

# Introduction

As Adela, in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, moves toward the mysterious Marabar Caves, she thinks about the great continent they represent: "How could the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile." British invaders circled the globe for two centuries, taking with them their language and art forms, and these have rooted and grown in distinctive ways on several continents, with marvelous results for anyone interested in literature in English.

This collection of critical and biographical essays on writers from around the world who write primarily in English represents a departure from the *British Writers* series, in which Scribners has for many years provided regular supplements that contain substantial readings of significant authors—poets, novelists, autobiographers, playwrights, and critics. As a result of the historical legacy of colonialism, many accomplished, influential writers have appeared in what used to be thought of as "marginal" areas. These regions are no longer marginal, and some do not even fit the designation of "postcolonial."

In *World Writers in English*, we examine a wide range of creative writers from India and Asia, Australia and New Zealand, from Africa, from the Caribbean, Canada, and elsewhere. The writers discussed in these pages who are primarily writers of fiction are Chinua Achebe, Margaret Atwood, J. M. Coetzee, Amitav Ghosh, Bessie Head, Kazuo Ishiguro, Jamaica Kincaid, Hanif Kureishi, Alex La Guma, Katherine Mansfield, Timothy Mo, Bharati Mukherjee, Alice Munro, V. S. Naipaul, R. K. Narayan, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Lewis Nkosi, Ben Okri, Michael Ondaatje, Alan Paton, Caryl Phillips, Jean Rhys, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Olive Schreiner, Paul Scott, Vikrem Seth, Christina Stead, and Patrick White. Those who write primarily poetry are Fleur Adcock, Aga Shahid Ali, Jeni Couzyn, John Forbes, John Kinsella, Jack Mapanje, Arthur Nortje, Peter Porter, A. K. Ramanujan, and Derek Walcott. Wole Soyinka is mostly known for his plays. Of course, many of these authors do not confine themselves to one genre, as in the case of Atwood, Ondaatje, Naipaul, Soyinka, and Walcott—just to name the obvious examples.

Each essay offers a thorough reading of a single author's work in the context of his or her life, with special attention paid to the cultural matrix that figures in the evolution of this writer. We have sought out first-rate critics from around the world, each of them being a specialist in the particular author discussed. As the essays themselves will suggest, many of these critics are themselves writers of considerable talents; the writing throughout is lucid and lively, and jargon is always avoided. Our intention has been to provide excellent introductions to these writers, with readings basic enough to help novice

*WORLD WRITERS IN ENGLISH*

readers yet complex enough to interest and challenge experienced readers. In each instance, thorough bibliographies are provided, so that the full range of an author's work can be displayed; the secondary bibliographies direct readers to critical books and articles, interviews, and other useful material.

As the world stage widens, we hope that these essays serve our readers well by providing an introduction to a remarkable group of writers whose minds have, indeed, taken hold of their own countries. They have combined local traditions with the tradition of British and American literature, creating work in various genres that bear a distinct cultural inflection but speak to the world of readers at large.

Jay Parini