**Contributor: Craig MacKenzie**

**Entry: Gray, Stephen (1941-)**

Novelist, poet, dramatist, and critic Stephen Gray was born in Cape Town and educated at the universities of Cape Town, Cambridge, and Iowa, where he was a member of the Iowa Writers Workshop. He edited *Granta* while at Cambridge and taught in France for some years before taking up a position at the Rand Afrikaans University (now the University of Johannesburg) in 1969, where he taught for some twenty years and became Professor of English. He took early retirement in 1991 and has since then worked as a freelance writer. The author of several works of poetry, drama, and fiction, Gray is also South Africa’s foremost anthologist and literary historiographer.

Stephen Gray’s early novels are the satirical *Local Colour* (1975) and *Invisible People* (1977), and the historical *Caltrop’s Desire* (1980). His fascination with history is also reflected in *John Ross: The True Story* (1987), a fictionalized treatment of the life of Charles Maclean (‘John Ross’), a ship’s boy who survived a shipwreck off the Natal coast in 1825 and spent several years at the court of King Shaka. Later novels include *Time of Our Darkness* (1988), *Born of Man* (1989), and the semi-autobiographical *War Child* (1991). His autobiography, *Accident of Birth*, appeared in 1993.

An editor of the 1970s poetry journal *Izwe*, his own poetry is collected as *It’s about Time* (1974), *The Assassination of Shaka* (1974), with woodcuts by Cecil Skotnes, *Hottentot Venus and Other Poems* (1979), and *Love Poems: Hate Poems* (1982). Later collections are *Apollo Café* (1990) and *Season of Violence* (1992). His *Selected Poems (1960–92)* appeared in 1993 and was followed by the engaging and innovative *Gabriel’s Exhibition* (1998) and *Shelley Cinema and Other Poems* (2006).

His work in drama includes the play script based on the prison experiences of Herman Charles Bosman, *Cold Stone Jug: The Play* (1982) (co-produced with Barney Simon), and the acclaimed *Schreiner: A One-Woman Play* (1983). He has made available the work of several out-of-print dramatists, from Stephen Black to Geraldine Aron, in collections such as *Theatre One* (1978), *Theatre Two* (1981) and *Stephen Black: Three Plays* (1984).

As an anthologist he has produced many influential collections, including the very successful selection of southern African prose *Writers’ Territory* (1973; rev. ed. 1999), *On the Edge of the World* (1974), updated as *Modern South African Stories* (1980; revised edition 2002), *The Penguin Book of Southern African Stories* (1985), *The Penguin Book of Contemporary South African Short Stories* (1993), and *The Picador Book of African Stories* (2000). His own collection of short prose, *Human Interest and Other Pieces* (1993), includes “Letters to Pratt”, a piece about the would-be assassin of H. F. Verwoerd, David Pratt, which includes the text of letters sent to him by relatives and admirers. A later collection of stories is *My Serial Killer and Other Stories* (2005). His anthologies of South African poetry, which have been influential in shaping the canon, include *A World of Their Own: Southern African Poets of the Seventies* (1976), *Modern South African Poetry* (1984), and *The Penguin Book of Southern African Verse* (1989).

His doctorate was published as *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (1979), a highly influential series of historiographical essays on the formation of South African English literature. His more recent work includes a set of essays on important South African writers, *Free-lancers and Literary Biography in South Africa* (1999), and new editions of the works of Herman Charles Bosman and C. Louis Leipoldt. He is also the author of the biographies *Beatrice Hastings: A Literary Life* (2004) and *Life Sentence: A Biography of Herman Charles Bosman* (2005).

**References and further reading**

Bethlehem, L.S. (1997) ‘Under the Proteatree, at Daggaboersnek: Stephen Gray, Literary Historiography and the Limit Trope of the Local’, *English in Africa* 24(2).

Judith Lütge Coullie, J.L. (2000) ‘Speaking about Writing about Living a Life: Interview with Stephen Gray on his Autobiography, *Accident of Birth*’, *Alternation* 7(1).

Dunton, C. (2001) ‘Stephen Gray at Sixty: An Interview and Bibliography of Primary Works’, *English in Africa* 28(2).

Robert W. Gray, R.W. (1999) ‘Black Mirrors and Young Boy Friends: Colonization, Sublimation, and Sadomasochism in Stephen Gray’s *Time of our Darkness*’, *Ariel* 30(2).

**List of works**

Poetry

*It’s AboutTime* (1974)

*The Assassination of Shaka* (1974)

*Hottentot Venus and Other Poems* (1979)

*Love Poems: Hate Poems* (1982)

*Apollo Café* (1990)

*Season of Violence* (1992)

*Selected Poems: 1960–92*(1993)

*Gabriel’s Exhibition* (1998)

*Shelley Cinema and Other Poems* (2006)

Novels

*Local Colour* (1975)

*Invisible People* (1977),

*Caltrop’s Desire* (1980)

*John Ross: The True Story* (1987)

*Time of Our Darkness* (1988)

*Born of Man* (1989)

*War Child* (1991)

Critical writings and biographies

*Southern African Literature: An Introduction (1979)* (This is a highly influential series of historiographical essays on the formation of South African English literature.)

*Free-lancers and Literary Biography in South Africa (1999)* (A set of essays on important South African writers.)

*Beatrice Hastings: A Literary Life (2004)*

*Life Sentence: A Biography of Herman Charles Bosman (2005)*