

Literature and Empire, 1890-1955

Short Essay

In New York a winter back, a close friend of mine stumbled across Mulk Raj Anand's *Letters on India* (1942) halfway-up a twisting book-skyscraper—inevitable fixtures of those forgetful and still adventurous bookstores found only in big cities. The frontispiece of the copy revealed that it had been sold in the People's Bookshop in Johannesburg (sometime before the 1950s). He gave it to me as a fitting gift: at the time I was anxiously putting together PhD proposals on radical literary networks in the late British Empire—in which Anand played a vital role. Having burnt my share of the midnight oil to frame the oceanic crossings of texts as poetic and compelling to an admissions committee, I found the distinctly unbriny smell of this 'globe-trotting' volume quite derisive. It was otherwise a perfect present; there was something wholly invigorating in holding something so solid.

I have since been avidly collecting books related to my doctoral project, which traces literary networks as a political institution in the late British Empire. As a collection, these books embody over half a century of literary cultures in the Anglophone world, with particular strengths in first editions and early editions pertaining to southern Africa, India, and especially Aotearoa/New Zealand—the case studies of my research. Several items are particularly noteworthy—such the copy of the poetry collection *The Bird of Time* (1912) by Indian poet and politician Sarojini Naidu, which was signed and gifted to Asaf Ali, the first Indian ambassador to the United States (sold to me for one pound as it had been 'graffitied'). At a conceptual level, together, they express the continuities and discontinuities of this turbulent period of British imperialism. At one end, anthologies of white settler writing are desperately trying to impose unity over the disintegrating empire. At the other, radical polemics are calling for the immediate demise of imperialist and capitalist incursion. However, at a material level of signatures and stamps, the collection also expresses a powerfully humanising dimension which has fundamentally altered my research: seeing in specific ways how texts have travelled, been consumed, and fortified friendships has provocatively expanded my understanding of the types of social work books can do.

I hope to continue to collect volumes of interest to southern Africa, South Asia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Additionally, I plan to take the collection in new directions, expanding it to include Irish and Caribbean books. This new ground gestures in more comprehensive ways at the production and circulation of Anglophone literature during the period and would be indispensable for further research.

Bibliography

Allen, C. R. *The Ship Beautiful: A Two-fold Tale*. (London and New York: Frederick Warne & Co, 1925)

1st edition, 2nd impression. A novel by New Zealand Pākehā author C. R. Allen (1885-1962).

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Letters on India*. (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1942)

1st edition, bearing a sale stamp c. 1945-1950 of People's Bookshop in Johannesburg, South Africa. A series of polemic essays by the novelist Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004).

Anand, Mulk Raj. *The Golden Breath: Studies in Five Poets of the New India*. (London: John Murray, 1933)

1st edition. A collection of literary criticism by the novelist Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004).

Bolitho, Hector. *Solemn Boy*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927)

1st edition. The debut novel by a major New Zealand biographer Hector Bolitho (1897-1974).

Bolitho, Hector (ed.) *The New Countries: A Collection of Stories and Poems by South African, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand Writers.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929)

1st edition, signed by the editor and gifted to G. G. Griffith (?). An important anthology of white settler Anglophone writing by a major New Zealand biographer Hector Bolitho (1897-1974).

Chattopadhyay, Harindranath. *The Feast of Youth.* (Adyar, Theosophical Publishing House, 1918)

1st edition, inscription says it was gifted to Helen Bowen Wedgwood by her 'forgetful friend' Mrinalini Chatto (sister of the poet), acquired from the estate of Sir Andrew Huxley (married to Wedgwood's daughter) after his death. This is the debut collection of poems by a major South Asian poet, Harindranath Chattopadhyay (1898-1900); a member of a prominent political family, his other siblings include Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), a major South Asian poet and second woman president of the Indian National Congress, and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (1880-1937), a prominent revolutionary and communist.

Gordon, Ian A. (ed.) *New Zealand New Writing, Vol I.* (Wellington: Progressive Publishing Society, 1942)

Paperback anthology of writing, in a series published by the short-lived Progressive Publishing Society, associated with the New Zealand literati.

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Gordon, Ian A. (ed.) *New Zealand New Writing, Vol IV.* (Wellington: Progressive Publishing Society, 1945)

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Haslam, Anthony (ed.) *Anthology of Empire.* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1932)

1st edition. An anthology of writing from around the British Empire—from Egypt, India, to Australia—compiled by Anthony Haslam (?).

Hodge, Merton. *The Story of an African Farm: A Play in Three Acts.* (London: William Heinemann, 1938)

1st edition, ex-library book Gloucestershire County Library. Adaptation of the Rose famous book by southern African writer Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) by New Zealand writer and journalist Merton Hodge (1903-1958).

Hyde, Robin. *Houses by the Sea & the Later Poems of Robin Hyde.* (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1952)

1st edition, retaining insert by original anonymous owner with notes on the poems. A posthumous collection of poems by New Zealand journalist, novelist, and poet Robin Hyde (1903-1939).

Kipling, Rudyard. *The Light that Failed.* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1913 [1891])

Attractive pocket edition of the first novel by prominent Anglo-Indian author Rudyard Kipling (1965-1936).

Kipling, Rudyard. *Plain Tales from the Hills*. (London: Macmillan and Co, 1891 [1888])

3rd edition, originally belonging to the estate of Janet Milne Rae (1844-1933), the Scottish author of novels set in India, some pages uncut. The first collection of short stories published by prominent Anglo-Indian author Rudyard Kipling (1965-1936).

Lancaster, G. B. *Pageant: A Novel of Tasmania*. (New York and London: The Century Co, 1933)

1st edition, 2nd impression. A rare and polemical novel by the best-selling New Zealand author G. B. Lancaster (1873-1943).

[Lee, John A.] *Children of the Poor*. (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1934)

1st edition, ex-library book Wellington Public Library. Socialist novel by prominent author and New Zealand Labour Party politician John A. Lee (1891-1982), published anonymously.

Locke, Elise (ed.) *Gordon Watson – His Life & Writings: A Memorial Volume to a New Zealand Writer, Solider, and Communist*. (Auckland: The New Zealand Communist Party, 1949)

1st edition. Volume of poetry and critical writings of Gordon Watson (1912-1945), an important New Zealand poet who died in the Second World War, compiled by Elise Locke (1912-2001), one of the most prominent political figures of twentieth-century New Zealand.

Marris, C. A. (ed.) *New Zealand Best Poems of 1933*. (Wellington, Harry H Tombs, 1933)

1st edition, inscribed in the frontispiece with 'Dorkie from Sydie'. Annual collection of poems compiled by C. A. Marris (1876-1947).

Marshall, Alan et al. *Southern Stories: Poems and Paintings*. (Melbourne: Dolphin Publications, 1943)

1st edition, gifted to Mang Hall (?) from Alice Dolphin (possible relative of publisher). Seminal anthology of Australian and New Zealand writers.

Mason, R. A. K. *This Dark Will Lighten: Selected Poems 1923-41*. (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1941)

1st edition, bound without boards, owner inscription Katrina P. Moneux (?). The final collection of poems by R. A. K. Mason (1905-1971), famously called New Zealand's first wholly original poet.

[Mason, R. A. K.] *Frontier Forsaken*. (Auckland: "Challenge", 1947)

1st edition. An anticolonial polemic regarding the Cook Islands by R. A. K. Mason (1905-1971), famously called New Zealand's first wholly original poet, published anonymously.

Millin, Sarah Gertrude. *The South Africans*. (London: Constable & Co, 1926)

1st edition. A historical text by one of pre-Apartheid South African's most prominent—and racist—authors, Sarah Gertrude Millin (1889-1968).

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First major edition of auto-biographical text by New Zealand literary heavyweight Alan Mulgan (1881-1962).

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Naidu, Sarojini. *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring*. (London: William Heinemann, 1912)

1st edition, signed by the author, gifted to Asaf Ali (1888-1953), an anti-colonial activist and first Indian ambassador to the United States, and inscribed with a modified version of the final poem. The third poetry collection by prominent South Asian poet and political figure, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), second woman president of the Indian National Congress.

Naidu, Sarojini. *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death & Destiny*. (London: William Heinemann, 1917)

1st edition. The third poetry collection by prominent South Asian poet and political figure, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), second woman president of the Indian National Congress.

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1st edition, some pages uncut. A collection of New Zealand Pākehā poems, considered the first major Anglophone collection of the archipelago and a touchstone for later poetry.

Reid, J. C. *Creative Writing in New Zealand: A Brief Critical History*. (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1946)

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Sargeson, Frank. *When the Wind Blows*. (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1945)

1st edition, bearing a sale stamp c. 1940s of Modern Books in Wellington. Novella by Frank Sargeson (1903-1982), arguably the most important New Zealand literary figures of the twentieth century.

Scanlan, Nelle M. *March Moon*. (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1945 [1944])

1st New Zealand edition. A short novel by now largely forgotten best-selling New Zealand novelist Nelle M. Scanlan (1882-1968).

Schreiner, Olive. *Undine*. (London: Ernest Benn, 1929)

1st UK edition. Posthumous novel by South African novelist, public intellectual, and feminist Olive Schreiner (1855-1920).

Scully, W. C. *A History of South Africa: From the Earliest Days to the Union*. (London: Longmans, Green, & Co, 1915)

An unusual history of southern Africa by prominent white South African liberal William Scully (1855-1943).

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1st edition, owner signature J. H. Mullard (?). An important novel about racism in southern Africa by prominent white South African liberal William Scully (1855-1943).

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1st edition, 2nd impression. A collection of earlier poems by giant of South Asian letters, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Bengali translated into English by the author.

Texidor, Greville. *These Dark Glasses*. (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1949)

1st edition. The only novella to be written by Greville Texidor (1092-1964), a largely forgotten British-born modernist and radical who made her home in New Zealand and Australia.