**COLIN MACINNES (1914-1976)**

Colin MacInnes was an English novelist, essayist, and radio broadcaster best known for his commentary on popular culture and his series of three novels set in 1950s London: *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959), and *Mr Love and Justice* (1960). MacInnes was born in London, but not long after World War I, his family travelled to Australia, where he spent his childhood and adolescence, returning to England in 1931. As a young man, MacInnes regularly spent time abroad, including his Army service in Europe during World War II. These early migrations, both voluntary and involuntary, affected MacInnes profoundly, contributing to his persistent sense later in life that he was an outsider in terms of national, cultural, and social identity. The title of his first volume of collected essays, *England, Half English* (1961), highlights his abiding interest in what he perceived as the hybrid nature of postwar English society. His personal and journalistic preoccupation with belonging and diversity in contemporary England was also one of the main themes of his fiction from the late 1950s.

In his three London novels, which were widely popular, MacInnes depicted the vibrant urban scene characterized by rebellious youth culture and postcolonial migrants from Africa and the Caribbean. Known for a sociological, realistic approach to fiction that has often lead to comparisons with George Orwell and Charles Dickens, MacInnes captured the diverse vernaculars and latest fashions of modern postwar London. Like his postcolonial British contemporaries Sam Selvon and George Lamming, he wrote about those who resided in the geographical and political heart of England but who nevertheless remained peripheral in crucial ways. *Absolute Beginners*, for example, memorably ends with a scene of the 1958 Notting Hill race riots—a violent and disconcerting coda to a story that otherwise “accurately reflects the innocence and the optimism … of the Macmillan era” (Gould xiii). MacInnes was less successful as a novelist after the 1950s, but he continued to write prolifically, publishing a book-length photo essay (*London, City of Any Dream*, 1962), a history of the British music hall (*Sweet Saturday Night*, 1967), and *Loving Them Both: A Study of Bisexuality* (1973). He also regularly contributed book reviews and essays on literature, music, art, architecture, and other aspects of popular culture to publications including *Encounter*, *Gay News*, the *Observer*, *New Society*, and the *New Statesman*. He died of cancer in 1976.

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