

☐ Contemporary  
Literary Criticism

**CLC**

**121**



Volume 121

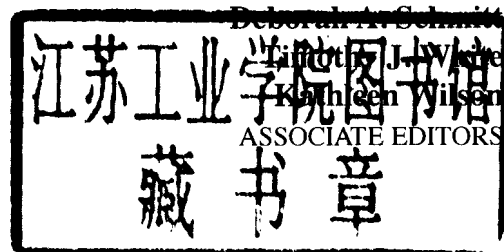
# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works  
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and  
Other Creative Writers

**Jeffrey W. Hunter**  
**Polly Vedder**  
EDITORS

**Angela Y. Jones**  
**Justin Karr**

**Deborah A. Schmitt**  
**Elizabeth J. White**  
**Kathleen Wilson**  
ASSOCIATE EDITORS



 **GALE GROUP**  
Detroit  
San Francisco  
London  
Boston  
Woodbridge, CT

## STAFF

Jeffrey W. Hunter, Timothy J. White, *Editors*

Angela Y. Jones, Justin Karr, Polly Vedder, and Kathleen Wilson, *Associate Editors*

Maria Franklin, *Permissions Manager*  
Kimberly F. Smilay, *Permissions Specialist*  
Kelly Quin, *Permissions Associate*  
Erin Bealmear and Sandy Gore, *Permissions Assistants*

Victoria B. Cariappa, *Research Manager*  
Corrine Boland, Wendy Festerling, Tamara Nott, Tracie A. Richardson, *Research Associates*  
Tim Lehnerer, Patricia Love, *Research Assistants*

Mary Beth Trimper, *Production Director*  
Cindy Range, *Production Assistants*

Barbara J. Yarrow, *Graphic Services Manager*  
Sherrell Hobbs, *Macintosh Artist*  
Randy Bassett, *Image Database Supervisor*  
Robert Duncan and Mikal Ansari, *Scanner Operators*  
Pamela Reed, *Imaging Coordinator*

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Gale Research neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Gale accepts no payment for listing, and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

All rights to this publication will be vigorously defended.

Copyright ©2000  
The Gale Group  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

All rights reserved including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-46132  
ISBN 0-7876-3196-5  
ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Preface

## A Comprehensive Information Source on Contemporary Literature

**N**amed “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

### Scope of the Series

*CLC* presents significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered by *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign writers, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

### Format of the Book

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

### Features

A *CLC* author entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the author’s name in the form under which the author has most commonly published, followed by birth date, and death date when applicable. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by a question mark.

- A **Portrait** of the author is included when available.
- A brief **Biographical and Critical Introduction** to the author and his or her work precedes the criticism. The first line of the introduction provides the author's full name, pseudonyms (if applicable), nationality, and a listing of genres in which the author has written. To provide users with easier access to information, the biographical and critical essay included in each author entry is divided into four categories: "Introduction," "Biographical Information," "Major Works," and "Critical Reception." The introductions to single-work entries—entries that focus on well known and frequently studied books, short stories, and poems—are similarly organized to quickly provide readers with information on the plot and major characters of the work being discussed, its major themes, and its critical reception. Previous volumes of *CLC* in which the author has been featured are also listed in the introduction.
- A list of **Principal Works** notes the most important writings by the author. When foreign-language works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets.
- The **Criticism** represents various kinds of critical writing, ranging in form from the brief review to the scholarly exegesis. Essays are selected by the editors to reflect the spectrum of opinion about a specific work or about an author's literary career in general. The critical and biographical materials are presented chronologically, adding a useful perspective to the entry. All titles by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type, which enables the reader to easily identify the works being discussed. Publication information (such as publisher names and book prices) and parenthetical numerical references (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of a work) have been deleted at the editor's discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.
- Critical essays are prefaced by **Explanatory Notes** as an additional aid to readers. These notes may provide several types of valuable information, including: the reputation of the critic, the importance of the work of criticism, the commentator's approach to the author's work, the purpose of the criticism, and changes in critical trends regarding the author.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** designed to help the user find the original essay or book precedes each critical piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- A concise **Further Reading** section appears at the end of entries on authors for whom a significant amount of criticism exists in addition to the pieces reprinted in *CLC*. Each citation in this section is accompanied by a descriptive annotation describing the content of that article. Materials included in this section are grouped under various headings (e.g., Biography, Bibliography, Criticism, and Interviews) to aid users in their search for additional information. Cross-references to other useful sources published by The Gale Group in which the author has appeared are also included: *Authors in the News*, *Black Writers*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *DISCovering Authors*, *Drama Criticism*, *Hispanic Literature Criticism*, *Hispanic Writers*, *Native North American Literature*, *Poetry Criticism*, *Something about the Author*, *Short Story Criticism*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, and *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*.

## Other Features

*CLC* also includes the following features:

- An **Acknowledgments** section lists the copyright holders who have granted permission to reprint material in this volume of *CLC*. It does not, however, list every book or periodical reprinted or consulted during the preparation of the volume.
- Each new volume of *CLC* includes a **Cumulative Topic Index**, which lists all literary topics treated in *CLC*, *NCLC*, *TCLC*, and *LC 1400-1800*.
- A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all the authors who have appeared in the various literary criticism series published by The Gale Group, with cross-references to Gale's biographical and autobiographical series. A full listing of the series referenced there appears on the first page of the indexes of this volume. Readers will welcome this cumulated author index as a useful tool for locating an author within the various series. The index, which lists birth and death dates when available, will be particularly valuable for those authors who are identified with a certain period but whose death dates cause them to be placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, Ernest Hemingway is found in *CLC*, yet F. Scott Fitzgerald, a writer often associated with him, is found in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*.
- A **Cumulative Nationality Index** alphabetically lists all authors featured in *CLC* by nationality, followed by numbers corresponding to the volumes in which the authors appear.
- An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, novellas, dramas, films, record albums, and poetry, short story, and essay collections are printed in italics, while all individual poems, short stories, essays, and songs are printed in roman type within quotation marks; when published separately (e.g., T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*), the titles of long poems are printed in italics.
- In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale has also produced a **Special Paper-bound Edition** of the *CLC* title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of the index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index: it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

## **Citing Contemporary Literary Criticism**

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in the Literary Criticism Series may use the following general forms to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted in books:

<sup>1</sup>Alfred Cismaru, "Making the Best of It," *The New Republic*, 207, No. 24, (December 7, 1992), 30, 32; excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 85, ed. Christopher Giroux (Detroit: Gale, 1995), pp. 73-4.

<sup>2</sup>Yvor Winters, *The Post-Symbolist Methods* (Allen Swallow, 1967); excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 85, ed. Christopher Giroux (Detroit: Gale, 1995), pp. 223-26.

## **Suggestions Are Welcome**

The editors hope that readers will find *CLC* a useful reference tool and welcome comments about the work. Send comments and suggestions to: Editors, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, The Gale Group, 27500 Drake Rd., Farmington Hills, MI 48333-3535.

# Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of CLC. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

## COPYRIGHTED MATERIALS IN *CLC* VOLUME 121, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

**Amerasia Journal**, v. 19, 1993; v. 22, 1996. Copyright © 1993, 1996 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Both reproduced by permission.—**American Book Review**, September, 1995; v. 17, February-March, 1996. © 1995, 1996 by **The American Book Review**. Both reproduced by permission.—**The American Poetry Review**, v. 25, March-April, 1996 for “American Poetry in American Life” by Robert Pinsky; June-August, 1997 for “Story Tellers” by Louise Glück. Copyright © 1996, 1997 by World Poetry, Inc. Both reproduced by permission of the authors.—**Ariel: A Review of International English Literature**, v. 15, January, 1984 for “Narayan’s Sense of Audience” by Harsharan S. Ahuwalla. Copyright © 1984 The Board of Governors, The University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—**The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books**, v. 47, September, 1993; v. 48, March, 1995. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Both reproduced by permission.—**Belles Lettres: A Review of Books by Women**, Fall, 1991; v. 8 Summer, 1991, 1993. Both reproduced by permission.—**Best Sellers**, v. 27, April 1, 1967; v. 32, October 1, 1972. Copyright 1967, 1972 by the University of Scranton. Both reproduced by permission.—**Biography**, v. 16, Spring, 1993; v. 17, Summer, 1994. Copyright © 1993, 1994 by the Biographical Research Center. All right reserved. Both reproduced by permission.—**Black American Literature Forum**, v. 18, Summer, 1984 for “Octavia Butler and the Black Science-Fiction Heroine,” by Ruth Salvaggio; v. 23, Summer, 1989 for a review of **Dawn** by Adele S. Newson.. Copyright © 1984, 1989 by the author. Both reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—**Book World-The Washington Post**, October 8, 1967 for a review of “How Many Miles to Babylon?” by Polly Goodwin; v. XXV. August 6, 1995 for “Mistress of Terror and Torture,” by Bettina Drew. © 1967, 1995 Washington Post Book World Service/Washington Post Writers Group. Both reproduced by permission of the authors.—**Callaloo**, v. 14, Spring, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by Charles H. Rowell. Reproduced by permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.—**Chicago Tribune**, March, 1996. © copyrighted 1996 Chicago Tribune Company. All rights reserved. Used with permission—Chicago Tribune Books, May 25, 1997. Reproduced by permission of the Chicago Tribune.—**Chicago Tribune Books**, May 25, 1997. Reproduced by permission of the Chicago Tribune.—**Children’s Literature Association Quarterly**, v. 8, Winter, 1983. © 1983 Children’s Literature Association. Reproduced by permission.—**Children’s Literature**, v. 11, 1983. Reproduced by permission.—**Commonweal**, v. LIX, October 23, 1953; v. CXII, January 11, 1985. Copyright © 1953, 1985 Commonweal Publishing Co., Inc. Both reproduced by permission of Commonweal Foundation.—**The Christian Science Monitor**, June 19, 1985. © 1985 by the Christian Science Publishing Society. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission from **The Christian Science Monitor**. / October 2, 1987 for a review of “A Piquant Infusion of India” by Neil Millar; October 2, 1987 for a review of “Lily and the Lost Boy” by Diane. © 1970, 1987 by the authors. Both reproduced by permission of the respective authors.—**Criticism**, v. XXX, Fall, 1988. Copyright, 1988, Wayne State University Press. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—**Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction**, v. XX, 1978. Copyright © 1978 Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 119 18th Street, N. W., Washington, DC 20036-1802.—**Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences**, v. 118, Fall, 1989. Copyright © 1989 by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Reprinted by permission of **Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences**.—**Encounter**, v. LXIV, March, 1985 for “Quiet Quiet India” by Richard Cronin. © 1985 by the author. Reproduced by permission of



the author.—English Journal, v. 85, November, 1996 for a review of “The Eagle Kite” by A. P. N. Copyright © 1985 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—The Explicator, v. 46, Spring, 1988. Copyright 1988 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—The Horn Book Magazine, v. LXVII, September-October, 1991; v. LXIX, July-August, 1993; v. LXXI, September-October, 1995. Copyright, 1991, 1993, 1995 by The Horn Book, Inc., 11 Beacon St., Suite 1000, Boston, MA 02108. All rights reserved. All reproduced by permission.—The International Fiction Review, v.14, Winter, 1987. © copyright 1987 International Fiction Association. Reproduced by permission.—The Iowa Review, v. 10, Autumn, 1979. Copyright © 1979 by The University of Iowa. Reproduced by permission of the author.—The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 1991; v. XXIX, 1994. Both reproduced with the kind permission of Bowker-Saur, a part of Reed Business Information Ltd.—Journal of South Asian Literature, v. 21, Winter, Spring, 1986. Reproduced by permission.—Kentucky Folklore Record, v. 27, January-June, 1981. Reproduced by permission of The University of Kentucky Press.—Kirkus Reviews, April 15, 1995; v. 64, June 1, 1996. Copyright © 1995, 1996 The Kirkus Service, Inc. All rights reserved. Both reproduced by permission of the publisher, Kirkus Reviews and Kirkus Associates, L.P.—The Literary Criterion, v. XV, 1980; v. XXV, 1990. Both reproduced by permission.—Literature Interpretation Theory, v. 2, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by OPA (Amsterdam) B.V. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Los Angeles Times Book Review, September 29, 1985. Copyright, 1985, Los Angeles Times. Reproduced by permission.—Los Angeles Times, June 10, 1997. Copyright, 1997, Los Angeles Times. Reproduced by permission.—The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, v.82, January, 1992. © 1992 by Mercury Press, Inc. Reprinted from The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, January, 1992.—MELUS: Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, v. 12, Fall, 1985; v. 13, Summer, 1986; v. 19 Fall, 1993; v. 20, Spring, 1995. Copyright, MELUS: Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States.—Modern Fiction Studies, v. 39, Winter, 1993. Copyright © 1993 by Purdue Research Foundation, West Lafayette, IN 47907. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of The Johns Hopkins University.—The Nation, New York, v. 239, November 3, 1985; v. 246, May 28, 1988. © 1985, 1988 The Nation magazine/ The Nation Company, Inc. Both reproduced by permission.—The New Republic, v. LXXVII, December 13, 1933; v. 176, January 15, 1997. © 1933, 1997 The New Republic, Inc. Both reproduced by permission of The New Republic.—The New Republic, © 1933 The New Republic, Inc. Reproduced by permission of The New Republic.—Newsweek, September 25, 1972; September 27, 1976. © 1972, 1976 Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Both reproduced by permission.—The New York Review of Books, v. XXXII, June 27, 1985; v. XLII, February 16, 1995. Copyright © 1985, 1995 Nyrev, Inc. Both reproduced with permission from The New York Review of Books.—The New York Times, March 28, 1997. Copyright © 1997 by The New York Times Company. Reproduced by permission.—The New York Times Book Review, November 16, 1930; November 12, 1933; November 11, 1934; October 11, 1936; November 8, 1942; December 1, 1946; May 19, 1957; November 17, 1960; November 8, 1964; November 9, 1980; March 7, 1982; November 11, 1984; November 18, 1984; July 21, 1985; December 10, 1986; June 30, 1991; November 10, 1991; May 9, 1993; March 10, 1994; September 11, 1994; v. CXLIV, July 30, 1995; August 18, 1996; Copyright © 1930, 1933, 1934, 1936, 1942, 1946, 1957, 1960, 1964, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1996 by The New York Times Company. All reproduced by permission.—The Ohio Review, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by the Editors of The Ohio Review. Reproduced by permission.—Publishers Weekly, v. 218, October 17, 1980.—Review of English Studies, v. 43, November, 1992. © Oxford University Press 1992. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.—Sagetrieb, v. 6, Spring, 1987. Copyright © 1987 by the author. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Salmagundi, Summer, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by Skidmore College. Reproduced by permission.—School Library Journal, v. 39, July, 1993; v. 41, April, 1995. Both reproduced from School Library Journal, a Cahners/R. R. Bowker Publication, by permission.—Science Fiction Studies, v. 17, Summer, 1990. Copyright © 1990 by SFS Publications. Reproduced by permission.—Science-Fiction Studies, v.22, March, 1995; v. 23, November, 1996. Copyright © 1995, 1996 by SFS Publications. Both reproduced by permission.—The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, 1985, 1986, 1993, 1995. All reproduced by permission.—Sojourner: The Women's Forum, v.19, February, 1994. Reproduced by permission of Sojourner Feminist Institute.—Studies in Short Fiction, v. 31, 1994. Copyright 1994 by Newberry College. Reproduced by permission.—Studies in the Literary Imagination, v. XVIII, Fall, 1985. Copyright 1985 Department of English, Georgia State University. Reproduced by permission.—Time, New York, v. 146, August 14, 1995.

Copyright 1995 Time Warner Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission from **Time**.—The New York Times Book Review, Copy **The Times Literary Supplement**, October 16, 1969; November 28, 1986; v. 39, 1989; n. 4671, October 9, 1992; n. 4697, April 9, 1993. © The Times Supplements Limited 1969, 1986, 1989, 1992, 1993. All reproduced from **The Times Literary Supplement** by permission.—**TriQuarterly**, Winter, 1994-95 for “A Conversation with Robert Pinsky” by Jim Knowles. © 1994 by **TriQuarterly**, Northwestern University. Reproduced by permission of the author.—**Twentieth Century Literature**, v. 34, Fall, 1988. Copyright 1988, Hofstra University Press. Reproduced by permission.—**The Village Voice**, v. XXXIII, August 9, 1988. Copyright ©1988, V. V. Publishing Corporation. Reproduced by permission of The Village Voice./n. 84, April 7, 1990 for a review of **The Storm** by Ben Downing. Copyright © 1990. Reproduced by permission of the author.—**Voice of Youth Advocates**, August-October, 1986; February, 1988. Copyrighted 1986, 1988 by **Voice of Youth Advocates**. Both reproduced by permission.—**The Women’s Review of Books**, v. XI, July, 1994, Copyright © 1994 All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—**World Literature Today**, Summer, 1981; v. 65, 1990; v. 67, Spring, 1993; v. 68, Autumn, 1994; v. 7, Autumn, 1997; v. 72, Spring, 1998. Copyright © 1981, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1998 by the University of Oklahoma Press. Reproduced by permission.—**World Literature Written in English**, v. 26, Autumn, 1986. © Copyright 1986 WLWE-World Literature Written in English. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

#### **COPYRIGHTED MATERIALS IN CLC VOLUME 121, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:**

Begum, Khani. From “Confirming the Place of ‘The Other’: Gender and Ethnic Identity in Maxine Hing Kingston’s **The Woman Warrior** by Khani Begum. Edited by Regina Barreca. Copyright © 1992 by OPA (Amsterdam) B.V. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Fox, Paula. From “Some Thoughts on Imagination in Children’s Literature” in **Celebrating Children’s Books: Essays on Children’s Literature in Honor of Zena Sutherland**. Edited by Betsy Hearne and Marilyn Kaye. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1981. Copyright © 1981 by The Zena Sutherland Lectureship Fund. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, a division of William Morrow & Company, Inc.—Frye, Joanne S. From “**The Woman Warrior**: Claiming Narrative Power, Recreating Female Selfhood, by Joanne S. Frye in **Faith of a (Woman) Writer**. Edited by Alice Kessler-Harris and William McBrien. Copyright © 1988 by Hofstra University. Reproduced by permission.—Goldman, Marlene. From “Naming the Unspeakable: The Mapping of Female Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston’s **The Woman Warrior**,” in **International Women’s Writing: New Landscapes of Identity**. Edited by Anne E. Brown and Marjanne E. Gooze. Greenwood Press, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by Anne E. Brown and Marjanne Gooze. Reproduced by permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT.—Green, Michelle Erica. From “There Goes the Neighborhood: Octavia Butler’s Demand for diversity in Utopias,” in **Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference**. Edited by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten. Copyright © 1994 by Syracuse University Press.—Ho, Wendy. From “Mother/Daughter Writing and the Politics of Race and Sex in Maxine Hong Kingston’s **The Woman Warrior**” in **Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives**. Edited by Shirley Hune, Hyung-chan Kim, Stephen S. Fugita, Amy Ling, eds. © by the Board of Regents of Washington State University. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Jablon. From **Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature**. University of Iowa Press, 1997. Copyright © 1997 by the University of Iowa Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Mylan, Sheryl A. From “The Mother as Other: Orientalism in Maxine Hong Kingston’s **The Woman Warrior**,” in **Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century Literature**. Edited by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory. University of Texas Press, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by the University of Texas Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Townsend, John Rowe. From **A Sounding of Storytellers: New and Revised Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children**. J. B. Lippincott, 1979, Kestrel Books, 1979. Copyright © 1971, 1979 by John Rowe Townsend. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the

author.—Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. From “Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?: Maxine Hong Kingston’s **The Woman Warrior** and the Chinese -American Autobiographical Controversy” in **Multicultural Autobiography: American Lives, by Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong. Edited by James Robert Payne.** Copyright © 1992 by the University of Tennessee Press/Knoxville.

**PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS APPEARING IN CLC VOLUME 121, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:**

Butler, Octavia E., photograph by O.M. Butler. Reproduced by permission.—Codrescu, Andrei, photograph. Archive Photos, Inc./Laurence Agron. Reproduced by permission.—Fox, Paula (looking up over her glasses), photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.—Kingston, Maxine Hong (gray hair with braid hanging down right side), photograph by Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.—Pinsky, Robert, photograph by El Bailey. Reproduced by permission.

# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

<b>Meena Alexander</b> 1951- .....	1
<i>Indian poet, novelist, critic, and autobiographer</i>	
<b>Kay Boyle</b> 1902-1992 .....	24
<i>American novelist, short story writer, poet, and essayist</i>	
<b>Octavia Butler</b> 1947- .....	71
<i>American novelist, short story writer, and essayist</i>	
<b>Andrei Codrescu</b> 1946- .....	153
<i>American poet, short story writer, memoirist, essayist, journalist, novelist, and travel writer</i>	
<b>Paula Fox</b> 1923- .....	184
<i>American novelist, essayist, and author of children's books</i>	
<b>Maxine Hong Kingston</b> 1940- .....	243
<i>American autobiographer, novelist, journalist, essayist, and short story writer; entry devoted to The Woman Warrior</i>	
<b>R. K. Narayan</b> 1906- .....	330
<i>Indian novelist, short story writer, essayist, memoirist, travel writer, journalist, critic, and editor</i>	
<b>Robert Pinsky</b> 1940- .....	422
<i>American poet and essayist</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 459

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 531

CLC Cumulative Nationality Index 539

CLC-121 Title Index 555

# Meena Alexander

1951-

Indian poet, novelist, critic, and autobiographer.

The following entry presents criticism of Alexander's career through 1998.

## INTRODUCTION

Alexander is an Indian writer whose poetry and fiction reflect her multicultural life experiences among diverse ethnic and religious communities on four continents. Generally concerned with the roles of place, memory, and language in identity formation, Alexander's works examine the disparate elements of her heritage and her cultural displacement, concentrating particularly on her status as an educated woman of the South Asian diaspora living and writing in the West. Alexander's search for psychic wholeness through language—a prevalent theme of her poetry—also articulates the concerns facing many postcolonial writers silenced by the dominant literary traditions of the imperial past. Critical discussion of her writings often centers on her contributions to Anglophone postcolonial literature, but scholars also have responded to her feminist perspective on literary and cultural issues. Alexander has remarked: "While I do not think I consciously write as a woman, I have little doubt that some of my deepest emotions and insights spring from having been born into a female body, learning to grow up as a woman in both a traditional Indian culture—South Indian, Syrian Christian, Malayalam speaking—and as part of the complex, shifting South Asian diaspora."

## Biographical Information

The daughter of a diplomat, Alexander was born into a socially prominent, Syrian Christian family in Allahabad, India, but was raised in the Sudan, where she attended high school and graduated from the University of Khartoum with a bachelor of arts degree in 1969. She pursued graduate studies at the University of Nottingham in England, writing her dissertation on Romantic English literature which later evolved into *The Poetic Self* (1979). After earning a doctorate degree in 1973, Alexander returned to India and taught at several universities until 1979, when she accepted a visiting fellowship at the Sorbonne in Paris. During her return to India, she also published her first collections of poetry: *The Bird's Bright Ring* (1976), *I Root My Name* (1977), and *Without Place* (1978). Late in 1979 Alexander emigrated to the United States and settled in the New York City area, assuming an associate professorship at Fordham

University. While acclimating to American life, Alexander immersed herself in writing. By the late 1980s she not only had contributed numerous scholarly articles to literary journals and feminist anthologies, but she also published the poetry collections *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988), *The Storm* (1989), and *Night-Scene, the Garden* (1989) as well as the critical study *Women in Romanticism* (1989). A lecturer in the writing program at Columbia University since 1990 and a professor of women's studies at City University of New York since 1992, Alexander produced more prose than poetry during the 1990s, writing two novels, *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997); an autobiography, *Fault Lines* (1993); another volume of criticism, *The Shock of Arrival* (1996); and a single poetry book, *River and Bridge* (1995).

## Major Works

Marked by processes of mediation between and meditation on different literary and cultural traditions, Alexander's imagistic and somewhat romantic poetry attempts to create a sense of identity for the poet and represents a type of psychoanalysis through which different aspects of her personality approach some sort of order. Alexander's early poetry depends on, as often as it reveals, the interstices of memory, history, and ontology; for example, *The Bird's Bright Ring* juxtaposes images of blood, salt, and native flora and fauna with fragmented commentary on the sociopolitical effects of British rule in India. Although Alexander's verse generally favors Indian themes and imagery, feminist issues comprise the majority of her work, including her scholarly studies, and female narrators and characters dominate both her poetry and fiction. *I Root My Name*, for instance, intimates the painful experiences of women, while "A Mirror's Grace," a poem appearing in *Without Place*, recounts Cleopatra's struggle to resist slipping into the margins of patriarchal linguistics. *House of a Thousand Doors* centers on memories and dreams of Alexander's grandmother, whom the poet has described as "a power permitting me to speak in an alien landscape." *The Storm* contemplates the feminist ideal of recreating and rewriting a "pure" female self-identity from fragmentary matrilineal memories. In *Night-Scene, the Garden*, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters figure prominently in the narrator's memory, which symbolizes a kind of "mother tongue" that encourages the poet to create a "new" self. The poetry of *River and Bridge* explores similar personal and feminist themes, focusing primarily on coping with cultural displacement, but other poems address myriad forms



of violence and protest bondage of all sorts, ranging from racial and sexual to economic and religious. Like her poetry, Alexander's fiction carries autobiographical overtones. Centered on literature's relation to life and women's role as healer of communal ills, *Nampally Road* relates the story of a woman writer who returns to her native India following her college education abroad. She plans to create literary order out of India's tumultuous past by writing a book about it, but instead she becomes involved in the resurgent political violence that surrounds her and reluctantly learns that she can do little to stop the suffering. Set in contemporary New York, *Manhattan Music* traces a female immigrant's gradual recovery of her self-identity through a series of interracial, multicultural relationships and intellectual associations.

### Critical Reception

Critics often have recognized Alexander's poetry for articulating some of the linguistic dilemmas confronting native writers of formerly British-administered colonies, noting that her imagery and formal structures, though reminiscent of European Romanticism and Modernism, are inflected by complex Indian rhythms, dense syntax, and South-Asian mythology. Consequently, Alexander has engaged the attention of postcolonial literary scholars. Ben Downing has characterized her poetic work thus: "Attracted to both the 'hierarchical unity' of Indian tradition and a modern, Western poetics of rupture, Alexander is faced with the difficult necessity of mediating between them." Alexander's fiction also has received a similar critical response, evinced by John Oliver Perry, who has called *Nampally Road* a "major contribution to South Asian-American literature far exceeding, say, Bharati Mukherjee's novels in cultural richness, psychological complexity, and sociopolitical—not to mention feminist—sophistication." Shilpa Davé, likewise comparing the significance of Alexander's fiction to that of Mukherjee's, concluded that *Nampally Road* represents more than "a narrative of minority victimage, and instead offers a reasonable strategy to incorporate the identity with the past by questioning the relationship between history and our cultural inheritance." Critics also have read Alexander's impulse to question her identity for signs of emergent feminism, responding particularly to her experiences as a woman in both an occidental and oriental context. "Alexander treats her writing as a search for a homeland, which is less physical than psychological, in particular her poetry, as a means of making sense of her multiple cultural, geographical and psychological positionalities," according to Helen Grice, adding that "it is [Alexander's] very ethnicity, gender, and exilic status that make her the person she is, and that it is partly the fault lines that exist between these identities that define her."

### PRINCIPAL WORKS

- The Bird's Bright Ring* (poetry) 1976  
*I Root My Name* (poetry) 1977  
*Without Place* (poetry) 1978  
*The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (criticism) 1979  
*Stone Roots* (poetry) 1980  
*House of a Thousand Doors* (poetry) 1988  
*Night-Scene, the Garden* (poetry) 1989  
*The Storm: A Poem in Five Parts* (poetry) 1989  
*Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (criticism) 1989  
*Nampally Road* (novel) 1991  
*Fault Lines* (autobiography) 1993  
*River and Bridge* (poetry) 1995  
*The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (criticism) 1996  
*Manhattan Music* (novel) 1997

### CRITICISM

#### John Oliver Perry (essay date Winter-Spring 1986)

SOURCE: "Exiled by a Woman's Body: Substantial Phenomena in Meena Alexander's Poetry," in *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter-Spring, 1986, pp. 125-32.

[In the following essay, Perry examines various manifestations of "exile" in Alexander's poetry, especially in relation to gender, language, and politics.]

[If the exile's] body cannot appropriate its given landscape. . . . the substantial body dwindles into phantasm. . . . Language . . . degenerates into a dead script when the bodily power of a people no longer instills it with particularity, no longer appropriates it in the expression of a emergent selfhood. . . . In the battle between the body and the spirit the outworn script of English as we find it here must be made to open its maw and swallow, swallow huge chaosses, the chaosses of uninterpreted actuality.

—Meena Alexander, "Exiled by a Dead Script" (1977)

Within the developing group of South Asian women struggling with the paradoxes of writing poetry in English, Meena Alexander rises as a solid phenomenon, neither fleeting shade nor faint aroma, but pungent, sure, fully extended in time and space and motion. At age thirty-five, in

the middle of the journey of her life, she has, unlike most other poets in India, already produced a substantial amount of poetry: five books in nine years, the last by far the largest and best. Her poems, often reaching beyond a page of narrow lines, have weight and extension individually and accumulate their feelings and significances collectively to build a full body of consciousness. If her just-issued book, *House of a Thousand Doors* (1986), is brought into the wider ken of other women—and one would hope, poets of every sort—also struggling to find their audience and language and subject in India, they will discover a thoroughly defined and exemplary artistry, undeniably contemporary in its increasingly simplified rhetoric and complex developing poetic. Meena Alexander could then very well become an emblem in whose sign others may inscribe their living wholes of experience, no matter how much their cultural condition threatens to make them aliens in their own land, in their own body, in the language they are appropriating.

This most recent work is much more convincing in every way than the flailing exploratory wordsmithing of her first two thin Writer's Workshop books, *Bird's Bright Ring* (1976) and *Without Place* (1977), or the eighteen still craftily obscure poems of flame and pain, blood, and vein, *I Root My Name* (1977). As if to prove the continuity of her work, she reprints five of those poems in this last hefty, partly prose volume with forty other poems, all but a dozen previously published in a wide range of journals in India and abroad. From the more mature *Stone Roots* (1980) she reprints only two small poems and a ten stanza dialogue, still somewhat contorted in syntax and symbolism and somehow related to a previously published play about a woman facing a wall, *In the Middle Earth* (1977). In fact, the 1980 book, from a highly regarded commercial press, already engages the forces and values, both social and esthetic, that make Alexander's whole body of work probably the most promising, and, except for Kamala Das', the most fully achieved by any contemporary South Asian woman poet.

Though literally, if not legally, an immigrant now in New York, the "roots" of which she writes are inescapably Kerala, Malayalam, Syrian Christian—not vaguely "pan-Indian"—that common fate of those exiled by the dead script of English and by spending most of their formative years in the shifting life of an Indian administrative family at home and abroad. Without disingenuously complaining of historically enforced social and personal and esthetic alienations, she probes the actualities of her given and constantly changing situations and their relationships to other equally shifting conditions of living, past and present. Her complex personal being feels convincingly exiled not only geographically, linguistically, and phenomenologically, but by the politics of her sexuality with its marginalized gender identity, by her generational modernity with its morally ambiguous liberal-liberated outlook, and by her inescapable

neo-colonial elitism with its guilty and hungry relationship to the so-called impoverished, underdeveloped Third World. All of these potentially abstract, inert conditions she compels into poetry. Not limiting her sphere of importance to feminist poetry, one can say that, except for two or three male poets, Meena Alexander has produced the most substantial poetry yet to appear in the genre of Indo-English poetry—if that is a proper term here.

Before this achievement can be placed, however, it is crucial to establish its material origins and its conditions of composition, which are not immediately those of India. Despite overtly declaring in both interviews and several specific poems her allegiance to Jayanta Mahapatra as poetic guru, and despite, indeed, a few painfilled gestures from that fine poet's darkly inward-curling, Orissan movements, Meena Alexander says she began writing poetry with Arabic speakers in Khartoum, where her father, a meteorologist, was stationed. She reports that her first efforts were in French, translated into Arabic for her circle of university friends there. Born in Allahabad, she had done some early schooling in St. Mary's, Poona. Then, continuing to spend part of each year with her maternal grandfather and paternal grandparents in Central Travancore, Kerala, she moved through two English-medium schools to the university in Khartoum; she then completed her formal education with a Ph.D. in English at Nottingham (the scene, with allusions to D. H. Lawrence, of some not inconsequential poems in *Stone Roots*). She also credits Brian Cox, editor of *Critical Quarterly*, with encouraging her poetic efforts in struggling Delhi-Hyderabad years of 1974 to 1979 or so, when as an appreciative "outsider," he told her of Jayanta Mahapatra's very relevantly indigenous and by then quite sophisticated achievements in Indo-English poetry that had also appeared in *CQ*.

That her Ph.D. dissertation developed into *The Poetic Self: Toward a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979) gives an indication of philosophical strengths that shape both her experiential material and her approach to it, as to poetry itself. For her artistic development reflects her highly intellectualized awareness of historical and literary continuities from Romanticism to post-symbolist esthetics, including, of course, the verbal strugglings and sensory-esthetic derangements of Mallarmé and extending to Marx and Heidegger similar tributes of interpretive incorporation.

So, unlike her ostensible guru, an Orissan college physics teacher who, until recently, has almost continuously lived in his native town, she has been thoroughly trained abroad for international (i.e., Eurocentric) post-modern writing, and, indeed, like several Indian poets in English, she makes teaching English Literature a scholarly, self-defining, relatively liberating profession. After lecturing posts in Delhi

and Hyderabad from 1974 to 1979, she came with her American husband, the historian David Lelyveld, to New York City and teaches particularly Romantic poetry at Fordham University there. Thus she has available most of the professional and social and linguistic supports that American poets enjoy for developing their talents. To that extent, then, she cannot be grouped with poets in India who must write in relative isolation not only from this highly productive cultural garden (or is it an artificial greenhouse?) but also from a dominant English-using circumambience, an audience committed and, on the whole, limited to English and, except for translations, committed to the Amero-English culture which that language, even in its Indo-English variants, inherently embodies. Though obviously living abroad (i.e., self-exiled from India) she and her family of origin and her present family use English predominantly (if sometimes in mixed ways) inside as well as outside the home. Meena Alexander can speak—besides Hindi, French, and Arabic—her mother tongue, Malayalam, but she has not learned that alphabet, and so preserves it in her experience as an oral, never a written or readable, form and medium. That conscious Romantic preservation of innocent childhood vision along with the cultivation of English for capturing a particular Indian family's heritage (as so well exemplified by A. K. Ramanujan) could well extort a cost in nostalgic sentiment, the contradictions of disjunctive cultural revivalism (shown by R. Parthasarathy), and the strains and confusions of alienation from any coherent culture, of which Shiv K. Kumar (her sometime fairly irrelevant poetry friend in Hyderabad) often complains.

Most readers of Indo-English poetry will be alert to those hazards of modern esthetic alienation and the inherent ideology of English, and admittedly such lowered expectations can be met in Alexander, especially in her earlier books, which tend toward mannered modernist-symbolist rhetoric built on highly repetitive patterning of words and sounds with highly ambiguous syntax. While complaining obscurely of being "**Without Place**" they seem without compelling style or independent thought and feeling. Developing toward a simpler, more direct syntax, symbolism and rhetoric, the early "horrible involved poem," she has explained, was " . . . my maiden attempt to pose the problem. It is an attempt to overcome the rhetoric of false problems which are posed. . . . How can you write authentic poetry in India with English?"

In short, in Delhi and Hyderabad she muddled initially with the conventional questions of modern-modish Indo-English criticism until she found her own body of material.

Poetry is place.  
Reach out and touch your fingernails,  
your skin  
weep, weep at sightless wings

that dare  
your quivering body through vacuities  
it cannot image  
cannot name

to a century  
in her ivory season—  
frail mastodon  
with cracking tusks

out of whose sinking hooves  
spring  
long-toothed lilies  
flaring mud.

—Part 2, section II, "**She Sings to Herself**," from  
"Songs Without Place" in *Without Place* (1977).

Indeed, she is capable of this bald rhetoric even in a passage from a fine recent poem like "**My Grandmother's Mirror**":

Shall I rinse you  
to an image the moon

can covet?  
You wince in my eyes.

Come to me sister:

my figures cut in a rocking glass  
pitch, then double themselves,  
tragic concupiscence  
that heals nothing.

But, on the whole, the later poetic performance manages to be convincing that its exile status comes from more substantial and particular problems than the inevitable modern one of trying to create a personal identity in poetry. She experiences exile as challenging not simply because of her family and educational and linguistic history, but also because of her elite class and female status. For the latter two conditions of her social being, even more than the former alien emigrant history, deprive her of direct access to the dominant experience of her patriarchal motherland. Yet she does not meekly accept writing from the margins of power, but makes them the frontiers of a feminist and holistic struggle for integration.

The first section of poems in her solidly constructed, but many-faceted *House of a Thousand Doors* is mostly about her beloved, housebound patrilineal grandmother, who spent important contemplative time by the wellside in the lower garden. These are followed by partly imaginary letters of the Gandhian political activist maternal grandmother, whom

she never knew and whose good friend was another female national activist, Balamaniamma (mother of Kamala Das)—“numb in the fiftieth year of her life, with the loneliness that can come from living in a woman’s body, ‘It is a house, a poverty, my flesh is a history,’ she murmurs.” (It is this woman who is the putative writer of five short prose “Tales of the Emperor” that concluded this volume.) Later poems in the book deal with her relatively innocent, even naive mother’s death—“**Narcissus Never Knew Her**”—with her own travails as mother, wife and woman in New York City, and with her attempts to return to, to appropriate a shape for her present identity, her family past on both male and female sides, and their Keralan place, as in “**Poem by the Wellside**”:

Body, you’re a stranger here  
I dare not touch the scars  
of stippled flesh  
milk left when it fled,  
a dry worn belly,  
palms filled with dark water.

(Palms, by the way, are a curiously persistent image from the very first books; perhaps not irrelevantly both the royal palm tree and the hand-palm are political polling signs for the Congress Party.)

To appreciate fully the non-strident, accepting quality of Alexander’s feminist focus, it is important to know that Kerala uniquely maintains an archaic form of matrilineal family trees, giving extraordinary status to the female line. That she comes from Syrian Christian stock as well, a fact which accounts for her Anglicized patronymic, compounds her felt separation from her impoverished sisters, also culturally deprived by their extreme economic and sexual marginality which exposes them to terrible abuses:

Her life and mine are twinned  
blades on a butcher knife  
raised at dream point.  
(“**She and I**”)

Despite appropriate expressions of outrage and despair at lower caste and outcaste female deprivation—including a powerful prose account of an out-of-state woman raped at a Hyderabad police station—she more often subtly interweaves into more immediate personal memories the feminist position she is centrally developing, of being metaphorically exiled from significant life by her female body, as in this passage of praise and horror about her grandfather as a magnificent, typically oppressive landlord.

I saw his stiff gold turban  
ivory cane, fit to crack a bullock’s back,  
his cushioned chair

with three foot arms  
drawn to the verandah’s edge.  
Three deep in the sand they squatted there  
restless women, stiff with dirt.  
He screwed a silver eyeglass tight  
set tobacco to his lips  
then turned and spat  
past the overseer’s shirt  
a woman’s left knee scarred with dirt.

This is from a pared-down version of a powerful five-page poem, “**Homeward, to Jayanta and Runu Mahapatra**,” that first appeared in the Summer 1983 *Toronto South Asian Review*. It is a complex evocation of inherited class guilt and deep personal trauma at the death of her grandfather, who, after all, was crucial in encouraging her intellectual development. The predominant emotion actually is not Judaeo-Christian guilt so much as tribal, family, or caste shame alongside awe at the grandfather, all framed by gratitude for the support in making this confession given by her listeners, the dedicatees, in their cosy home in Tinkonia Bagicha, Cuttack. As, in effect, foster father and mother, the Mahapatras help her to “close the wound” of exile years in America and, more important, to own up to the horrible guilty separation she once unquestioningly enjoyed from her even more oppressed sisters. During her birthing pains in New York these women come in dream to deliver her. Cut from the book version, the poem’s final threat of violent retribution, though in the key of protest rather than appropriation, deserves reprinting:

You come armed with ten thousand sickles,  
crossed knives,  
you come under the shelter of flags coloured with  
blood.  
Joined with you  
We uncoil from flesh, station and name.  
Like fern leaves etched on a garden slope  
we rise from the mercy of dark water.

The allusive, densely metaphorical, almost vegetative manner of the final two lines more closely exemplifies Alexander’s usual style than the previous pretesting—or the more traditional image that now is left to conclude this major poem:

I hear the rumour of armies.  
The armies of the night are gathering.

In general Meena Alexander’s poems do not suffer from either lack of conciseness or over-directness verging on cliché. In fact, the casual reader may be troubled by the contrary difficulties, of densely compacted allusion and images together with hyper-sophisticated phenomenological observations: