**Hope, Christopher (David) Tully (1944 – )**

Molly Hall, University of Rhode Island

**Hope Portrait, held by Macmillan.**

(url: http://literature.britishcouncil.org/christopher-hope)

Born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1944, the late modernist author Christopher Tully Hope is still alive today in 2015, and still publishing, though has spent much of his later life in England. Primarily a novelist, Hope has dabbled in nearly every genre, also writing poetry, drama, short stories, travel writing, biography, memoir, essays, and even children’s books. In the political comedic tradition of such South African forebears as Herman Charles Bosman and Tom Sharpe, his prose bordered on magical realism, evoking the fantastical tradition of Lewis Carroll, but also the hyperrealist satire of Johnathan Swift. Like his nationality, Hope’s literary influences are often hard to pin down. Hope is the most significant figure in the emergent group of white South African writers who employ dark surrealist satire over liberal realist aesthetics, a move they feel is necessitated by the particular cruelties of that state and its history. He is best known for two of his early novels, *A Separate Development* (1980), which depicts the tensions over interracial reproduction and the anxiety over passing as white or black, and *Kruger’s Alp* (1984), which narrates the white anxiety over what is perceived as the inevitable rebellion of the black population and destruction of whites at their hands. All of his South African tales attempt, through a strategy of comedic unreality, to do what seems impossible and unify the black and white South African experience. In the late 1980s, his work, such as in *The Hottentot Room* (1986), begins to take a more international perspective, but approaches the same themes examining discrimination, homeland, and fellowship through stories tinged by exile.

Although it is known that he served in the South African navy briefly beginning in 1962, Hope’s early life in his homeland is little discussed, as he expatriated himself at the age of 31 and never resided in South Africa again. In 1972 he began his tenure as a high school English teacher, journalist, and editor of *Bolt* in Durban, Natal, South Africa before moving to Europe and eventually London in 1975. He felt that at this distance from South Africa he was better able to laugh critically at the injustice of the horrors which loomed too large to address on the ground at home. His national identity was split for him between British and South African. Hope spent much of the 1970s and 1980s as a radio and periodical journalist, and arts and politics commentator and critic between the prolific writing and publishing of his own fiction. He held a position as writer-in-residence in Elgin, Morayshire in 1978, and received multiple Bachelors’ and a Master’s degree in South Africa, but otherwise eschewed formal academia.

In England he publishes his first novel, *A Separate Development*, about the racial tensions in his homeland, and which was banned there. He often used comedy to underscore the absurd banality of evil from his fiction to his realist accounts of his childhood in South Africa, as in *White Boy Running: A Book about South Africa* (1988). Never one to heed generic boundaries, his *Moscow! Moscow!* (1990) is a sort of politically infused travelogue of his visit to Russia. He moved to rural France in the late 1990s, his tenure there becoming the subject of his semi-autobiographical book of observations, *Signs of the Heart* (1999).

Although his poetry, stories, novels, and non-fiction are all political in their challenges to racism and discrimination more generally, he does not consider it his authorial task to change the world, but rather record it. He ironically recorded the lethal normalcy of South African political atrocities such as Apartheid as a way to ask his readers to take heed of what seems too horrible to be true. His work was acknowledged in nearly every genre he wrote in, winning the Cholmondeley Award for poetry in 1978, the David Higham Prize in 1981 for his novel *A Separate Development*, the PEN Award in 1990 for *Moscow! Moscow!*, and he was inducted into the Royal Society of Literature as a Fellow, amongst other honors. He continues to write to this day, having just published another political satire of race in South Africa entitled *Jimfish* (2015), to mixed reviews.

**Selected List of Works**

Poetry

*Cape Drives* (1974)

*In the Country of the Black Pig and Other Poems* (1981)

*Englishmen* (1985)

Novels

*A Separate Development* (1980)

*Kruger's Alp* (1984)

*The Hottentot Room* (1986)

*Black Swan* (1987)

*My Chocolate Redeemer* (1989)

*Serenity House* (1992)

*The Love Songs of Nathan J. Swirsky* (1993)

*Darkest England* (1996)

*Me, the Moon, and Elvis Presley* (1997)

*Heaven Forbid* (2002)

*My Mother’s Lover’s* (2006)

*The Garden of Bad Dreams* (2008)

*Jimfish* (2015)

Short Story Collections

*Private Parts and Other Tales* (1981)

*Learning to Fly* (1990)

Uncollected Short Stories

"Carnation Butterfly" (1985)

"Strydom's Leper" (1990)

Drama

*Ducktails* (1976)

*Bye-Bye Booysens* (1979)

*An Entirely New Concept in Packaging* (1983)

*Box on the Ear* (1987)

*Better Halves* (1988)

Children’s Books

*The King, the Cat, and the Fiddle* (1983, with Yehudi Menuhin)

*The Dragon Wore Pink* (1985)

Autobiographical Writings

*White Boy Running: A Book about South Africa* (1988)

*Signs of the Heart: Love and Death in Languedoc* (1999)

Other Non-Fiction

*Moscow! Moscow!* (1990)

*Brothers Under the Skin: Travels in Tyranny* (2003)

**Further Reading**

Cornwell, Gareth, Dirk Klopper, and Craig Mackenzie (2012) *The Columbia Guide to South*

*African Literature in English Since 1945*, New York: Columbia UP.

Head, Dominic (2006) *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, Cambridge: Cambridge

UP.

Wachinger, Tobias (2001) “Happy Occidentalism: Christopher Hope’s *Darkest England* and the

Concept of a Mission in Reverse,” *Colonies, Missions, Cultures in the English Speaking*

*World: General and Comparative Studies*, Ed. Gerhard Stilz, Tubingen: Stauffenburg,

361-372.