

CBCL NEWSLETTER

CONFERENCE ON BRITISH COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

No. 8

November 1965

THE 1965 MEETING

This year's meeting of the Conference will be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, as follows:

Time: December 27th, 10:30 - 11:45 a.m.

Place: Conference Room 8, Palmer House, Chicago

Chairman John P. Matthews reports a program centering on New Zealand, with these topics and speakers:

"Some Versions of Man Alone in New Zealand Writing"
(emphasis on the poetry of Glover and Smithyman and the fiction of Duggan and Shadbolt)
Wystan Curnow (U. of Pennsylvania)

"'Shared Experience' -- a Canadian Looks at New Zealand Poetry" (basic text to be used for illustrations, Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse)
George Whalley (Queen's U.)

"The New Zealand Novel"
R.T. Robertson (Virginia Polytechnic Inst.)

(A fourth contribution on a New Zealand topic, by J.S. Ryan, Peterhouse, Cambridge, will be duplicated and distributed.)

Business will include a progress report on the Conference petition for "Group" status, a further report on proposals for an international conference on Commonwealth literature to be held in the U.S., and other matters. Will those planning to attend kindly notify: Prof. John P. Matthews, Dept. of English, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

PROPOSALS FROM LEEDS . . .

Just received is the volume COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE, which prints papers delivered at the Leeds conference in September, 1964 (see NEWSLETTER #6, pp. 2-4). The appended "Report and Recommendations" seem important enough to be given verbatim for the information of Conference members and others who may be interested.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONSI Academic Interchange and Research

1) At the moment more help is available for the exchange of postgraduate students than for the exchange of university teaching staffs. It is, therefore, desirable to concentrate on the second type of exchange.

2) Members of English departments can learn much of value by studying the richness and diversity of the English literary tradition in widely varying environments. Exchanges should be considered in terms both of general English studies and of more specialized Commonwealth interests, depending upon the wishes of the host institutions.

3) The British Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan has proved of great value in those Commonwealth countries where it has been extended to include staff interchange. All possible steps should be taken to enlarge the application of such provisions, and there should be specific allocations to further the study of Commonwealth literature. Exchanges of university staff between Commonwealth countries for the specific purpose of teaching and studying Commonwealth literature should become an accepted policy of the universities both within and outside the framework of the B.C.S.F.P. and of other schemes which contribute to the exchange and supply of staff.

4) Reciprocal exchanges for periods of one academic year should be a primary aim, as well as non-reciprocal secondments of staff members for periods of several years, but two categories of short-term visits are useful:

- (a) those made by special invitation financed by special or existing sources
- (b) those arranged privately or by national exchange Committees for members of one Commonwealth country in transit or study leave, or on some other purpose, through another Commonwealth country.

Every encouragement should be given to such visits, including financial arrangements to cover the expenses involved in diversion or stop-over during transit.

5) An Academic Exchange Committee, perhaps on the lines of the Canadian-Australian Academic Exchange Committee, should be established in every Commonwealth country.

6) Every national Committee should be represented in every major university within its area, and should try to act as a clearing-house for the benefit of staff members who wish to take part in academic exchange with other Commonwealth countries.

7) The exchange of senior scholars for especial purposes may prove advantageous, but both individuals and their institutions will derive particular benefit from the exchange of junior staff members.

8) The national Committees should try to find money from both governmental and private sources to pay the travelling expenses of staff members coming to their countries.

9) An inter-Commonwealth exchange fund should be solicited from both governmental and private sources

to enable countries, otherwise unable to do so, to pay travelling expenses, and to compensate staff on exchange appointments for serious loss of salary.

10) The chairmen of the national Committees should bring to the attention of their respective Librarians or equivalents the importance of establishing at least one comprehensive repository of Commonwealth literature in every member nation. Librarians should be asked to employ their good offices in approaching publishers of books and journals of literary interest with the request that they deposit one copy of every such book and journal in the National Library of every Commonwealth country which has expressed itself willing to participate in such a scheme.

II Language, Literature, and University Courses

11) The recommendations by the 1961 Makerere Conference about the teaching of language are endorsed. In addition, local writings and recordings in English should be used in language courses, and there should be training in spoken English.

12) The recommendations made by the 1962 Cambridge Conference about the teaching of literature are endorsed.

13) University departments of English should include writings in English from any part of the world in the syllabuses of their formal academic courses, provided that such works attain an appropriate academic standard.

14) Students should be encouraged to study the development of the local English literature by seminars, visits of authors, inclusion in the syllabus, and other suitable means.

15) Universities should encourage creative writing by any means in their power.

16) Commonwealth countries should be encouraged to establish Institutes of Commonwealth Studies in which there should be a considerable emphasis on relevant literatures and in which appropriate library facilities should be provided.

17) University departments of English should study both by linguistic and by literary methods the relations between English literature and indigenous literatures in other languages.

18) The attention of appropriate departments of English and of publishers should be drawn to the need for lexicons of English as used distinctively by various countries of the Commonwealth, and assistance from suitable trusts or foundations should be sought to underwrite such projects.

III Mass Communications and Culture

19) If a Commonwealth Secretariat is set up it should have a strong cultural Division.

20) The Commonwealth Relations Office should be asked to set up a committee, or some other appropriate body, to facilitate the exchange of broadcast and recorded literary material among members of the Commonwealth.

21) It is important to bear in mind the special circumstances of the developing countries of the Commonwealth and the needs of predominantly rural communities. The attention of the BBC and of other Commonwealth broadcasting companies should be drawn to the inadequacy of much of their present programme material to the needs of non-Metropolitan communities, and they should be asked to pay greater attention to both the training of producers aware of local conditions and the supply of more relevant programmes.

22) The British Council should be asked to promote an annual travelling exhibition of works of literature published in the Commonwealth during the year

in question, and other book exhibitions from time to time, featuring Commonwealth writing from earlier periods.

23) Publishers in the Commonwealth should be asked to help developing Commonwealth countries with no publishing facilities of their own to publish approved works in the vernacular suitable for a mass audience.

IV Publishing and Bibliography

24) A list of Commonwealth publishers of creative literature should be drawn up, country by country, together with a list of periodicals to which review copies of books by writers from other parts of the Commonwealth might usefully be sent.

25) Heads of departments of English should encourage university bookshops to stock works of Commonwealth literature, particularly those in paperbacks.

26) A suitable publisher should be invited to consider the compilation and publication of

- (a) an inclusive historical bibliography of Commonwealth literature
- (b) an anthology of contemporary Commonwealth verse in English
- (c) an annual anthology of Commonwealth writing in English, both verse and prose.

27) A journal of Commonwealth literature should be established, which should include critical articles and annual bibliographies.

In a footnote, may we extend a hearty welcome to No. 1 of THE JOURNAL OF COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE (September 1965), published by Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. (48 Charles St., London W 1) and the University of Leeds. Subscriptions, \$6.50 Can./U.S. for 4 copies; issued annually for two years, then twice yearly.

MORE ON THE WEST INDIAN NOVEL

Reference to #5, p.1, will indicate that a paper on the West Indian novel by John J. Figueroa (Univ. of the West Indies) was received and read by title at the 1963 meeting. Only recently have we had access to the text and can now, belatedly enough, record something of what the paper contained.

Three categories of approach to West Indian culture were set up: Continuation, Consolidation, and Re-Creation (or Innovation), each in turn referable to structure, concern, and language. Phyllis Allfrey (THE ORCHID HOUSE) was taken as the representative of Continuation; Vidia Naipaul (A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS) of Consolidation; George Lamming (IN THE CASTLE OF MY SKIN -- the title is derived from a poem by Derek Walcott) of Re-Creation. In outline form, ten novels forming the basis of critical judgments in the paper appear as follows:

Continuation

Phyllis Allfrey, THE ORCHID HOUSE, 1953
 Edgar Mittelholzer, THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
 SYLVIA, 1953
 Sylvia Wynter, THE HILLS OF HEBRON, 1962

Consolidation

George Lamming, SEASON OF ADVENTURE, 1960
 Vidia Naipaul, A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS, 1961
 Samuel Selvon, AN ISLAND IS A WORLD, 1955

Re-Creation

John Hearne, VOICES UNDER THE WINDOW, 1955
 George Lamming, IN THE CASTLE OF MY SKIN, 1953
 Edgar Mittelholzer, A MORNING AT THE OFFICE,
 1950
 Vic Reid, NEW DAY, 1949

(Professor Figueroa, the author of this paper and also a West Indian poet and story-writer himself, is currently spending a year's leave in the U.S.)

NO ORDINARY SLIM VOLUME

The time is not far off, let us believe, when poems and stories written in English by "natives" (whether African, Polynesian, Malaysian, Chinese, or what-not) will cease to draw wonder. We already expect Nigerians, for instance, to write well, as they do. Even so, the "first" is still the first, and the Maori poet Hone Tuwhare enjoys or endures such distinction. R.A.K. Mason's foreword to NO ORDINARY SUN (Auckland: Paul, 1964, reprint 1965) makes the point:

After many generations of racial intermingling in our country, things have become interfused: in poetry, as in life itself, this is manifested in many forms. Here -- and I think this is for the first time -- is a member of the Maori race qualifying as a poet in English and in the idiom of his own generation, but still drawing his main strength from his own people.

Tuwhare has been publishing since 1958; this book is a gathering from several periodicals, most especially THE NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, which together with LANDFALL has served as a vehicle for new poems throughout the postwar period. The title-poem is as up-to-date as the atomic bomb, upon which it makes a more incisive comment than some we have seen, while others with titles like "Tangi" or "Mauri" (not a misprint for "Maori") emphasize some of the "main strength" that Mason speaks of. Another source of strength may very well lie in the circumstance that this poet works with his hands (Australians will recall the parallel example of Shaw Neilson). Here is one of his comments on what he and his fellow workmen at a hydroelectric project are doing:

The Sea, to the Mountains, to the River

Far off
the sea beckons
to the mountains.

Austerely
the mountains ponder
the cacaphonic river tossing
white-splintered mane to the
mist's swirl.

Here
alien sounds are struck.
Nowhere is there greater fuss
to tear out the river's tongue .

Blue hiss and crackle
of the welding rod,
compressed sigh of air
and the whump and whoof
fuse to the rising clamour
of the rivet gun.

Cursing
scuffing the earth with massive
boots, men are walking away:
and from a smoke-wreathed shoulder
of a crouching hill a gigantic fist
of sound unfolds -- shattering the clouds.

Coaxed into staccato life
a tractor nonchalantly puffs
perfect rings into the startled air.

Exulting men
as skilled as spiders thread
a skyline of steel crucifixes.

The sea beckons
again and again
to the mountains. Unmoved
the austere mountains ponder
a silence as profound as stars.

NEW ZEALAND NOVELS: STATISTICAL CONTEMPLATIONS

Mr. James A.S. Burns's A CENTURY OF NEW ZEALAND NOVELS, A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE PERIOD 1861-1960, briefly noticed in the April, 1964, number, offers not only a quick-reference picture of production over a century but a kind of acceleration-gauge that could be applied to several literatures other than New Zealand. It lists, in all, just over 300 titles. Of these, we do not reach #50 until 1896; #100 until 1925; #150 until 1936. That means, roughly, that one-third of the century accounts for two-thirds of the novels produced, or that one-fourth of the century accounts for half, whichever point you choose to stop at. The curve rises even more sharply in the ten years 1951-1960, which saw 91 titles published: one decade alone accounts for almost a third of a century's total. Always remembering that figures are slippery and in any case can tell us nothing about quality, we still may use these statistics to draw some inferences.

This century, and most particularly the last couple of decades, has already revolutionized the basic geography of the English language and the literature of English. A similar look at the fiction of Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, or the West Indies would reveal similar trends: consider, for example, the dates of the novels listed by Prof. Figueroa at another place in this number. The earliest is 1949, with the remainder all in the 50's and 60's. While it is also quite true that more novels appear all the time in Britain and the U.S., they do not appear at such dramatic rates of increase or with the same consequences upon the literatures from which they emerge.

Correction: The name "D.R. Dathorne" appended to the article "African Writing in Germany" (#7, pp. 5-9) should have appeared as "O.R. Dathorne." Our apologies.

NEWS & NOTES

This number of the NEWSLETTER is being edited from Hong Kong, as will be the next, in which we hope to survey some of the recent and current English writing associated with the colony.

*

A.J.M. Smith, Professor of English and Poet in Residence at Michigan State U., is preparing a new edition of THE OXFORD BOOK OF CANADIAN VERSE IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH to be published in the fall of 1966 in honor of the centenary of Confederation, July, 1967.

*

At the University of Tasmania, S.C. Harrex is preparing a Ph.D. dissertation on the English-language novel of modern India.

*

The South African English Poetry Society has been founded at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, at the instance of Professor Guy Butler. Annual subscription to the society's quarterly broadsheet is R1.00 (approximately Can.-U.S. \$1.40), and contributions from members will enjoy prior consideration for publication.

*

Prof. William H. Magee (U. of Alberta) has lately published articles on "Ontario in Recent Canadian Literature" and "Alberta as a Literary Inspiration."

*

On a grant from the Australian-Canadian Academic Exchange Committee, Prof. Mary Foster Martin (Mc-Master U.) recently completed a tour of New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, India, and other countries.

Cetologists will regret to learn that the Tory Channel whaling station (at the northern tip of South Island, New Zealand) has ceased operations. Competition in Antarctica has so much depleted whale stocks that shore-whaling in New Zealand is apparently no longer economically feasible (as it still is at certain places in South Africa). But if we may believe one of the old local ballads, shore-whaling was never a Sunday-school picnic, anyway:

I am paid in soap, and sugar, and rum,
For cuttin' up blubber and boilin' down tongue;
The agent's fee makes my blood so to boil,
I'll push him in a hot pot of oil!

*

The twenty years recently covered in the ANNOTATED INDEX TO THE ENGLISH JOURNAL, 1944-1963 (Champaign: N.C.T.E., 1964) produced -- as might have been predicted -- numerous articles on British and American writers, with comparatively few on foreign writers such as Lin Yutang, Thomas Mann, or Boris Pasternak. Only four figures associated (more or less) with Commonwealth writing are present: Costain, Rumer Godden, Monsarrat, Paton. Not indexed are reviews and brief book-notices, in which a few others would undoubtedly have turned up. The next twenty years, or perhaps even five to ten, can be expected to show movement away from such minimal attention to the "lost tribes" of English.

*

Prof. Ada Nisbet of UCLA is presently completing her comprehensive bibliography of British (i.e., English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand) comment on the United States, 1832-1900, to be published by the U. of California Press early in 1966. The chronological bibliography

includes comment of all kinds, not just travel comment. Miss Nisbet will welcome correspondence from anyone who may know of obscure items or lists which may have escaped her notice. At present her list runs to around 4,000 books and pamphlets as well as several thousand periodical items.

*

It is of interest to observe that in the first volume of the NATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INDIAN LITERATURE, 1901 TO 1953 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1962) the English section is the most extensive of the four languages represented (the others being Assamese, Bengali, and Gujarati). Among the sub-sections, after Linguistics and Arts comes Literature: General Works; then Poetry, Drama, Fiction (the largest category, covering some ten quite closely printed pages), Essays, Letters, Humour and Satire, and Miscellaneous.

A more restricted listing of Indian scholarship, the 1952-1962 subject index to THE LITERARY CRITERION (U. of Mysore) contains numerous studies of British and American writers in addition to a fair share of Indians (e.g. Toru Dutt, Gandhi, Kamala Markandaya, R.K. Narayan, Sarojini Naidu, Nehru, Tagore). One would expect that a novelist so much concerned with transplanted Indians as V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad) might have attracted some critical interest, but he appears not to have. Neither did any writer from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa (where Indians write and are written about). Would this hold true for Indian universities in general, or have we hit upon merely a chance exception? We would welcome a reply from an Indian scholar in position to comment on the general state of Commonwealth literary studies there.

ITEMS RECEIVED

BULLETIN OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR AFRICAN LITERATURE
IN ENGLISH, no. 2. 1956.

Now under the editorship of Prof. Eldred Jones (Fourah Bay College), and furnished with a handsome yellow-black-white cover design by Mr. John Vandi, this number contains articles on recent African fiction, poetry, and drama, a retrospective review by the editor of a travel-work published in 1909 (BRITONS THROUGH NEGRO SPECTACLES, by A.B.C. Merriman-Labor), and articles in which poetry is stressed: one on Vilakazi, a second on Senghor. "Writing from Nigeria" describes briefly how "the spate of writing in English begun by Tutuola and Ekwensi in Nigeria is to some extent now fulfilling itself." Following an interesting note on the Lagos production of a play by Christiana Aidoo (DILEMMA OF A GHOST), the "Notes from Correspondents" section includes items from University College, Nairobi; Makerere University College; University College, Dar-es-Salaam; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone; University of Ghana; University of Ibadan. Finally there is a section on "New Publications or Re-Issues." This young journal appears to be striving for a literary pan-Africanism (inclusive of South Africa) which one hopes may continue to reflect as much variety and vigor as demonstrated in this issue.

Ruth Dallas, EXPERIMENT IN FORM. Dunedin: University of Otago, 1964. n.p.

Nine poems "set up by the English Honours bibliography class and some others, and printed off on our foolscap Albion hand-press built in 1845."

H.W.D. Manson, THE MAGNOLIA TREE. Johannesburg: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1963. 85 pp., and PAT MULHOLLAND'S DAY. Johannesburg: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1964. 108 pp.

The first of these plays is a poetic drama in a Japanese setting; the second "takes place in South Africa though I have not included any race problems," says the playwright, adding: "Days frequently pass in a man's life in South Africa in which these temporary problems do not make themselves felt. Quite obviously all South Africans would be nervous wrecks if it were not so. Mulholland's problems in this play are greater than any political ones." Both plays have the conventional 3-act structure, and the second is in prose with a verse prologue. Several of the author's plays (which are chiefly verse drama) have been heard on radio, and he has received the Olive Schreiner Prize for drama.

Racilia Jilian Nell, comp. NADINE GORDIMER, NOVELIST AND SHORT STORY WRITER: A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HER WORKS AND SELECTED LITERARY CRITICISM. Johannesburg: U. of the Witwatersrand, 1964. 33 pp.

Another Important Guide

A suitable companion to THE COMMONWEALTH IN BOOKS (noticed in #7) is THE COMMONWEALTH TODAY, by A.J. Horne, Librarian of the Commonwealth Institute, issued in July by the Library Association. It provides an annotated list of 720 books in all, main areas being Africa, America (Canada/Caribbean), Asia, Australasia, and the Mediterranean. The preface expresses the hope that "some librarians may be encouraged and helped by it to improve their collections on the Commonwealth and its individual members." Most items date from the 1950's and 60's and presumably are still available.

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