

# In Memoriam

## ANDREW SALKEY, 1928-1995

### Novelist, Poet, Anthologist, Broadcaster

**ANDREW SALKEY**, who has died at 67 years of age, was one of the Caribbean's most prolific writers. Novelist, poet, anthologist, broadcaster, he has left a legacy of work that younger writers may find difficult to surpass. He wrote and edited 39 books—novels, children's books, poetry, short stories, travel journals and some 50 plays and features, mainly for radio.

Born in Colon, Panama, of Jamaican parents, he lived and was educated in Jamaica and England graduating from London University in the 1950s. He taught English and Latin and broadcast and wrote scripts for domestic, Caribbean and World Service of the BBC.

He helped found the Caribbean Artists' Movement and in 1970 was a founding editor (together with Edward Kamau Brathwaite in Jamaica and Kenneth Ramchand in Trinidad) of its journal, *Savacou*. During the late 1960s and 1970s he was a familiar face at the West Indian Students' Center in Earls Court, a vibrant venue and nurturing ground for many a future Caribbean leader.

He spoke fluent Spanish and took more than a keen interest in the non-English speaking parts of the region, something that is reflected in his 1977 anthology, *Writing In Cuba Since The Revolution*, and his own poetry collection, *In the Hills Where Her Dream lives: Poems For Chile*. The latter won the Casa de las Americas Prize for Poetry in 1979. His most creative period as an author was two decades after the 1959 publication of his first novel *A Quality of Violence*.

From 1976 he lived in the US as Professor of Writing at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts. But he remained a visitor whenever possible to London, where in September 1992 his contribution to Caribbean literature was celebrated at a two-day symposium and tribute at the Commonwealth Institute. Participants included Margaret Busby, the late Samuel Selvon, Alastair Niven, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Trevor McDonald, Anne Walmsley, Peter Nazareth and Robert Chrisman.

Unparalleled in the literary history of the Caribbean community of London, that occasion was testimony to the high esteem in which Andrew was regarded. He won several awards, including The Thomas Helmore Poetry Prize (1955), The John Simon Guggenheim (1960), Sri Chinmoy Poetry Award (1977), and The Black Scholar Award of Excellence (1992). Andrew was always ready to lend a hand to aspiring writers, and gave of his time unselfishly — reviewing, supporting and reading at events. Encouraging young writers, he was wont to read the work of others rather than his own.

An inveterate letter writer, Andrew is known to have replied promptly to all letters, a discipline he learnt from his schoolmistress mother and one for which the Caribbean region is not renowned.

In four decades as a writer, he enriched the literature of the Caribbean region by trying to make more secure stories of our folk hero Anancy, a trickster figure in the traditional culture of Africa and the Caribbean. In *Anancy's Score*, his 1973 collection of short stories, Salkey bridged the historical gap between Anancy's two homelands, treating him as both a physical and metaphorical spiderman, profoundly involved in the continuing struggles throughout the Third World. This led him to experiment and to take liberties both with the English language and with the nation language of Jamaica in a way no other writer had attempted before. Nine of his published works were aimed at the younger reader, contributing to a genre that is not a familiar one in the writing of the region.

For many schoolchildren and teachers the world over, during the 1970s and 1980s, these books were their only window to the world of the Caribbean. Some have been translated into other languages and in 1967 he was awarded The German Children's Book Prize, for his story "Hurricane."

Bogle-L'Overture Publications, the company I founded in 1969, will always be indebted to Andrew for the unstinting support he gave the venture from its inception throughout the difficult years of its existence. I am proud that we are due this autumn to bring out his final collection of short stories, *In the Border Country and Other Short Stories*.

He had been ailing for some time and — although the warning signs may have been contained in a letter he wrote me earlier this month ("... my heart conditions lingers on like a bad-willy pen. I take tablets for the angina when it surfaces which is fairly frequently these last weeks") — I was not alerted to the impending sad news. Andrew died during the early morning hours of Friday, in an ambulance, while on his way to Cooley Dickenson Hospital. He will be buried in London. He is survived by his widow Pat, sons Eliot and Jason and grandson Joseph Andrew.