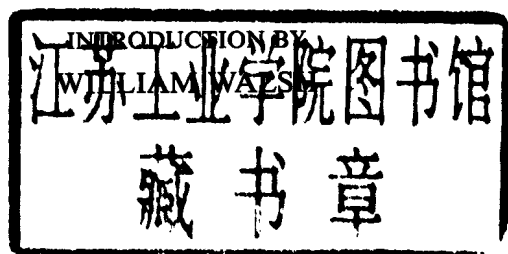

ST. JAMES REFERENCE GUIDE TO ENGLISH LITERATURE

COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE



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EDITOR'S NOTE

The entry for each writer consists of a biography, a complete list of his published books, a selected list of published bibliographies and critical studies on the writer, and a signed critical essay on his work.

In the biographies, details of education, military service, and marriage(s) are generally given before the usual chronological summary of the life of the writer; awards and honours are given last.

The Publications section is meant to include all book publications, though as a rule broadsheets, single sermons and lectures, minor pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, etc. are omitted. Under the heading Collections, we have listed the most recent collections of the complete works and those of individual genres (verse, plays, novels, stories, and letters); only those collections which have some editorial authority and were issued after the writer's death are listed; on-going editions are indicated by a dash after the date of publication; often a *general selection from the writer's works* or a *selection from the works in the individual genres* listed above is included.

Titles are given in modern spelling, though the essayists were allowed to use original spelling for titles and quotations; often the titles are "short." The date given is that of the first book publication, which often followed the *first periodical or anthology publication* by some time; we have listed the actual year of publication, often different from that given on the title-page. No attempt has been made to indicate which works were published anonymously or pseudonymously, or which works of fiction were published in more than one volume. We have listed plays which were produced but not published, but only since 1700; librettos and musical plays are listed along with the other plays; no attempt has been made to list lost or unverified plays. Reprints of books (including facsimile editions) and revivals of plays are not listed unless a revision or change of title is involved. The most recent edited version of individual works is included if it supersedes the collected edition cited.

In the essays, short references to critical remarks refer to items cited in the Publications section or in the Reading List. Introductions, memoirs, editorial matter, etc. in works cited in the Publications section are not repeated in the Reading List.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this volume is to provide the reader with the appropriate facts and critical guidance in what will be still to many the relatively new, or even unknown, field of Commonwealth literature. Literary studies in English are dominated by the immensely rich achievement of English literature through the centuries, and by the current movement of writing in Britain and the United States. (It would be more appropriate, certainly in England, to invert the order of interest and to say dominated by writing first in the United States and secondly in Britain.) Commonwealth literature itself is of course a term of art. The Commonwealth is an increasingly impalpable and metaphysical conception. Even to define it would require a practised lawyer, and to point to where it exists, an accomplished politician. Here one is concerned with writing in English outside Britain and the United States. Which writers have made a significant use of the resources of the language to embody their experience and view of life? Which of them are of more than local importance? Which of them, judged by appropriate standards, have added to the canon of literature in English and realised in a creative way capacities implicit in the language? One harps constantly on the language because the existence of a work of literature depends not on the writer alone but also on the degree of maturity the language it is written in has reached, just as its complexity and fineness depends on the range of resources within the language. One thing will certainly become clear from the work of the writers considered in this book, namely the amazing capacity of the English language to express an immense span of sensibility, whether West Indian, Canadian, Australian, African, New Zealand, or Indian, a testimony not just to the gifts of the individual writers but to the genius of the language itself. All these writers write in English but they do not, of course, think of themselves, nor are they to be thought of, as Commonwealth writers, which would make as much sense as UNESCO writers or Esperanto writers. They feel themselves to be Australians or New Zealanders or Canadians, writing against a particular historical and national context, not contributors to an amorphous Commonwealth. It is the English language in which they are united, not the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, the term is convenient and represents in a reasonably uncontentious way a fact of history and substance about the tradition and the art of these writers.

The shared language brings up at once the central paradox of Commonwealth literature, namely the coexistence in it of the literatures of English-speaking nations and of those in which English is only a second, or learnt, language. The two most extraordinary cases of this are those of India and Africa. Indeed, it is an Indian, Buddhadeva Bose, who has given, even if unsympathetically, an accurate analysis of the predicament of writers writing in English out of an alien experience with no constant, inward, and organic connection with English as a living language (from *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, edited by P. Lal, 1969):

The best of Indian-English verse belongs to the nineteenth century, when Indians came nearest to "speaking, thinking and dreaming in English." In authenticity of diction and feeling Sri Aurobindo far outshines the others, but Toru Dutt's charming pastiche still holds some interest. As for the present-day "Indo-Anglians," they are earnest and not without talent, but it is difficult to see how they can develop as poets in a language which they have learnt from books and seldom hear spoken in the streets or even in their own homes, and whose two great sources lie beyond the seven seas. A poet must have the right to change and recreate language, and this no foreigner can ever acquire. As late as 1937, Yeats reminded Indian writers that "no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his

mother tongue"; to the great majority of Indians this admonition was unnecessary, but the intrepid few who left it unheeded do not yet realise that "Indo-Anglian" poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere.

There is a certain unanswerable truth hidden in Bose's observations, but, however irresistible the case made by Bose is, there is no *a priori* truth or dogma in literature. There is no doubt that there have been poets in India and Africa who have written what are by any standards poems in English of genuine merit and authentic individuality. Let me name only from India Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel, A. K. Ramanujan; or from Africa Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okigbo, Michael Echeruo, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Kewsi Brew. One of these, Nissim Ezekiel, whose poetry is intellectually complex and fastidious in diction, has made with his own poetry a sufficient reply. He has also retorted to Bose's strictures (in the same volume) in a more explicit fashion:

The tone and implied attitudes of Mr. Buddhadeva Bose's article are distasteful to me. . . . He begins, for example, by pretending to be surprised that "Indians should ever have tried to write verse in English." What is so surprising about it? Is Mr. Bose completely devoid of a sense of history? Does it not occur to him that since English was introduced as a medium of higher education in India, some Indians *naturally* took to writing verse in it, just as other Indians wrote political commentaries, philosophical essays, sociological surveys, economic studies, and so on? Historical situations create cultural consequences. . . . To write poetry in English because one cannot write it in any other language is surely not a despicable decision.

"Historical situations create cultural consequences." Indeed they do, whether in the absent-minded and oppressive British Empire or in the more calculated and weightless Commonwealth. It was indeed natural that Canada, Australia, and New Zealand should develop as they have done from the late eighteenth century and the detritus of an exhausted Augustan literary idiom. In Australia this idiom was blended with the sweetness of Walter Scott, as it was in Canada where it followed first Romantic and then Tennysonian models. The literary life of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in its earliest stages showed novelists and poets using on the material of their own life instruments of vision devised elsewhere for quite different purposes. In each of the three countries the effort was to assimilate the new experience to the old, whether that was English, Irish, or Scottish. A. J. M. Smith described the two aims of the earliest Canadian poets, whether French or English, in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960):

One group has made an effort to express whatever is unique or local in Canadian life, while the other has concentrated on what it has in common with life everywhere. The poets of the first group sought to discover something distinctively and especially "Canadian" and thus come to terms with what was new in the natural, social, and political environment in which they found themselves or which they helped to create; the others made an effort to escape the limitations of provincialism or colonialism by entering into the universal civilizing culture of ideas. The first group was more homely, more natural, and sometimes more original, but it lacked, until the twentieth century, the technical proficiency necessary for real success. The danger for the second group was to be merely literary.

In Australia the manipulation of Australian material to make it conform to an English sensibility – for example, in *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) by Henry Kingsley – was succeeded by a phase characterised by the substitution of Dickens for Scott as the primary English influence on the novel. We see this, for example, in *For the Term of His*

Natural Life (1874) by Marcus Clarke. It led in Australia to the effort to establish a genuinely Australian character and tone in its literature and the effort accurately to draw the contours of the true Australian voice and powerfully to respond to an Australian scene, unmisted by English importation. In Australia a great part in this transformation was played by the group of writers formed around a handful of literary periodicals, the most important of which was the *Bulletin*, whose passion was for an exclusively Australian Australia. This group of writers played an important part in the long preparation of a separate Australian identity.

The development of the early literature of New Zealand rehearses the progress we see both in Australia and Canada, that is, it begins with the literature of observation, travel, and history, in which the actual terrain and the mode of life is seen through European eyes. New Zealand, for example, was frequently taken as a testing ground for the theory of the Noble Savage. It was an English woman, Lady Barker, who first communicated a genuine sense of the realities of New Zealand life. Her work is unfatigued by current cliché, and the fine instrument of an acute perception. The range of New Zealand experience became articulate in a group of women novelists, Edith Searle Grossman, Alice F. Webb, Blanche Baughan, and Jane Mander. These writers attempted and sometimes succeeded in discovering a distinguished New Zealand voice and had come to a point where they were capable of seeing New Zealand life unrefracted through an alien haze. This development was brought to a much higher point of maturity by a group of writers in the 1930's, of which the theorists were the critic and moralist M. H. Holcroft and the poet Allen Curnow, who wrote (in *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, 1960) that the "individual talent" should take its place in the historical "tradition" of New Zealand: "whatever is true vision belongs, here, uniquely to the islands of New Zealand. The best of our verse is marked or moulded everywhere by peculiar pressures — pressures arising from the isolation of the country, its physical character, and its history."

In Canada, a more positive effort than in New Zealand, a less truculent one than in Australia, to arrive at the same kind of thing, the development of a separate Canadian tradition, was one of the consequences of the work of the post-Confederation poets, Lampman, Roberts, Crawford, Carman, and Scott. Their work, particularly that of Lampman and Scott, had an intrinsic merit and distinct historical significance in that it helped to articulate, in a way which could be used in the future, a Canadian tradition. Such a tradition had been inaugurated in the history of the American Francis Parkman, of theologians like Henry Alline, of philosophers like Thomas McCulloch, and these poets gave it the richness and density of art — the first literary and local expression of the Canadian spirit. Both in Canada and Australia the most important literary work was in the poetry and the novel. The drama led a feeble and hardly separate existence.

In India in the nineteenth century a considerable quantity of significant writing had certainly appeared in English but of an abstract and discursive kind. It had a strong Victorian philosophy and much of it had to do with communicating Western ideas in pursuit of the effort to reform Hindu thought and to bring into it a stricter ethic and a more scientific habit of thought. This was a tradition inaugurated by Ram Mohan Roy, sustained by Vivekananda, and still represented in the modern world by Nirad C. Chaudhuri. The fact that these writers worked in English was a large, though implicit, recognition of the fact and influence of British civilization in India. The effort of all these writers and particularly of Chaudhuri, whose *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) is probably the greatest example of this kind of non-fictional literary work written in a language other than the mother-tongue, was to bring a questioning Western mind into touch with an Indian tradition and sensibility. All these writers found the concepts, principles, usages, and styles which they wished to bring into Indian life not in the cramped civilization of British India but in the immensely more inclusive source of the English language and its literature. It was not till the 1930's and later that the novel in English really began its separate and impressive Indian existence. There are now a considerable number of these writers but they all have in common the genuine novelist's impulse to illustrate, to be specific and concrete and embodied. They are genuine novelists for whom fiction is an end in itself and not a means of communicating other kinds

of truth. They range from Mulk Raj Anand, who is passionately concerned with the villages, with poverty, with the cruelties of caste and social injustice, to Raja Rao whose work is profoundly philosophical or metaphysical. It is as concrete as Mulk Raj Anand who is concerned with the inner life, or as subtle as the translucent, sensitive, and Chekhov-like work of R. K. Narayan. Narayan beautifully illustrates the use of a language bred in one tradition and history to be the instrument of a vision derived from a totally different one. His is a concentrated and limiting art, concerned with modest unself-confident and over-conscious heroes of the middle class. His novels are varied, but one sees a common pattern which traces the development of spiritual maturity among the young, in a setting of marvellously authentic Indian life.

If the literature of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand started at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the literature of the West Indies is essentially a creation of the twentieth century. There are, according to George Lamming (in *The Pleasure of Exile*, 1960), three important events in British Caribbean history. "The first event is the discovery. . . . The next event is the abolition of slavery and the arrival of the East – India and China – in the Caribbean Sea. . . . The third important event . . . is the discovery of the novel by West Indians as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experience of the West Indian community." The West Indian community is the product of a society descended from European landlords, functionaries, and traders, African slaves, Indentured Indians, from Chinese and others, the scope of whose origin and sufferings matches the virtuosity of the language which is its voice. George Lamming believes that it is the life of the West Indian peasant which is the centre of the West Indian experience, and it is their success in giving a voice to this silent richness that makes him admire Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon, and Roger Mais, whose work is shot through and through with the urgency of peasant life. But this is perhaps to exclude one of the greatest of West Indian writers, V. S. Naipaul, a detached critic of West Indian society. His combination of peasant sagacity and cultivated elegance has produced a distinctively individual fiction which is also strongly representative of the complex society of the West Indies. Some of the hostility shown to Naipaul in his native land may be attributable to an aristocratic flinching from what he sees as the common brutality of so much human life, something which in his later work has become almost a Swiftian and obsessive distaste. Nevertheless, Naipaul has himself most skilfully engaged with some of the main themes of West Indian fiction, with, for example, the vitality of folk life, with the irrationality of folk life, particularly in the half-institutionalised form it takes in the West Indies, and, finally, with what is perhaps the deepest and most painful theme in West Indian fiction, the agony and pride of race. Wounded racial feeling at a profound spiritual level is a strong impulse and staple motif of much West Indian writing, in Vic Reid's *New Day* (1949) and *The Leopard* (1958) for example, and in some of the most impressive fiction of George Lamming himself.

Commonwealth literature in India began to assume its own character in the 1930's, in the West Indies in the later 1950's, and in Africa in the 1960's. In Africa, its most impressive talent is shown in the novel and the play, particularly in the novels of Chinua Achebe and the drama of Wole Soyinka. Historical circumstances again account for the English connection of these writers, but not for the remarkable quality of the achieved work. Chinua Achebe, who works from a near-Renaissance impulse to teach by entertaining, is much concerned with the growth and decline of Ibo civilisation, a world which is masculine, coherent, and, in a sense, Greek. The classical Ibo world embodied in his fiction is rounded and intricate, and in correspondence with a great range of human impulses, embodying both the aristocratic and democratic principles. It is a life lived by a clan of equals which yet allows for the exceptional man. Later novels show how external forces, of Christianity and the British administrative system, invade and infect this poised and fragile synthesis. The talent of Wole Soyinka has the fullness and substance of Achebe's, but is more richly and elaborately orchestrated. He has, too, like Achebe, a profound feeling for peasant life, but has a much more sophisticated literary culture, and a very worried and anxious contemporary consciousness. Soyinka's drama is embedded in religious myth, enlivened by a magnificently

muscular vernacular idiom and humour, and expressed in a language of great power and range.

In neither of these writers, so close is the expression to the experience, do we find that linguistic strain displayed when experiences nourished by one stratum of experience and history are expressed in a language from another. This is a fundamental friction we see in the work, for example, of John Pepper Clark, in which an African content is frequently at odds with the English idiom. As it seems to me we do also, for example, in the work of the East African poet Okot p'Bitek, or in the curious combination of film script, best-seller, and market pamphlet practised by Cyprian Ekwensi. That so much African and West Indian fiction should be in English is the result no doubt of the writer's desire to use Western categories of analysis and dissection and the rich English mode of expression on his unique African experience, as much as a desire to build up an international audience. The number of these novelists increases yearly. Many of these writers are at home in a complicated language, and some of them, chiefly for reasons of education, find it impossible not to write in English. This would be truer, I judge, of the Indian novelists than of the African. Wole Soyinka, for example, has indicated a willingness to write in an indigenous national language should one become possible and acceptable. But R. K. Narayan, who has made an Indian sensibility at home in English art, once said that he felt no linguistic strain and that for him English was always the natural language to write in. When Narayan was in England in 1968 I asked him in a radio conversation (23 February) whether he found it any strain to write in English. His reply will interest the reader:

Until you mentioned another tongue I never had any idea that I was writing in another tongue. My whole education has been in English from the primary school, and most of my reading has been in the English language. The language and literature of this country flourished in the Indian soil until lately. It still remains a language of the intelligentsia. But English has been with us for over a century and a half. I am particularly fond of the language. I was never aware that I was using a different, a foreign, language when I wrote in English, because it came to me very easily. I can't explain how. English is a very adaptable language. And it's so transparent it can take on the tint of any country.

No doubt there will be other R. K. Narayans and Chinua Achebes living the same double life and coming to a similar resolution. In their distinctly difficult conditions they will at any rate have one supreme advantage, the use of a language of such capacity and range that no reach of human experience is beyond it.

I have referred to some of the historical circumstances in the development of Commonwealth literature, to the fundamental "given" of the English language, and to some characteristic themes and their various expressions in different parts of the globe. And it is true that none of these literatures could have developed without their special connection with the English literary tradition, and without the vast potency of the English language. Moreover, one has to recognise the special difficulties of writers in countries where there exist no adequate audience, no range of publishers and journals and critics, and whose governments, while finding the English language a useful technological and diplomatic tool, look on literature as a frivolous luxury. But as well as these there is the essential requirement of individual talent and I want now to turn to that handful of writers in the Commonwealth who seem, as critics in this volume will say, to have made substantial and even major contributions to literature in English in the modern world.

From India one would be bound to take R. K. Narayan. He writes of the middle class, his own class, the members of which are neither too well off not to be worried about money and position, nor de-humanized by absolute need. His hero is usually modest, sensitive, ardent, wry about himself, and sufficiently conscious to have an active inner life and to grope towards some existence independent of the family. The family is the immediate context in which he operates, and his novels are remarkable for the delicacy and precision of the family

relations treated – that of son and parents, and brother and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937); of husband and wife, and father and daughter in *The English Teacher* (1945); of father and son in *The Financial Expert* (1952); of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955).

The firmly delineated town, therefore, is the outer circle of the action; within it is the subtler and more wavering ring of the family; and at the centre of that stands, or rather flinches, the Narayan hero, a tentative, spiritually sensitive, appealingly limited character, in whom modesty is a positive force, whether he be the leathery old proprietor of a tiny industry like Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), or the converted con-man Raju in *The Guide* (1958; apologetically converted, note, in spite of himself), or the nervous editor of the press on Market Road, Nataraj, in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961). The characteristic Narayan figure always has the capacity to be surprised by the turn of events. His individuality has a certain formlessness, a lack of finish, indeed, as though the definition of his personality depended upon the play of external influences – which of course in India, with the immense weight of inherited tradition, it so frequently does. This quality of the incompleteness in the person means the further capacity not just to be startled by what happens but to be at least in part reconstituted by it. The procedure in a Narayan novel is almost invariably a renovation or reforming of character in response to the encouragement or provocation of events, which is never, however, total enough to be revolutionary but sufficient to make a new bend in the flow of continuity. If this is how the process appears to the observer, it shows itself to the protagonist as his effort to achieve a more explicit and articulate sense of self.

Narayan's novels are comedies of sadness, calling up the name of Chekhov rather than anything in English literature, as Graham Greene pointed out in his introduction to *The Bachelor of Arts*. The sadness comes from the painful experience of dismantling the routine self, which, the context being Indian, seems less a private possession than something distilled by powerful and ancient conventions, and secondly the reconstitution of another personality. The comedy arises from the sometimes bumbling, sometimes desperate, sometimes absurd exploration of different experience in the search for a new and, it may be, an exquisitely inappropriate role. The complex theme of Narayan's serious comedies, then, is – one must not balk at the word in an Indian context – the rebirth of self and the process of its pregnancy or education, the set of conditions in which it takes place. His characters occupy a universe of which the substantial features are both the flux of being and the plurality of being. Things flow, an infinite variety of things, of men and manners, relations and women, avocations and degrees, joys, disappointments, and disasters. To the author this is the nature of reality, to the characters what they will, perhaps, with a moderate kind of happiness, finally accommodate themselves to. This complicated cargo is carried on an English style which is limpid, simple, calm, and unaffected, natural in its run and tone, and beautifully measured to its purposes. It has neither the American purr of the combustion engine nor the thick marmalade quality of British English, and it communicates with complete ease a different, an Indian sensibility.

If I move from India on a natural route to the West Indies, I should produce the names of V. S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott. Naipaul's earliest novels suggest that he is the possessor of a delicate, attractive talent, at once gentle and mischievous, feeling and unsentimental. And Naipaul's gift clearly is all of this. But there are, both in *Miguel Street* (1959) and *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), hints of deeper resonances, insinuations of less tractable disasters. There is a kind of sadness folded into the quick lines of the sketches in *Miguel Street*. It is unemphatic and never despairing because neither author nor characters take up any indignant stance about what happens to them. They accept it. And they do so because of a conviction, or if that is too explicit and articulate, because of a profound attitude or a posture in the bones and nerves, that one part of being human is simply hopelessness, and another part is practising a ritual to make that tolerable. There is an image of this cool tragic sense even in the tumultuously farcical career of Ganesh the Mystic Masseur in the death of his father.

It is a driving need to establish both for others and themselves their human necessity which initiates and sustains *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul's largest, most generous and inclusive work. "How terrible it would have been," Mr. Biswas reflects as he lies dying in his

mortgaged house. "How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated."

In Naipaul's work we see an independent and fastidious talent fully engaged and brilliantly successful: in the treatment of the second-hand violated colonial and post-colonial society; in the understanding of the psychology of the sensitive young, appalled by the sight others have of their secret life; in the rendering of political and social ideas, not as untethered formulations but living activities; in the evocation of place and physical context – the London light, the cocoa valleys, houses, weather, hotels – all, we often feel, so much more constant, so much more faithful to themselves than devious, impotently treacherous man; in the general composition and suppleness of tone and the scope of concretely realized experience; and above all in the penetration and vitality with which he develops his central, constitutive theme – one of profound human meaning – an exploration of the ways in which the conscious individual in a given society establishes modes of mediation between himself and his experience.

Derek Walcott is the finest, the most complete, of the West Indian poets. His early work, like that of many other contemporary poets, is derivative from seventeenth-century English poets, from Eliot, and from Auden. But these models are being used by a talent capable of ripening into its own unique self: and when one remembers how much Walcott had *not* the benefit of, in what immediate poetic context he had to construct a voice for his sensibility, his achievement, and one's admiration for his tense integrity, are very high indeed. His temptation was to slide into the satin smoothness admired by an earlier generation and made more enticing in his case by a cultivated love of the English language and its history. His achievement was to construct an idiom and rhythm which were in touch with traditional resources in the language while they established connections with the modern world in general and the West Indian situation in particular. His best poems bring a personal compassion to bear on more impersonal considerations, as in "Ruins of a Great House."

His range embraces the near-clinical analysis of the relations of separating lovers in the febrile "A Care-free Passion"; the quarrel of the African and the European in the West Indian blood; the magnificent Victorian dignity of an ancient West Indian lady, Mabel Rawlins, together with the civilized sobriety and the clear moral tone implied in her vocabulary and address. We have in the intrinsic and difficult music of such a poem as "A Letter from Brooklyn," an indication of the distance Walcott's poetry has come from its early external euphony. His poetry is now one of a deeper and strengthened experience, of a more personal and ravaged attachment to his own art and his West Indian world.

Wole Soyinka is an impressive poet and a novelist too, but it is in his plays that his gifts are most fully realized. He is much preoccupied with the mystery of time. The treatment of the theme of time in his plays persuades us that a society which has failed in an objective and progressive way to come to terms with time may well succeed in dealing with it in another way. When history is contracted to the span of memory between a grandfather and grandson and historical testimony to immediately existing and transient artefacts, then it is possible in thought and word for time to be distorted, contracted, or collapsed altogether. Which is just what Wole Soyinka does to the dimension of time in *A Dance of the Forests* (1960). Time in such a society is even more a mental construct than it is in those loaded with external historical evidence. But this is only a neutral and contextual condition of the dramatist's success. A more intimate and active means for managing time is a language sanctioned by the living belief of a people, with range, vitality, and sufficient resource to be equal to every layer of experience.

The Lion and the Jewel (1959) is a near-Roman comedy of a goatish ancient out-bluffing women of several generations and accomplishing in an off-hand way an intricate and difficult seduction. The action here is strict and nimble, the verse harder and thinner, the design very clear and unblurred. Neither Lakunle the schoolteacher, a most unhefty Leftie, the beautiful,

simple Sidi, nor the cunning crone Sadiku, standing for a cerebral future, an unintelligible present, and a passively conventional past, respectively, is any match for the disillusioned and energetic conservatism of Baroka, the "Bale," or ruler and priest: "I do not hate progress, only its nature/Which makes all roofs and faces look the same."

The Road (1965) imposes the discipline of *The Lion and the Jewel* on the poetry of *A Dance of the Forests*. The play is set along a road, the road from life to death; the cast is a superbly seedy gang, including the driver of a passenger-truck No Danger No Delay; his passenger-tout and driver's mate, Samson, a mixture of Enobarbus and Mosca; a Captain of Thugs called Say Tokyo Kid; and a splendidly pliable policemen, Particulars Joe; and brooding over all with menacing benevolence, Professor, proprietor of the driver's haven (AKSIDENT STORE – ALL PART AVAILEBUL), a dismissed lay-reader but also the oppressively strange death-in-life figure. Everyone in the play is the servant, or agent, or priest, or student of death. The road itself is ruled by Ogun, the god of war and death and roads. Road accidents, which Professor, the missionary of death, helps to arrange by removing road signs from dangerous points of the road, are Ogun's High Masses. The theme of the work is life conceived of as a movement towards dissolution; the action of the play is an arrest of time at the point where man is dissolving into the under-world. This bleak and difficult subject is enriched by a mulch of religious myth, Yoruba custom and tradition, and indigenous cosmology, and enlivened by a vernacular idiom and a humour which is by turns wild, grim, and despairing. The imagination is peremptory, potent, fertile; the intrinsic logic of the play is Yoruba in its myth, Western in its dramatic categories; the use of the language, in the intuitive feel for its grain and phrasing, is triumphantly English.

Katherine Mansfield was a writer who succeeded in her best work, in "Prelude" and "At the Bay," for example, in raising a whole world on the slim basis of half a dozen members of a provincial New Zealand family. She was able quite unportentously to suggest the human universality implicit in the Wellington household. Taking over a new house is itself an instance of the way in which domestic commonplace becomes more largely significant since it is a natural extension of the human impulse to turn impersonal things in the direction of humanity. The conditions of success required by Katherine Mansfield for making the brilliantly pictured particular expressive of substantial human nature were the creative action of memory working in a setting with which she was intimate without strain, a set of characters in whom lurked all the actualities of her own past, and a nest of relationships which were rich and ancient but also thronging with possibilities of development and contrast; and as well as these, a general sense (not by any means present in most of her stories), the sense that Beryl has intermittently in "Prelude" – that "life is rich and mysterious and good..." The goodness comes from the coherence of value and attitude which supports the life of the family and its society; the richness from the emotionally grounded and significantly interesting and worthwhile life its different members live, in which variety is sustained by the strength of the family union; the mysteriousness from the writer's power to reproduce the radiant and inexplicable in human experience. In these New Zealand stories Katherine Mansfield's sympathetic imagination is controlled by a gift for allowing freedom to the subject so that an extraordinary sureness of touch goes with a remarkable absence of manipulation or forcing of the material.

Katherine Mansfield's stories are complex, subtly woven organisms, making their points by a blend of implication, imagery, contrasting half-tones, and the manoeuvring of distinct but chiming voices, each voice and each viewpoint melting without grating into the next. They use, in fact, a poetic technique with the characteristic of such, a capacity to stay transparently faithful to the author's vision and also to take on colour, whether it be subdued or strong, perfectly fitted to the theme at any given moment.

The two major figures in Australian literature are A. D. Hope, the poet, and Patrick White, the novelist. Hope turned to the seventeenth century for the style made up of the passionate subtleties and the intellectual sensuousness of the metaphysical poets and the masculine, ironic force of Dryden. Why the seventeenth century should be looked to as the source has to do with the congruence between Hope's own poetic nature and the adult, ardent, almost

mathematically reasoning habit of the metaphysicals: a balance further modified by another, the symmetry between Hope and his admired Dryden's gift of sensitive manliness, his way of being at once independent and level with his experience, however intricate; and modified yet again by Hope's sympathetic understanding of Dryden's skill in calling upon a range of poetic resonance within a strictly defining, disciplining pattern. Nor should we overlook the fact that Hope had to make his choice of exemplar at a particular time and from within a certain literary tradition – not only the wider one grounded on the English language and the English literary tradition but within the local Australian one based on the altered language of his own country. It could not be a purely personal choice, although it had to be primarily a personal one, answering to the need felt in the poet's own nerves. The poet as poet is not engaged in any explicit mission to renovate a literary tradition. But of course he is involved in such an undertaking, and the more significant he is as a poet, the more profound is his involvement. Hope's "conservatism" in fact is truly radical. His poetry had to be freed from the influence of home, from a tradition still too much domesticated within the nineteenth century in which British gentility and blandness were curiously reinforced in their parochialism by an unambitious, and suspicious, Australian matiness. The seventeenth century, so different, so remote from the nineteenth century in its inclusiveness and in the very assurance of its scepticism, to which poets in Britain earlier directed their attention, could be the same cleansing, tonic influence for Australia: above all if the connection were to be made by an Australian poet.

Hope is a remarkable poet, the most distinguished his country has produced. His very positive literary character is both grainily individual and strongly in the main Western literary tradition. It is, it is clear, the central tradition he adheres to: accretions, whether modish or cliqueish, he has no use, and indeed considerable scorn, for. The lucidity and correctness which he is at pains to develop in his work are qualities he admires from artistic conviction, as a humanist opposed both to romantic haze and conventional trends. But they also testify to a profound cultivation of spirit, a certain wholeness and the harmony of nature, as they do too to a fine independence of literary fashion.

Patrick White is so different a writer, or so much himself as a writer, that he requires of any reader, and perhaps particularly of the British reader, an unusual steadiness of application. Genuine and stubborn difficulties have to be faced before the reader is at home in a fiction in which the idiom is often opaque and the narrative conducted through choking thickets of imagery. As well as the perplexities provoked by the manner there are those provided by the character of the time and space in which most of Patrick White's work is located. It is not the more extended past, the nineteenth century as in *Voss* (1957), which is hard for the reader to grasp, but, oddly, the nearer past – say from 1914 to 1939 – the period from which so many of White's characters take their habits and assumptions. The sensibility of that time, possibly because of its relative nearness, because it is something we ourselves have shed, seems almost totally gone and bafflingly hard for a contemporary British reader to grasp with spontaneous understanding. Then there is the mystery of Australian space, that beautiful and positive emptiness, which envelops the community and overwhelms the individual. Difficulties of access, however, in the long run diminish, even if they never disappear; and certainly they come to seem less important against the reader's increasing conviction that he is in the presence of a true creative power. It is a power which derives its strength from inner resources. It is free of "cleverness" and remarkably unaffected by fashion. It has great ease and flow – not facility – of conception, a kind of creative insouciance, which finds subjects and themes both urgent and permanent, lying waiting to be exposed in situations of the seediest simplicity and among characters of quite humdrum mediocrity.

Patrick White is a sumptuously prodigal artist, loving the pure creative play or flourish. Yet by the end of the first movement of *Voss* a considerable amount of the work of the novel has been completed and the rest set in train. The dowdy town and the easy country around it, against which the harshness of the desert will be measured, are clearly in the reader's mind; the decent average of the population against which the ferociously extreme nature of the

German explorer, Voss, can be tested has been established; the relationship of Voss and Laura has been initiated, a relationship which, since they never meet again, is carried on in the imagination of each and opened up to the reader by their correspondence. The members of the expedition have been sketched with just the right degree of definition to mark them off as separate persons and yet to keep them united in a single party. And all the preliminary work on the gigantic figure of Voss is carried firmly through.

In the second phase of the novel two lines of narrative are sustained. In one the expedition is conducted through more and more difficult, and finally brutal, country towards its disastrous end; in the other the relationship of Voss and Laura is developed in a series of meditations and (unreceived) letters. The two worlds of actuality and possibility are kept in touch and the latter, it is suggested, offers in the end a chance of redemption to the former. There is a passage at one point in the journey in which this touching of two orders of existence is itself used as an image of the land: "Over all this scene, which was more a shimmer than the architecture of landscape, palpitated extraordinary butterflies. Nothing had been seen yet to compare with their colours, opening and closing, opening and closing. Indeed, by the addition of this pair of hinges, the world of semblance communicated with the world of dream." Not only in the architecture of landscape but also in the architecture of people the two worlds of semblance and dream communicate with each other.

In the third part of *Voss* there occur some lines which make an apt epigraph for *Riders in the Chariot* (1961). "It was his niece, Laura Trevelyan, who had caused Mr. Bonner's world of substance to quake." The upheaval of the substantial world is the great shaping activity working through *Riders in the Chariot*. The novel follows the favored White pattern – a strong central conception, development by means of a biographical method, and an endless multiplication of palpable detail. The world of substance made to quake in the novel includes not only the thick, resistant one of common life and convention but other and odder worlds too: the world of a crazy specimen of the decayed Australian gentry, the world of an unpretentious working woman, the world of a persecuted German Jew, the world of an uprooted aborigine. In addition each of the characters in whom these worlds are defined and examined gives access to one species of a fourfold variety of experience: experience of the natural world, of plants and animals through Miss Hare's nearly non-human instinct for otherness; of integral, simple goodness in Mrs. Godbold, the East Anglian immigrant; of the profoundest religious experience in Himmelfarb, the saintly survivor of the Nazi camps; and of art through the painting of Dubbo, the tubercular half-caste. The four lives, their separate worlds and different orders of experience connect, or are violently knotted together, in the small, dry, dusty town of Sarsaparilla. The range, the imaginative scope, is extraordinary, and the control of the varied material has that unstressed ease which comes from a total inward familiarity.

What causes the world of substance to quake is the possession by each of the quartet of a special direct, nondiscursive apprehension of realities which the world of substance either does not recognize at all or recognizes as dangerous and deserving of destruction. This faculty or organ of consciousness is independent of experience in that it is in some sense a quality of genius, a gift, but it is not at all freakish, not attached to the character like an extra limb or head. It makes its presence felt gradually like any other function of the personality, and it speaks through the articulation of the characters' lives and in the idiom of action. The consciousness – of which the chariot is the symbol – resides in each of the four, Miss Hare, Mrs. Godbold, Dubbo, and Himmelfarb, in a form appropriate to the experience of each. But it has, too, qualities in common. This gift of insight is secret, kept and nourished in privacy; and it is recognized only by those who themselves possess it. Suffering is a necessary condition of its development. Only suffering can reduce the person to that state of painfully earned simplicity which is the essential preparation for a clarified consciousness. Again it invariably provokes persecution, whether it is persecution in the home by a companion or in the factory by workmates or more monstrosly in Hitler's Germany by virtually the whole of a society.

Patrick White belongs to a line of novelists whose art embodies a concentrated and

dazzling vision of man. Such writers are not manipulators of plot or cultivators of a sensibility or critics of manners or chroniclers of a period. Their art is initiated by their vision, and its form is determined more by a force from within than by any extrinsic scaffolding. It is somewhere between imaginative power and authenticity and crispness of detail that Patrick White's work is imperfect, in the area where architectural capacity and taste are required. The failure is not in the generating concept nor in the worked-out detail – in neither the idea nor the vocabulary, that is – but somewhere between, in what one might call the syntactical structure. *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot* certainly answer this account I believe: impressive in the constructive idea, superb in the palpable concreteness, but apt on occasion to offer an imposed and gratuitous symbolism in place of organic design. It shows us insistently the ravaged harshness of Patrick White's reading of human reality. Communities lust to persecute anyone or anything beyond the average. In the family the old torture the young, the young savage the old; outside it men and women are locked together in malice. At the same time we are aware, though more obliquely, less positively, in *The Eye of the Storm* (1973) than in *The Tree of Man* (1955), *Riders in the Chariot*, or *The Solid Mandala* (1966), of the flow of love, of the possibility of illumination, of the conditions under which something rich and healing could be constructed. It takes a talent of a rare order to keep the two themes in place and in proportion.

In 1965 the late Douglas Grant, reviewing Carl F. Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* (in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*), ventured to write:

Klinck is properly quite unabashed by the utter mediocrity of the majority of the writers brought under discussion. . . . Canadian literature must contain more writers not worth the grading than any other literature in existence; a literature that cannot offer the reader even one great writer in compensation for the hundreds of nonentities that would pour through any sieve coarser than *Literary History of Canada*.

I don't believe it is possible to hold such a view any more. Canadian literature in English, deriving from a complex cultural situation, has at the back of it two major literatures and the pressure of the giant to the south. It has produced in the last twenty years an immense range of poets touching every shade of sensibility. Probably the two best, and most representative, of those poets are A. M. Klein and Earle Birney. The fact that they should both be poets has a certain significance in that Canada seems to be the one Commonwealth country in which the poetry is at least equal if not superior to the prose.

"The poetry of Abraham Moses Klein springs from the roots of a consciousness where Hebrew and legal lore have become strangely and exotically intermingled with Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot," as Leon Edel remarks (in *A. M. Klein*, edited by Tom Marshall, 1970). Klein is one of the few serious Canadian writers untroubled by the problem of identity and free of its attendant, modish hysteria about alienation. His work has in it all the richness, the inclusiveness, of the Jewish character and mind, the product of an ancient, sophisticated, oppressed, and still living tradition. At the same time he is alert to the several nuances of contemporary Canadian life, and the marriage of a suffering but essential serenity with a nervous and accurate response makes for a poetry which is altogether independent but also splendidly central.

The inclusiveness and centrality of Klein's poetry correspond to the complexity of his nature and in particular to the two-fold strain in it, the tough and the tender, the stony and the tolerant. The double impulse and the double idiom are lissomly exercised in "*In re Solomon Warshawer*," but they come to their full power in *The Second Scroll* (1951) and *The Rocking Chair* (1948). There is a direct connection between the pared and harsher diction of some parts of "*Solomon Warshawer*" and the severity and abstinence of the manner of *The Rocking Chair*, another between the rhetoric of lamentation in the Jewish voice in the same poem and the layered, antique but passionate formality of the novella *The Second Scroll*.

The Rocking Chair, Klein's final appearance as a poet, apart from the verse in *The Second*

Scroll, and his first volume of poems to be published in Canada, came out in 1948. In the achieved poems an imagination charged with history and a consciousness clarified by an ancient coherence are brought to bear on persons, places, things, processes, conditions, saltily, stingingly, fresh and Canadian. The past in the poet is locked with the present in the object. The effect is to produce a reality which has both roundness and depth. Each clean surface is backed by a thick supporting texture of allusion and reference from history, literature, traditional assumption, and racial memory and luminous Jewish reverence for the life of the word and the book, an unbroken order of human experience.

The other poet, whose art seems both in resource and character decidedly more indigenous, is Earle Birney. The paradox of Birney's nature is the combination within a single temperament of warmth, of the impulse for communion, with the bleak recognition of man's final isolation. Indeed, Birney's is almost a specification of Coleridge's idea of the structure of human personality. It is "an instinct of our human nature to pass out of self – i.e. the image or complex cycle of images ... which is the perpetual representative of our Individuum, and by all unreflecting minds confounded and identified with it.... Not to suffer any form to pass into me and become a usurping self" (*Inquiring Spirit*, edited by Kathleen Coburn, 1951). The consequence of this mental form, uniting the outgoing and the reserved, in Birney's poetry is that his most intense relationships are not with the known and named individual but with anonymous members of a class. There is little in his poetry, for example, of the intricate ecstasy and the complex despair of individual love.

Birney's poetry, like some of the best contemporary verse, has quite dispensed with any Victorian sense of strait-laced *genres*. His humour, graven-faced and gravelled-voiced as it is, is both joyful and sane. His poems have nothing abstractly or specifically comic about them. These are not comic poems, and the comic is simply a constituent of the vision and the poetry. It is because he evokes the actual with such presence and authenticity that what is comic in it – and the alert eye can always discern it – strikes one as just and irresistible. He appreciates very well his own disadvantages. He is simply the looker-in, the man with the tongue half locked in the cell of his own language, as he remarks in "Cartagena de Indias." He realizes that he is in a minority of one in a world in which there are two races:

we human citizens
who are poor but have things to sell
and you from outer space
unreasonable our one tourist
but plainly able to buy

He suffers the rough justice the weak can perform on the strong, some pushing and cheating, some subdued revenge. But he has his advantages too, an eye for the suggestive shape, a feeling for what is common even to two races so utterly divided as the indigenous and the tourist, and an ear with a musician's communicating precision.

The aim of the studies that follow is to bring home to us how many writers outside Britain and the United States have realized in a creative way, particularly in the twentieth century, capacities implicit in the language, while they simultaneously embodied the exact tone and the peculiar idiom of personal and national experiences. Many of these are serious writers, all are genuinely representative. Some are more important representatively than intrinsically. I have been at pains to insist on what they have in common, the resources of the English language. But one cannot overlook the great differences in context in which these writers operate. Patrick White, for example, writes straight from the heart of the British tradition, even though it may be given his own national modification and even though he may do it at immense physical distance; Kenneth Slessor, A. D. Hope and James McAuley, all Australian poets, have in common the will to open up access to human and poetic resources outside those bequeathed to Australia by a parochial nineteenth-century culture. R. K. Narayan works against the background of his own powerful and very different civilization and in a second language learnt at school; Mulk Raj Anand writes out of a feeling for the deprived