Contributor: Kgomotso Masemola

Entry: Van Wyk, Christopher (1957–)

Born in Baragwanath, Soweto, Chris van Wyk has proved an influential figure on the South African literary scene. Associated with the Black Consciousness movement, his volume of poems titled It Is Time to Go Home (1979) won the Olive Schreiner Prize of 1980. In the same year he would begin his five year term as editor of Staffrider journal, which proved such an important outlet for the black protest poetry of the period. He launched Wietie magazine, which sought to provide a platform to recuperate the Sophiatown argot known as tsotsitaal or gangster-speak. The venture was not successful, but demonstrated his skill at crossing cultural and racial boundaries through linguistic means, a type of textual experimentalism not without a foundation in lived experience. Linguistic play can also be seen, for instance, in the title of his 2004 memoir, Shirley, Goodness & Mercy*: A Childhood Memoir*, a Joycean title, based on the punning of proper names.

References and further reading

Mzamane, M.V. (1988) ‘New Poets of the Soweto Era: Van Wyk, Johennesse, and Madingoane’, *Research in African Literatures* 19 (1): 3-11.

Selected list of works

*It is Time to Go Home* (1979)

*The Year of the Tapeworm* (1996)

*Shirley, Goodness & Mercy: A Childhood Memoir* (2004)