecheta's work would do much better to start on *The Joys of Motherhood*. Both the new stories, however, could be usefully read in schools or given to voracious children who believe there is more to imagine than television has to offer. Because they are so unpretentious they may easily stimulate several young readers to try composing stories themselves.

ALASTAIR NIVEN

## The Next Issue Includes:

INTERVIEWS: Doris Lessing, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alice Munro.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY: Buchi Emecheta.

PROSE AND POETRY: Tony Cosier, John Clanchy, Mark O'Connor, Michael Sharkey, Anthony Nazombe. Extract from Elma Napier's unpublished novel *Calibishie Chronicle*.

ARTICLES: on Thea Astley, Jean Rhys, David Maillu, R.A.K. Mason, Stephen Black, Elma Napier.

CHECKLIST: on works of criticism on the image of Africa, Africans, and Blacks of the African diaspora in Western literature.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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