

is familiar with the Republic knows, the island can be the closest place to the US outside the star-spangled land. Typically, then, the author of *Inventing Ireland* has created a repeatedly-ruptured narrative that deliberately moves in more directions than one, yet Hollywood-wise ends as a happy tale. Kiberd cultivates, when he needs it, a glitzy style that flattens distinctions of register. Still, the author manages to tell a number of good stories, and leaves us with a distinctly un-modern epic of literary historical revaluation.

SYHAMAL BAGCHEE



Stella Algoo-Baksh. *Austin C. Clarke: A Biography*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1994. Pp.234. \$19.95 pb.

Growing up poor, black and illegitimate in Barbados, Austin Clarke was destined to discover early in life that the black person "has to be ready to do almost anything just to exist" (45). His sensibilities were nurtured in a class-conscious society dominated by well-to-do whites, and his education at Barbados's prestigious schools was designed to transform him into a black Englishman. One is not surprised to learn therefore that having grown up in such a narrow society Clarke played the role of the black Englishman on the University of Toronto campus when he arrived there as a student in the 1950s. But it did not take him long to discover that it was his blackness that mattered, and his experiences convinced him that "Canada was fundamentally racist" (37). This conviction is crucial, for it is at the heart of his writings. For instance, his obsession to prove his value in a racist society has always been the source of his creative energy. The theme of racism pervades Clarke's writing. Two examples are worth noting: the early *The Meeting Point* (1967), in which Bernice, his biographer contends, "reflects the author's own perpetual insecurities" as a black individual in a white society (104); and the later *Nine Men Who Laughed* (1986), in which Canadian society is depicted as a force engendering in black immigrants "a sense of dislocation . . . and a loss of identity" (166).

However distinctive Clarke's experiences in Barbados and Canada may have been, he is the typically disaffected colonial who, given the valuable perspective of distance and much self-examination, comes to understand the extent to which his colonial education reinforced his sense of inferiority even as it taught him to regard Mother England as the source of all things true and good and beautiful. Clarke, Algoo-Baksh shows, has undertaken a long and sometimes traumatic voyage of self-discovery which climaxed in his realization that while his colonial education offered him an escape from poverty, it also deprived him of his own black culture and heritage. This discovery is a central theme in *Amongst Thistles and Thorns* (1965) and *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* (1980).

Although this is a largely satisfying biography, Algoo-Baksh, one feels, treats Clarke's notorious return to Barbados and his sojourn there as Acting General Manager of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation too leniently. Clarke's goal was to use television and radio as tools in the Barbadianization of the masses. Algoo-Baksh insists that Clarke wanted Barbadians to "profit from the insights he had acquired in his quest to comprehend his own identity"; and he also wanted "to foster in the Barbadian people both a profound self-respect and an appreciation of their own culture and society" (125). However commendable a goal, Clarke's attempt to become Barbados's cultural messiah might have been regarded as decidedly pretentious, to say nothing of impertinent. The Barbadian masses were not interested in cultural salvation, and indeed Algoo-Baksh euphemistically describes the entire exercise as "an ambitious venture" (126). Algoo-Baksh, furthermore, claims that in *The Prime Minister* (1977) "Clarke's resentments are focused to serve his art, rather than his art the resentments" (142). Some readers will not be persuaded by this claim, for the novel is arguably an exorcism of his turbulent and abortive tenure as manager and sometimes reads like a revenge book.

Algoo-Baksh has mined and brought to the surface revealing facts about Clarke's life and attitudes that are valuable for a thorough study of his work. There is no question of Clarke's valuable contribution to Canadian literature. Algoo-Baksh has explained his attempt to "shake [Canadian] society out of its complacency, to disabuse it of its belief in its innocence" (185). She has also succeeded in demonstrating the crucial connection between his life and his work, and has traced in some detail Clarke's struggles to find a respectable place as a black man of letters in North America. She has also traced *en route* the development of Clarke's multifaceted and sometimes harassed consciousness, and she has given the reader a clear picture of Clarke's remarkable progress from his humble beginning as an illegitimate youngster in Barbados with limited prospects, to literary and social success and above all, to a sense of his own integrity as a unique individual.

HAROLD BARRATT



Ian Macdonald and Vanda Radzik. *Kyk-Over-Al 46/47: 50th Anniversary Issue*. Georgetown: Red Thread Women's Press, 1995. Pp. 314. US \$12.00.

The Caribbean has not been as fortunate as other regions where opportunities for publication in local literary journals and magazines are concerned. The region has not produced a journal as widely known as *Transition* (Africa), *Meanjin* (Australia), *Landfall* (New Zealand), *Canadian Literature* (Canada), or *The Literary Half-Yearly* (India). This is