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## The Year that was

Mark MacLeod

Diana Brydon

Simon Garrett

Alamgir Hashmi

Kirpal Singh

*See next page for additional authors*

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## The Year that was

### Abstract

Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, and West Indies

### Authors

Mark MacLeod, Diana Brydon, Simon Garrett, Alamgir Hashmi, Kirpal Singh, and Victor J. Ramraj

# The Year That Was

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## AUSTRALIA

Best known early in his career as a highly individual poet and then as conservationist and author of *A Million Wild Acres*, Eric Rolls says it took him twenty years to discover that what he really wanted to do was to write non-fiction with the intensity of poetry.

His *Celebration of the Senses* (Penguin) is a terrific book: observant, thoughtful, funny, sexy — a great affirmation of life that challenges the repression of sensuality in Australian writing by men. This paperback edition adds an important and moving postscript to the original that makes you go back and read the whole book in its light. Interesting to put beside A.B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life*.

So many outstanding publications mean that any reviewer can do no more than hint at the pleasures of this year's Australian fiction. My own favourites are David Malouf's *12 Edmondstone Street* and *Antipodes* (Chatto & Windus), and Helen Garner's award-winning *Postcards from Surfers* (Penguin). Malouf and Garner share an apparently simple style, and behind an almost childlike clarity of vision, an unobtrusive concern with ways of seeing.

The fictional/non-fictional title piece of *12 Edmondstone Street* is at once the best evocation I know of the spaces in the Australian house, and an essay on memory. And the stories in *Antipodes* again confirm the impression that Malouf's strength lies in the novella and short story, rather than in the longer novel.

An uneasy marriage between the fine craft of her style and the unbearably depressing characters and situations of Helen Garner's early work made it frustrating to read. But *Postcards from Surfers* continues the celebratory mood of her outstanding novel *The Children's Bach*. The pain is still there, but it's again balanced by humour. Only one of the stories here doesn't work — and that's when Garner tries on an ocker male voice — but that's a brief diversion and serves to highlight the keynote of this collection, which is Garner's unflinching honesty.

Thomas Keneally's *A Family Madness* (Hodder and Stoughton) takes as its starting point the tragic phenomenon of family murder-suicide.

Straddling two worlds like most of Keneally's novels, *A Family Madness* focuses on the suburban flatness of western Sydney, and the psychic scars of World War II brought to it by a Belorussian migrant family. In a conventional enough contrast, historical detail makes the European scenes slow to read, and gives the alternating Australian scenes the illusory light and freedom which is the catalyst for the final tragedy. Although the European scenes are unnecessarily demanding, *A Family Madness* remains a fine novel, and a natural successor to *Schindler's Ark*.

Keneally himself has praised Thea Astley's *Beachmasters* (Penguin) as her finest novel so far. While not as bleak as her previous novel, *An Item from the Late News*, *Beachmasters* suggests that Astley is reserving her rich comic talent for the short story now. With Greenland somewhere in the background, she returns to the South Pacific setting of her novel *A Boatload of Home Folk* for this movingly written account of cultural paternalism, failed revolution and the loss of innocence.

Another novelist with an inclination towards the exotic, Christopher Koch, in his Miles Franklin Award-winning novel *The Doubleman* (Chatto & Windus) tells a story of the Australian folk music scene in the 1960s. Readers who enjoy *Across the Sea Wall* and *The Year of Living Dangerously* may find the more familiar subject matter here disappointing, but the novel's symbolism and its treatment of the occult have certainly polarised critical opinion.

As Peter Carey seems bound to do with his determination to be a novelist. Reviewing his *Illywhacker* (UQP), Elizabeth Webby delivered the line of the year when she said that inside this massive novel was a great short story struggling to get out. It's a terrific book in parts, but too long, nevertheless. A frightening image for Carey's fiction here in the Best Pet Shop in the World, which, like Australia, is owned by the Mitsubishi Company and peopled with the extraordinary inventions of Herbert Badgery, the 139-year-old narrator who won't, or can't, die.

Equally inventive but more tightly constructed and with a real double-take ending is Elizabeth Jolley's novel *Foxybaby* (UQP). It's been argued, most recently by Fay Zwicky, that Australia lacks the experience and the awareness of true evil and that what emerges in Australian literature, therefore, is authoritarianism, wickedness or naughtiness. Elizabeth Jolley's fiction is a case in point. There is pathos and loneliness beneath the wonderfully playful complexity of its surfaces, but it is life-affirming. Like *Miss Peabody's Inheritance*, *Foxybaby* leaves the reader with pleasant echoes of an imagined childhood, its naughtiness drawn again here from English school fiction.

The best new novelist is Kate Grenville, already highly praised for the

short stories in *Bearded Ladies* (UQP). Here, in the quickly retitled *Lilian's Story* (Allen & Unwin), she tells the story of a woman who, though not lovely, learns to love herself. Reciting Shakespeare for a shilling, bullying a young father into letting her hold his baby, from one point of view she is eccentric, from another she is intelligent and hurt. Another first novel *Benton's Conviction* (A & R), by the underrated poet Geoff Page, manages to make with its anti-war theme a distinctive addition to the literature of World War I, and by now that's not easy to do!

While Helen Garner and David Malouf produced short story collections that are for me among the top three Australian books published this year, other short fiction titles are particularly strong. Like Sumner Locke Elliott, whose new novel *About Tilly Beamis* (Pavanne) is rather disappointing, Morris Lurie is a great master of dialogue and rhythm, and his *The Night We Ate the Sparrow* (Penguin) constantly delights you with its sureness of touch and its offbeat humour. The tricky subtitle 'A memoir and fourteen stories' is only the beginning: any one of the fifteen pieces might be either.

Frank Moorhouse's *Room Service* (Viking) collects the stories centring on Francois Blase, the Balmain Bushman, and reprints Moorhouse's contribution to the Drover's Wife Parody Show; Beverley Farmer in *Home Time* (Penguin), Tim Winton in *Scission* (Penguin) and Olga Masters in *A Long Time Dying* (UQP) produce outstanding collections of stories, with only Masters occasionally succumbing to some of the dangers of matching that style with plain subject matter.

And finally Gerald Murnane's wonderfully titled *Landscape with Landscape* (Norstrilia) is not quite a novel nor, with its self-conscious and overlapping narrative, are its six pieces discrete. Reading Murnane's short novel *The Plains*, I felt like a child trying to walk on a sandhill for the first time, with it slipping out from under, and me constantly groping for a foothold. Here, the more familiar settings are deceptively supportive and the book is genuinely and unexpectedly funny. Murnane has moved a long way from the conventional Catholic background of his early work. Understandably, perhaps, the critics don't seem to know what to do with him, and small press publication continues to buy them a silent time for reading and thinking. But paperback distribution and a wider audience are at last beginning to change all that...

So unusually strong is the year's work in fiction that it overwhelms the poetry and drama by comparison. Robert Gray's *Selected Poems* (A & R), however, would be remarkable in any year. It's no doubt a bit late in the century, but no Australian poet has learned better the lessons of Imagism. An intriguing combination of Zen sparseness and Australian

colloquial ease, Gray's poetry has so often tended towards the pure image that the substantial size of this volume comes as a surprise. The extraordinary clarity and conviction of Gray's visual sense have always delighted me; what shocked me reading across his whole career here at one go is the intense loneliness of the landscape. The poet and the rain, the poet and the abattoir, the poet and the harbour ferries. So much beauty. So few people.

The other interesting collection this year is Laurie Duggan's *The Great Divide* (H & I). Although, like John Tranter, Duggan is under the impression that Australian writers had not heard of Modernism until 1968, the new accessibility of the poetry here shows him crossing the Great Divide which the self-styled 'Generation of '68' did so much to help build in contemporary Australian poetry. Like Nigel Roberts and Tranter himself, Duggan has an appealing sense of humour and readers who enjoy it will be pleased to find it in his well-known 'South Coast Haiku', '(Do) The Modernism' and others. A particular discovery for me, though not in Duggan's characteristic style, was the autobiographical 'Adventures in Paradise'.

Although David Williamson's *Sons of Cain* (Currency) and Ron Elisha's *Two* (Currency) should not be missed, the best Australian play in years is Janis Balodis's *Too Young for Ghosts* (Currency). Balodis parallels the nineteenth century experiences of the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt with the alienation of Latvian migrants in Stuttgart and on the Queensland canefields after the Second World War. His play moves brilliantly in production, but as with the work of his contemporary, Michael Gow (*The Kid, Away, On Top of the World*), the great advantage of being able to read the playtext is to take in fully the classic richness of its language.

And finally to children's books. As Elizabeth Jolley knows, if you make your readers laugh — and lots of them — you probably don't deserve a literary award, and the prize-givers seem determined to ignore the writer every primary school child in Australia is reading: Robin Klein. Her *Penny Pollard's Diary* (OUP) and *Hating Alison Ashley* (Penguin) should have been books of the year in their time, and although her new novel *Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left* (Viking) is not in my view quite as good, you would get a less cautious response from a class of ten-year-old Australian readers. Anyone interested in Australian feminism will want to take Klein's work into account.

Ivan Southall returns to form in *A City Out of Sight* (Puffin), his belated sequel to an early novel, *To the Wild Sky*. Thurley Fowler's Book of the Year, *The Green Wind* (Rigby), is a gentle evocation of Australia in the

1930s; and although the Protestant/Catholic concerns persuade some critics that James Aldridge's *The True Story of Spit MacPhee* (Viking) is a novel about, rather than for, children, its depth and sensitivity will reward older readers.

The limited space generally available for reviewing children's books, the range of books published and the often diverging responses of their adult and child readers make the criteria for a brief overview unusually complex. But Elizabeth Hathorn aims simply to relate the experience of a new school to readers not well catered for (seven year olds) and in *Paolo's Secret* (Methuen), she gets there. A book that, however modest, succeeds beautifully — on its own terms. And it's not often you hear a reviewer saying that!

MARK MACLEOD

## CANADA

At a time when Canada's government is preparing to discuss free trade with the United States, Canadian writers are reassessing the nature and meaning of borders in their work. Janette Turner Hospital's *Borderline* (McClelland & Stewart) employs the metaphor most explicitly, using a border crossing from the United States into Canada as a trigger for considering the dividing lines we draw and redraw between worlds, cultures and individuals. Farley Mowat's autobiographically-based *My Discovery of America* (McClelland & Stewart) stems from the refusal of American authorities to let him cross the border to enter the United States. New novels by Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid's Tale*, McClelland & Stewart) and Robertson Davies (*What's Bred in the Bone*, Macmillan) have been extremely well received in the United States, which conveniently appears to have rediscovered Canada this year, just as the question of our cultural sovereignty seems destined to appear on the bargaining table.

Atwood's novel is set in an American future, where people look north to Canada as their only hope of escape from the totalitarian, misogynist theocracy which has taken over the United States. Davies' is set in Canada's past, when colonials still thought of England or Europe as the avenues of escape from stultifying small-town new-world values. *The Handmaid's Tale* is Atwood's most political novel yet, but its feminist implications enable readers so inclined to ignore the most serious questions it asks about the direction of democracy in America, and where one should draw the line between the needs of the collective and of the

individual. The issue raised by *What's Bred in the Bone* — where does one draw the dividing line between originality and imitation in art? — should be interesting, but is not. This novel reads like a stilted parody of Davies's earlier work and it is boring. Davies' *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks* (Irwin) reprints the three Marchbanks books with new notes by the author, continuing the play between curmudgeonly Marchbanks and gentlemanly Davies.

Gwendolyn MacEwan's *Noman's Land* (Coach House) blurs the boundaries between myth and reality as it continues *Noman's* search for the ever elusive Canadian identity. In Ann Ireland's *A Certain Mr Takahashi* (McClelland & Stewart), winner of the Seal first novel award, two Toronto girl friends share an adolescent crush on a Japanese concert pianist that turns into a self-destructive obsession with otherness on several levels of experience. Sarah Sheard's *Almost Japanese* approaches the same subject from a different angle. In Robert Harlow's *Felice: A Travelogue* (Oolichan) a Vancouver housewife discovers herself against the backdrop of the Polish Solidarity movement and the history of injustice represented so memorably by Auschwitz. George Ryga's concern with injustice leads him to dramatise the plight of Mexicans working as slaves in the southern United States in *In the Shadow of the Vulture* (Talon). Marie Jakober's *Sandinista* (New Star) follows a range of characters involved in 1977 in the Nicaraguan revolution, including a Canadian priest who faces a crisis of faith during the struggle.

Novels set in Canada include Paul Quarrington's *The Life of Hope* (Doubleday), a satirical, bawdily humorous mystery story; Constance Breresford Howe's *Night Studies* (Macmillan), human drama with a night school setting; Joan Barfoot's *Duet for Three* (Macmillan) focussing on a mother-daughter relationship; Morley Callaghan's *Our Lady of the Snows* (Macmillan), a recycled story about a golden-hearted whore that seems to haunt its author as much as it does the bartender Gilhooley; and the grimly impressive David Adams Richards' *Road to the Stilt House* (Oberon), an intense account of the day-to-day interactions of the poor in the isolated Maritimes.

The most acclaimed short story collections continue the obsession with crossing or re-drawing borders. Neil Bissoondath's *Digging up the Mountains* (Macmillan) introduced an exciting new talent who also happens to be V.S. Naipaul's nephew. Ranging widely — from Toronto to Trinidad, Central America and Japan — these stories deal powerfully with the classic immigrant themes of dislocation and belonging, and the borderlines between the political and personal in ordinary lives. Austin Clarke deals with similar themes, but replaces Bissoondath's predomi-



nantly bourgeois perspective with that of the down and out in *When Women Rule* (McClelland & Stewart). Bharati Mukherjee's stories in *Darkness* (Penguin) are charged with the new energy she discovered when she moved from Canada to the United States. For her, '«Indianness» is now a metaphor, a particular way of comprehending the world'. Stephen Guppy's *Another Sad Day at the Edge of the Empire* (Oolichan) plays with the implications of Vancouver Island as simultaneously at the edge of a continent and the centre of this writer's magic-realist world. Mavis Gallant's *Overhead in a Ballroom: Stories of Paris* (Macmillan) imply a more conventional acceptance of the ideas of centre and fringe. Jane Rule's *Inland Passage* (Lester & Orpen, Dennys/Naiad), contains stories of lesbian and heterosexual lives and loves. Judith Merrill's *Daughters of the Earth and Other Stories* (M&S), is future fiction, mostly written twenty years ago but still powerful boundary-breaking work. Two accomplished craftsmen demonstrate their versatility in Hugh Hood's *August Nights* (Stoddart) and Leon Rooke's *A Bolt of White Cloth* (Stoddart).

In contrast to the selections by individual authors, anthologies are beginning to narrow the region down to the city — at least in *Vancouver Short Stories*, ed. Carole Gerson (UBC Press), *Vancouver Fiction* (Polestar), ed. David Watmough, *Vancouver Poetry* (Polestar), ed. Allan Safarik, *Glass Canyons: A Collection of Calgary Fiction and Poetry*, ed. Ian Adam (NeWest), and *Fatal Recurrences: New Fiction in English from Montreal*, ed. Hugh Hood and Peter O'Brien (Vehicule).

A notable crossing of linguistic boundaries occurs in the bilingual anthology *Poesie canadienne contemporaine/Acadian Poetry Now*, ed. Henri-Dominique Paratte (Perce-Neige). Inspired by a visit to China, Gary Geddes' *The Terracotta Army* (Oberon) narrows the gaps between imperial China and contemporary Canada, individual artistry and national struggle, the Chinese character and the English word. Ralph Gustafson published three books this year: *At the Ocean's Verge: Selected Poems* (Black Swan), *Directives of Autumn* (McClelland & Stewart) and *Impromptus* (Oolichan). McClelland & Stewart brought out impressive collections by three well-known poets: Al Purdy, *Piling Blood*, Roo Borson, *The Whole Night Coming Home* and David McFadden, *The Art of Darkness*. Other selected poems include Doug Fetherling, *Variorum: New Poems and Old, 1965-1985* (Hounslow), Judith Fitzgerald, *Given Names: New and Selected Poems 1972-1985* (Black Moss) and Glen Sorestad, *Hold the Rain in Your Hands* (Coteau). Gerald Hill's *Heartwood* (Thistledown) is a promising first poetry collection. Robert Kroetsch's *Advice to My Friends* (Stoddart), John Pass's *An Arbitrary Dictionary* (Coach House), George Johnston's *Ask Again* (Penumbra), and Erin Mouré *Domestic Fuel* (Anansi) are among the

year's more outstanding publications. Irving Layton, true to form, provided the year's biggest controversy, through his violent objections to Elspeth Cameron's *Irving Layton: A Portrait* (Stoddart) and the publication of his own autobiographical version of his earlier years in *Waiting for the Messiah* (McClelland & Stewart).

At last we have a good anthology for teaching Canadian drama in *Modern Canadian Plays*, ed. Jerry Wasserman (Talon) and a collection of supplementary material in *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions*, ed. Anton Wagner (Simon & Pierre). Radio drama, long ignored, achieved some recognition with the publication of *Words on Waves: Selected Radio Plays of Earle Birney* (CBC/Quarry).

It has been a good year for scholarship. The Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts brought out the first of its annotated editions of Canadian classics, Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*, ed. Mary Jane Edwards (Carleton University Press), in an attractive inexpensive paperback edition. *Susanna Moodie: Letters of a Lifetime*, ed. Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins and Michael Peterman (U of T Press) — published in the centenary of Moodie's death — is another long awaited volume. The two-volume *Towards a Canadian Literature: Essays, Editorials and Manifestos*, ed. Douglas M. Daymond and Leslie G. Monkman (Tecumseh), makes available a wide variety of critical material previously hidden away in journals and newspapers. Personalised artistic and cultural commentary are kept alive in George Bowering's *Craft Slices* (Oberon) and Doug Fetherling's *The Blue Notebook: Reports on Canadian Culture* (Mosaic). *The Canadian Novel: Present Tense*, ed. John Moss (NC) and *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature* (NeWest) provide more academically-oriented commentary that keep alive the year's spirit of boundary-crossing adventures.

DIANA BRYDON

## NEW ZEALAND

The year was dominated by a book that was published in 1984, a book with an impact so forceful that literature became news. *The Bone People* and its author Keri Hulme have hauled writing on to a stage otherwise occupied by a legal victory over rugby mavericks, the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* by French agents, a declaration banning nuclear-armed and -powered ships from New Zealand waters and cricket Test victories abroad. Heady times indeed.

Predictably, publishing has not had to deal with the same excitements in 1985. But *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, edited by Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen, will have, in its quieter way, a considerable influence on the way in which New Zealand writing is perceived. This is the second such Penguin (the first was selected and introduced by Allen Curnow in 1960) and Wedde takes the opportunity in his Introduction to re-evaluate the past, to take stock of the present and to suggest new possibilities for the future definition of a New Zealand literature.

It is a stimulating and provocative piece of writing and the expansive selection which follows it reveals a precise and astute literary judgement. To my mind the collaboration between the editors, and between them and the publishers, has resulted in an excellent, essential, anthology.

Two other anthologies, both of fiction, quarry sites of sectarian interest. *Women's Work* (Oxford), edited by Marion McLeod and Lydia Wevers, is a strong, exciting collection of stories from 1963 onwards. With writers like Mansfield, Frame, Grace and Hulme I doubt that anybody thinks other than that women occupy a central place among New Zealand writers: on the other hand, with a tradition like this to draw on, it would be crazy not to celebrate their achievement.

*The New Fiction* (Lindon), edited and introduced by Michael Morrissey, is a rather odder phenomenon. The organising principle is that postmodernism defines these fictions, but what that concept might mean is far from clear in the lengthy and obtuse introduction. Many of the stories, postmodern or not, are good and certainly deserve to be published. Whether they deserve to be yoked to the task of dragging this 'theoretical' treatment along with it, though, is another matter.

Individual authors also had collections of short fiction published. The best of these was Vincent O'Sullivan's *Survivals* (Allen and Unwin/Pat Nicholson Press), while Joy Cowley's *Heart Attack and other stories* (Hutchinson) and Philip Mincher's *All the Wild Summer* (John McIndoe) — a sequence of twelve pieces — have much to recommend them. Keri Hulme's *Lost Possessions* (VUP) is a short story presented in the form of diary entries, one per page, so that it takes on the look of verse. It has been published separately from the forthcoming *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (also VUP) which will collect eighteen of Hulme's stories.

First novels include one published posthumously — James K. Baxter's early and only story *Horse* (Oxford). While it hardly rates as a success in literary terms, it does have other interest as it weaves a probably fairly factual tale from the incidents of student youthfulness.

Better at exploiting the possibilities of the adolescent-growing-up genre is Lloyd Jones' *Gilmore's Diary* (Hodder and Stoughton). Plenty of

humour here, although it drops away towards the end. D.H. Binney, an established artist, has also written a first novel called *Long Lives the King* (Heinemann), which has attracted positive reviews.

The reputations of two practising novelists are reinforced by their latest publications. Marilyn Duckworth follows *Disorderly Conduct* with *Married Alive* (Hodder and Stoughton) while Heather Marshall's latest book is *A Nest of Cuckoos* (Hutchinson).

Likewise poetry collections included both strong first books from new writers and interesting new work from the established. Among the former, Helen Jacobs' *This Cording, this Artery* (Blackberry Press), Hugh Lauder's *Over the White Wall*, Robin Healey's *Night Kitchen* (Mallinson Rendel) and John Newton's *Tales from the Angler's Eldorado* (Untold Books) stood out while the latter comprised Kendrick Smithyman's *Stories about Wooden Keyboards* (AUP/OUP), Brian Turner's *Bones* (John McIndoe) and Peter Olds' *After Looking for Broadway* (One Eyed Press).

Janet Frame has completed her autobiographical trilogy with *The Envoy from Mirror City* (Hutchinson). The whole project has been exciting and refreshing. We await extended commentary from the established critics of her fiction.

Although *And* has completed its four-issue project, its influence certainly continues — and thus it has achieved its stated aim: to cause a fundamental shift in the pattern of critical discourse here. Perhaps the most beneficial effect has been on *Landfall* whose four guest editors each produced stimulating and provocative issues of the quarterly in 1985. Another spinoff has been *Splash* (c/- Dept. of English, University of Auckland). *Islands* and *Untold* continue their own ways.

An entertaining year, though the Booker from Okarito rather hogged the limelight!

SIMON GARRETT

## PAKISTAN

Poetry in 1985 had the lion's share with three remarkable collections by poets who are well-known. Taufiq Rafat published his first book at the age of fifty-eight, *Arrival of the Monsoon: Collected Poems 1947-78* (Lahore: Vanguard, Rs100). Rafat's work was known widely from magazines and anthologies and this collection is very welcome. Zulfikar Ghose published *A Memory of Asia: New and Selected Poems* (Austin, Texas: Curbston, \$14.95), which gives us twenty-five poems (about one fourth) from his

previous three books, plus twenty new, uncollected poems. The new poems are a delight and show Ghose working the language along new tracks and finding fresh excitements. Daud Kamal's *A Remote Beginning: Poems* (Budleigh Salterton, U.K.: Interim, £2.40) is his second collection and provides further evidence of work in a given mode in which Kamal specializes. Economy is the hall-mark; the imagery is attractive; the words set up tentative echo-systems which send the reader on beyond the poem towards an understanding. Alamgir Hashmi contributed poems to such anthologies as *Soundings: A Poetry Anthology* (Deerfield, IL: Lake Shore Publishing, \$7.95) and *Light Year '86* (Cleveland: Bits Press/Case Western Reserve University, \$13.95), as well as to *The Toronto South Asian Review* (IV 2 44-51).

*Pawn to King Three* by Mahmud Sipra (London: Michael Joseph, £9.95) was the only novel in the year. There were some good short stories: 'A Translator's Fiction' by Zulfikar Ghose, *Antaeus* (New York: Fall 1985, pp. 66-75); 'The Beast of Bengal' by Javaid Qazi, *The Toronto South Asian Review* (Toronto: IV 2, pp. 34-42); and 'The Legacy' by Tariq Rahman, *Short Story International* (Great Neck, NY: VIII 45, pp. 38-45).

Among translations into English may be mentioned *Hasham Shah: Sassi Punnun* rendered into English verse from Punjabi verse by Christopher Shackle (Lahore: Vanguard, Rs100); Tahira Naqvi's translation from Urdu of seventeen short stories by Manto in *The Life and Works of Saadat Hassan Manto*, Leslie A. Flemming/Tahira Naqvi (Lahore: Vanguard, Rs200); and the verse translations of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's several Urdu poems by Naomi Lazard and Agha Shahid Ali in 'Special Feature: Faiz Ahmad Faiz', *Sonora Review 8* (Tucson, Arizona). Other languages are also beginning to get interested in contemporary English works: Afzal Ahsan Randhawa has translated Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* into Punjabi.

The Manto volume cited above also offers a very good study of Manto's short stories by Leslie A. Flemming, an American scholar who has spent many years studying the life and the works of this major Urdu writer. The critical section in this book is a reprint of the earlier Stateside edition. Another reprint to note is *A History of Sindhi Literature* by L.H. Ajwani (Karachi: Allied Book Co., Rs45), which was originally published in 1970. Among articles, Zulfikar Ghose's 'Bryan' (*The Review of Contemporary Fiction: B.S. Johnson/Jean Rhys Number V, 2, 23-34*) deals with the early writing careers of B.S. Johnson and Zulfikar Ghose as well as with their mutual friendship. Alamgir Hashmi's 'Muhammad Sadiq and the Historiography of Urdu Literature' (*Viewpoint X, 27, 27-29*) reviews the English tradition of the historiography of Urdu Literature in

light of Muhammad Sadiq's work and assesses its present achievement. Much other critical work in the form of reviews and articles concerned such writers as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Zulfikar Ghose, Alamgir Hashmi, Muhammad Iqbal and Salman Rushdie.

Under non-fiction must be mentioned such titles as *The Nehrus and the Gandhis: An Indian Dynasty* by Tariq Ali (London: Pan Books, £2.50); Alys Faiz's letters to her husband Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Dear Heart — To Faiz in Prison* (1951-55) (Lahore: Ferozsons, Rs120); Khalid Hasan's *Give Us Back Our Onions: People and Politics in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard, Rs150); Siddiq Salik's *The Wounded Pride* (Lahore: Wajidalis, Rs150), about the experiences of Pakistani prisoners of war in India in the early 1970s; and *The Collected Works of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Vol. 1: 1906-1921* compiled by Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (Karachi: East and West Publishing Co., Rs225), which contains the writings and speeches of the father of the nation.

In bibliography, the bibliographic series launched by the Institute of Islamic History, Culture and Civilization of the International Islamic University in Islamabad is expected to cover a wide range of topics, including language and literature. The volumes published so far relate mainly to politics and culture.

Among journals, the pace was usual, except that *Explorations* was not published at all. *Cactus*, a new literary magazine, has begun to publish poetry, fiction and translations in Lahore. *My Beautiful Launderette* by Hanif Kureishi, which caused rave reviews in England both as a stage play and as a film, drew only poor audiences to private screenings in Pakistan. Aesthetic and cultural gaps will maintain it as a controversial item, indeed as a British cultural curiosity which is edifying in some ways. A number of poetry readings were held in the year, nationally and internationally. Zulfikar Ghose gave readings at the 1985 International Festival of Authors in Toronto. Taufiq Rafat, Daud Kamal, Alamgir Hashmi, Waqas Ahmad and other Pakistani poets gave major readings, along with several poets from India, Bangladesh and the USA, at the International American Studies Conference held at Lahore in November 1985, as well as at the Quaid-e-Azam Library in Lahore.

It was a year full of activity and output which, nonetheless, left its absences behind: poet and journalist G. Allana died in March; while Nazir Ahmad, well-known translator and commentator of Punjabi and Urdu works, died in Lahore during August.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

We may begin by citing two poetry anthologies that appeared in 1985: *The Poetry of Singapore*, published by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, and *Sincerely Yours*, published by a small publishing house, Tate Publishing. The first took about four years to appear, the second less than a year. The first is handsomely bound and printed (no one knows what the official costs incurred were, but one guesses they were high!), the second, modestly so with the costs shared by those who are featured. The first boasts of the 'established' poets, the second, of none except those the publishers felt merited more attention. It would be interesting to see how these two anthologies are judged by later generations. *Sincerely Yours* has not yet been reviewed, *The Poetry of Singapore*, on the other hand, has attracted critical attention and copies of the book have been sent free to schools in the island. No editor's name appears in *Sincerely Yours* (though it contains Foreword by the present writer — hence all this could well be very interested comment). *The Poetry of Singapore* contains an impressive list of editors with Edwin Thumboo as General Editor and Lee Tzu Pheng as the Editor for the English section. I am told on good authority that the selection and editing of individual sections was left completely to the respective editors. The 'official' anthology contains poems in all the four official languages of Singapore while *Sincerely Yours* contains poems written only in English. One offers new voices, the other old voices. Speaking as one who has been part of the literary scene in Singapore for nearly twenty years I'm saddened to see that the official anthology — at least as far as the English section is concerned, merely reiterates what many in Singapore know: that poetry is regarded as precious and still confined to an élite. In 1976 Edwin Thumboo brought out his definitive *The Second Tongue*. Ten years later only two new poets are added while two who appeared in Thumboo's anthology of 1976 (including the present writer) are omitted. I do not find the English section at all representative and indeed wonder if the energies and resources could not have been better utilised. After all, since 1980, some very good poems have been published in *Singa* — the Ministry's official journal. Singapore definitely has more than eighteen poets writing in English and the absence of many does a gross injustice to those who have published poems in many different places but fail to make it to *The Poetry of Singapore*. Alas.

The Department of English Language and Literature of the National University finally brought out collections of poetry sponsored by the Shell Creative Writing Fund. To date three collections have appeared:

*Tranquerah* by Ee Tiang Hong (Malaysian poet, now living in Australia), *No Man's Grove* by Shirley Lim (Malaysian poet, now living in the US) and *No. 5* by Simon Tay, a Young Singaporean. All three collections are well worth purchasing for they contain some powerful expressions. He continues with his favourite theme of historical impingement, Lim explores modes of inner response, while Tay strikes an experimental note. While these collections are strongly recommended there is anxiety about their distribution and one hopes that some arrangement will be made whereby these books are made readily available both in Singapore and elsewhere.

In fiction there was a good deal of activity as well: at least three individual collections of short stories appeared: Lim Thean Soo's *Blues and Carnations*, Wong Swee Hoon's *The Phoenix and Other Stories*, and R.H. Hickling's *The Ghost of Orchard Road & Other Stories*. This last mentioned is actually an expatriate, a Professor of Law, now retired, who, having had many years of *living* in Singapore, now attempts to immortalise this through writing. The stories are witty, occasionally cutting (especially when he deals with university matters) but almost always entertaining. They do not, I feel, make for permanently interesting literature, but provide a most useful insight into how someone who has lived in Singapore for many years, but as an expatriate, now views his experiences. Lim Thean Soo is, as we all know, a long established writer of poems and short fiction. *Blues and Carnations* is yet another interesting and entertaining book from this untiring author — here there is Singapore's past creatively conveyed, a past familiar to the author. I still believe that more stringent editing can strengthen Lim's fiction, but it is his prerogative to publish it as he thinks fit. His characters are remarkable and offer an insightful look into life as it was, and is, lived. Wong Swee Hoon is a comparative newcomer to Singapore's literary scene. But she is already making a name for herself — here are stories with which most Singaporeans can so easily identify themselves. The sheer variety afforded by the plural society is here captured in moving, topical stories almost intentioned to arouse interest. In some ways the fictions here are too 'ordinary' (as Lim's are 'extraordinary') but they appeal — and that matters. Wong is young as a writer but has great potential to be the second Catherine Lim of Singapore and give us a book of stories which will become a household name.

There was, too, a great deal of excitement in drama, but here I will single out one play in particular that was the rave of 1985: *Emily of Emerald Hill*. Brilliantly produced and directed by Max Le Blond, the play attracted full houses on all the nights it ran. The Minister for



Culture raised the possibility of casting it over television and it has been invited to Edinburgh for the 1986 Commonwealth Arts Festival. The play is an elaborate monologue (wonderfully rendered by the inimitable Margaret Chan) written by Stella Kon, centring on a Baba-woman's experience of changing times. After Robert Yeo's powerful political plays such as *Are You There Singapore* and *One Year Back Home*, Singaporean audiences needed something like *Emily*. This powerful dramatisation of a culture, a period, a life-style that is now fast becoming only a memory in modern Singapore, evocatively transformed English language drama from a theoretical possibility to a challenging reality. It will be exciting to watch what happens now.

1985 was not a particularly fruitful year for criticism. Apart from the odd review, few, if any, decent articles on Singapore writing appeared anywhere. Many of the well-known names in literary criticism here have been busy — but writing articles for various books targeted to appear in 1986. We will have to wait and see what these articles augur. The petty jealousies continue, and the critics search for viable idioms to express their viewpoints.

KIRPAL SINGH

## WEST INDIES

1985 saw, in the untimely death of Shiva Naipaul, at the age of forty, the silencing of an important voice in Caribbean literature. In 1984, Naipaul undertook a six-month journey to Australia and the Far East gathering material for a book on which he was working when he died. *The Observer* (27 October) published from this unfinished work an extract in which Naipaul describes his visit to Sri Lanka and reflects on his alienation from religion. The uncompleted manuscript will be part of a collection of his work to be published by Hamish Hamilton in 1986. In the May 18 issue of the *Spectator*, Naipaul wrote 'A Thousand Million Invisible Men', an essay on the concept 'Third World', which he dismisses as 'a term of bloodless universality' that 'robs individuals and societies of their particularity'. An extract from this essay was published posthumously in the September issue of *Harper's*.

One of the more important pieces of fiction of the year was Wilson Harris's *Carnival* (Faber), a novel that explores the Dantesque spiritual journey of Everyman Masters, the protagonist, who instructs the narrator-biographer, Jonathan Weyl, to write 'a biography of spirit as

the fiction of my life'. Weyl begins with an account of Masters's current life in London, then provides extensive flashbacks to his earlier days in 'New Forest, South America', which evidently is Guyana. The novel is intricately constructed with characteristic cyclical and antithetical patterns. Many of the symbols of Harris's earlier novels reappear here, including El Dorado, but the pervasive symbol is the Caribbean Carnival, which, with its concomitant masks, takes on metaphysical and transcendental significance.

In Canada, Neil Bissoondath, the thirty-year-old Trinidadian now residing in Canada, published an impressive collection of fourteen stories entitled *Digging up the Mountain* (Toronto: Macmillan), his first book. The stories, set in Trinidad, Canada, Europe, and Latin America, are mature and polished and reveal a sharp but sympathetic insight into the lot of the dislocated and alienated individual whether he is a Trinidadian businessman threatened by his island politics, a young Japanese girl in Toronto trying to free herself from stifling customs, or a Canadian travelling amidst the impoverished in Spain. Bissoondath is V.S. Naipaul's nephew. His pared prose and his critical but understanding voice invite comparison with Naipaul, who has said of Bissoondath: 'I'm staggered by the talent which is already so developed'.

Jamaica Kincaid, the Antigua-born resident of New York, who is a staff-writer for *The New Yorker*, followed her outstanding volume of short stories *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), written in an appealing lyrical prose, with *Annie John*. This work, a collection of linked stories, traces the growth of a young girl in Antigua. It was runner-up in the recently-created Ritz Paris Hemingway Award Competition for the year's best novel in English. Kincaid's earlier volume won the Morton Douwen Zabel Award for fiction in 1984. Austin Clarke, the Barbadian-Canadian novelist, published a new volume of stories, *When Women Rule* (Toronto: M & S). The eight stories are poignant accounts of West Indians in Canada. the protagonists all lead bleak lives filled with disappointments and frustrations. Peter Abrahams published an epic novel, *The View from Coyaba* (Faber), which spans two centuries of Jamaican life from the days before emancipation to the fall of Michael Manley's government in 1980.

Several works of fiction by younger and newer writers were published by small presses. These include Rooplall Monar's *Backdam People* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press), a collection of stories set on sugar estates of the author's native Guyana and told in the distinctive creole of the Indo-Guyanese (similar to that used in David Dabydeen's *Slave Song*). Cyril Dabydeen's *The Wizard Swami* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop) is a novella on the rural life of Indo-Guyanese protagonists. Norman Smith's *Bad*

*Friday* (New Beacon) tells about the desperate life after leaving school of a West Indian youth in England. Amon Saba Saakana's *Blues Dance* (Karnak House) describes the life of another black youth who gives up his life of crime on becoming a Rastafarian. Faustin Charles describes the West Indian experience in Britain in terms of the spiritual and psychic in *The Black Magic Man of Brixton* (Karnak House). Karnak House also brought out Neville Farki's *The Death of Tarzana Clayton*, which depicts how Tarzan, perceived as a colonial oppressor, is killed by his adopted African brother.

A few fictional pieces focussing on the experiences of women were published, mainly by small presses. Hazel Campbell's *Woman's Tongue* (Jamaica: Savacou) is a volume of eight stories about the unhappy lives of some Jamaican women. Andre Schwarz-Bart's *A Woman Named Solitude* (San Francisco: Creative Arts) is a novel about the mystical life of a slave woman in Guadeloupe. Michelle Cliff's *The Land of Look Behind* (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books) describes in prose and poetry the personal and political conflicts of a Jamaican woman. Faber published Caryl Phillips's *The Final Passage* which relates the spiritual and emotional effect of a young woman's travels within the Caribbean and her migration to Britain.

There were several reissues of established works. Faber (London and Boston) published Harris's *Guiana Quartet* (*Palace of the Peacock*, 1960; *The Far Journey of Ouidin*, 1961; *The Whole Armour*, 1962; and *The Secret Ladder*, 1963) in a single volume of 464 pages. Faber published also Abraham's *This Island Now* (1966), a novel which describes post-colonial political life on an unspecified West Indian island. *The Plains of Caroni*, Sam Selvon's novel of the effects of technological changes on the domestic and social lives of Trinidadian sugar-workers, was republished by Williams-Wallace, Toronto. Three other works by Selvon were reissued in the attractive Longman Caribbean Writers series (which eventually will have critical introductions): his first novel *A Brighter Sun* (1952), the perennially popular *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), and the collection of stories set in Trinidad and London *Ways of Sunlight* (1957). John Hearne's *The Sure Salvation* (1981), his latest novel, which reveals a darkening vision of society, was reissued in paperback by Faber. Heinemann published in the Caribbean Writers series a collection of Jean Rhys's stories, *Tales of the Wide Caribbean*, with a substantial introduction by Kenneth Ramchand. Included in this volume is the brilliant piece 'I Used to Live Here Once', one of the shortest stories in West Indian literature but extremely well-crafted, accommodating reading on a gothic and several social-realistic levels.

A handful of poetry volumes were published this year: Dionne Brand's *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (Toronto: Williams-Wallace) is a group of poems on the Grenada revolution; Fred D'Aguiar's *Mama Dot* (Chatto & Windus); Amyrl Johnson's *Long Road to Nowhere* (London: Virago); Desmond Rutherford's *Speak Love to Me* (London: Akira); Amon Saba Saakana's *Tones and Colours* (Karnak); and Olive Senior's *Talking of Trees* (Kingston: Calabash).

James Berry edited a new anthology *News For Babylon: The Chatto Book of West Indian-British Poetry* (Chatto & Windus/Hogarth Press) which has works by forty poets in Britain with roots in the Caribbean. It includes older writers like Wilson Harris, Andrew Salkey, and John Figueroa and newer figures like Fred D'Aguiar, Grace Nichols, and Linton Kwesi Johnson. Lorris Elliott published *Other Voices* (Toronto: Williams-Wallace), an anthology of fiction and poetry by forty-three Black writers in Canada, most of whom are from the Caribbean, including such authors with published volumes as Dionne Brand, Cyril Dabydeen, Lorris Elliott, Claire Harris, Arnold Itwaru, Charles Roach, and Edward Watson. In *Caribbean Plays for Playing* (London: Heinemann), the editor, Keith Noel, included plays by Dennis Scott, Kendal Hippolyte, Alwyn Bully, and Zeno Obi Constance. He provides brief notes and comments on the history of Caribbean drama.

Three anthologies of folklore should be mentioned. Daryl Dance's *Folklore from Contemporary Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press) is a comprehensive collection of over a hundred-and-sixty of Jamaica's favourite riddles, myths, legends, rhymes, anancy tales and ghost stories. Velma Pollard published a less ambitious volume of Caribbean folk tales aimed at schools: *Anansesem: A Collection of Caribbean Folk Tales, Legends and Poems for Juniors* (Kingston: Longman). And Kenneth Vidia Parmasad edited *Salt and Roti: Indian Folk Tales of the Caribbean* (Trinidad: Sankh).

In criticism, there was a reprint of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *Contradictory Omens* (Mona: Savacou), a work first published in 1974, in which the author discusses the impact of creolization of Caribbean culture. V.S. Reid published *The Horses of the Morning* (Kingston: Caribbean Authors), a full biography of Norman Manley. David Dabydeen edited *The Black Presence in English Literature* (Manchester University Press). Carole Angier produced a biographical-critical study of Jean Rhys (New York: Viking). Beverly Ormerod wrote *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann) in which she analyses the main themes of French West Indian literature, making comparison with the rest of the Caribbean. Mark McWatt edited *West Indian Literature*

and *Its Social Context*, the proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference on West Indian Literature, which includes papers on Naipaul, De Lisser, Lamming, De Boissière, Rhone, and Lovelace.

Several journals produced issues focussing on Caribbean writings. The *Journal of Caribbean Studies* (Fall) has articles on Austin Clarke, Caribbean-Canadian writers, calypso, and a short story by Jan Carew. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (20, 1) carries pieces on Cyril Dabydeen, the Naipauls on Africa, the aboriginal in *Palace of the Peacock*, and C.L.R. James's barrack-yard. *Komparatistische Hefte* (Bayreuth) devotes Number 9-10 to European-Caribbean literary relations; it includes an essay by Carew and an interview with John Hearne. *Wasafiri* (Spring), the journal of ATCAL (London), has an interview with Selvon and an article on Indian-African relations in Caribbean fiction. And finally, John La Rose, the publisher-bookseller, has started a new periodical, *New Beacon Review*, which has a few pieces on Caribbean literature. The first issue, July 1985, includes poems by Brathwaite and Salkey.

VICTOR J. RAMRAJ

## Book Reviews

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Stephen Gray, *Douglas Blackburn*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984. 158 pp. No price given.

Douglas Blackburn (1857-1929) was a British journalist, writer and novelist who spent a large part of his grown-up and working life in South Africa — more specifically the Transvaal and Natal. He produced journalistic books on topics like *Thought-reading, or Modern Mysteries Explained* (1884), *The Detection of Forgery: A Practical Handbook* (1909) and *Secret Service in South Africa* (1911) as well as a biography of Edith Cavell (1915), wrote articles for such diverse journals as the *Johannesburg Star*, the *Standard and Diggers' News*, the *Daily Mail* and the British humanitarian and pro-Boer *New Age*, and edited a series of short-lived one-man magazines of his own in both England and South Africa, from the *Brightonian* to the *Transvaal Sentinel* and *Life: A Sub-Tropical Journal*. On top of this he published seven novels dealing with South African themes, the two best-known of which were probably *A Burgher Quixote* (1903) and *Richard Hartley, Prospector* (1905) that were brought out by William Blackwood and Sons in Britain.