

# *A Manifold Voice*

CLIFFORD SIMMONS

ONE suspects that in Great Britain knowledge of writers working in English, but in traditions outside those of Britain and the United States, is very limited indeed. It is also possible to conjecture that in overseas Commonwealth countries little is known of writers from other Commonwealth countries overseas. There is for example an upsurge of writers from Africa in recent years, and the names of James Ngugi of Kenya and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria spring to mind. The latter is probably better known to some for his imprisonment than for his writings.

There are many voices urging our attention, and Professor Walsh has chosen a highly relevant title<sup>1</sup> for his volume of studies on Commonwealth literature: *A Manifold Voice*. This is an excellent book in which the author seeks to explore some of the less familiar resources — less familiar to the British readers — existing in the English language, by pointing, as precisely and concretely as he can, at a number of writers who have worked in traditions outside those of Britain and the United States. His second intention is to highlight some of the authors who have made great use of the resources of the English language.

There were a number of writers he could have chosen for his series of studies, but no one would wish to fault his particular choice. From Australia he features Patrick White and A. D. Hope: from New Zealand, Katherine Mansfield: from Canada, Morley Callaghan: from India, R. K. Narayan, and Nirad C. Chaudhuri: from the Carriibbean, V. S. Naipaul: and to represent Africa, Olive Schreiner from South Africa, and Chinua Achebe from Nigeria.

What a delight it is to be reminded of R. K. Narayan's *Maneater of Malgudi* and *The Street Vendor*, which give us a strong feeling for this small town in Mysore. In Professor Walsh's essay on

<sup>1</sup> William Walsh, *A Manifold Voice*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1970, 218 pp., 35s.

Nirad Chaudhuri, he is mainly concerned with his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. V. S. Naipaul, a Hindu from Trinidad, has written six novels, two volumes of short stories and two other books, *An Area of Darkness* and *The Middle Passage*, which could be described as travel books, yet implicitly have other characteristics. His novels have made a remarkable impact, and his last, *The Mimic Man*, is a tour de force.

Who else could represent Australia but Patrick White? And the same could almost be said of A. D. Hope, one of Australia's greatest poets. The choice of Katherine Mansfield and Morley Callaghan is to be commended, two such dissimilar writers. Olive Schreiner's story of an African farm was published in 1883; such a different world from that of Chinua Achebe whose first novel *Things Fall Apart* was published only twelve years ago. Here is a writer who in his novels deals with the contemporary African scene and brings to light the people and the conditions of our time.

*A Manifold Voice* is a book which should be in every library, and which should be read as an introduction to the great contribution that the Commonwealth is making to the literature of the English language