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| Clouts, Sydney (David) (1926–1982) |
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| Sydney Clouts was perhaps the most modernist South African poet of his generation. Though his published oeuvre remained small, including a single published volume, *One Life* (1966), he was highly regarded in poetic circles; he won both the Ingrid Jonker and Olive Schreiner prizes for poetry in 1968. He lived largely in Cape Town, whose natural environs fundamentally inspired him; a permanent move to England in 1961 radically diminished his capacity to produce and complete new poems. Though his more accessible poems, such as ‘Dawn Hippo’ and ‘Hotknife’ – adopting a Cape Coloured patois – are regularly anthologised, his work became increasingly lapidary, almost aphoristic, and elusive of meaning. Because most often he wrote sensually of the particulate natural world – birds, sea, rocks, pools, trees being common emblematic elements – he was accused of being both apolitical and too Romantic. He was more deeply informed, however, by modernists such as Wallace Stevens and Eugenio Montale; he said he ‘wanted to write like Mondrian’. His finest poems, such as ‘Residuum’ and ‘Dew on a Shrub’, consist of spacious single-line statements of high metaphoric density, constructions analogous to Cubism. Throughout his career he strove to weld his essentially European sensibility to southern African landscapes and realities. |
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| Further reading:  (Sydney Clouts special issue)  (Goddard)  (Watson)  (Wylie) |