Derek Walcott

Born on the island of Saint Lucia, a former British colony in the West Indies, poet and playwright Derek Walcott was trained as a painter but turned to writing as a young man. He published his first poem in the local newspaper at the age of 14. Five years later, he borrowed $200 to print his first collection, 25 Poems, which he distributed on street corners. Walcott’s major breakthrough came with the collection In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960 (1962), a book which celebrates the Caribbean and its history as well as investigates the scars of colonialism and post-colonialism. Throughout a long and distinguished career, Walcott has returned to those same themes of language, power, and place. His recent collections include Tiepolo’s Hound (2000), The Prodigal (2004), Selected Poems (edited by Edward Baugh, 2007) and White Egrets(2010). In 1992, Walcott won the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Nobel committee depicted his work as “a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment.”  
  
Since the 1950s Walcott has divided his time between Boston, New York, and Saint Lucia. His work resonates with Western canon and Island influences, sometimes even shifting between Caribbean patois and English, and often addressing his English and West Indian ancestry. According to Los Angeles Times Book Review contributor Arthur Vogelsang, “These continuing polarities shoot an electricity to each other which is questioning and beautiful and which helps form a vision altogether Caribbean and international, personal (him to you, you to him), independent, and essential for readers of contemporary literature on all the continents.” Known for his technical control, erudition, and large canvases, Walcott is, according to poet and critic Sean O’Brien “one of the handful of poets currently at work in English who are capable of making a convincing attempt to write an epic…His work is conceived on an oceanic scale and one of its fundamental concerns is to give an account of the simultaneous unity and division created by the ocean and by human dealings with it.”  
  
Many critics point to Omeros (1990), an epic poem reimagining the Trojan War as a Caribbean fishermen’s fight, as Walcott’s major achievement. The book is “an effort to touch every aspect of Caribbean experience,” according to O’Brien who also described it as an ars poetica, concerned “with art itself—its meaning and importance and the nature of an artistic vocation.” In reviewing Walcott’s Selected Poems (2007), poet Glyn Maxwell ascribes Walcott’s power as a poet not so much to his themes as to his ear: “The verse is constantly trembling with a sense of the body in time, the self slung across metre, whether metre is steps, or nights, or breath, whether lines are days, or years, or tides.”   
  
Walcott is also a renowned playwright. In 1971 he won an Obie Award for his playDream on Monkey Mountain, which The New Yorker described as “a poem in dramatic form.” Walcott’s plays generally treat aspects of the West Indian experience, often dealing with the socio-political and epistemological implications of post-colonialism and drawing upon various forms such as the fable, allegory, folk and morality play. With his twin brother, he cofounded the Trinidad Theater Workshop in 1950; in 1981, while teaching at Boston University, he founded the Boston Playwrights’ Theatre.   
  
In addition to his Nobel Prize, Walcott’s honors include a MacArthur Foundation “genius” award, a Royal Society of Literature Award, and, in 1988, the Queen’s Medal for Poetry. He is an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He is Professor of Poetry at Essex University.

Sujata Bhatt

Sujata Bhatt was born in [Ahmedabad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmedabad), and brought up in [Pune](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pune) until 1968, when she emigrated to the United States with her family. She has an [MFA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_of_Fine_Arts) from the [University of Iowa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Iowa), and for a time was writer-in-residence at the [University of Victoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Victoria), [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada). She received the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) and the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award for her first collection *Brunizem*.  She received a [Cholmondeley Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cholmondeley_Award) in 1991 and the Italian Tratti Poetry Prize in 2000. Her translations from the German include *Mickle Makes Muckle: poems, mini plays and short prose* by Michael Augustin (Dedalus Press, 2007). Bhatt was a visiting fellow at [Dickinson College](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dickinson_College), [Pennsylvania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania) and currently works as a freelance writer. She has translated Gujarati poetry into English for the *Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women Poets*. Combining Gujarati and English, Bhatt writes "Indian-English rather than Anglo-Indian poetry."Her poems have appeared in various journals in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, and Canada, and have been widely anthologised, as well as being broadcast on British, German, and Dutch radio. In 2013 she was made Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at Nottingham Trent University.

Many of Bhatt's poems have themes of love and violence. She explores issues such as racism and the interaction between Asian, European, and North American culture. Michael Schmidt observed that her "free verse is fast-moving, urgent with narratives, softly spoken. Her cadence is natural, her diction undecorated." Bhatt has been recognized as a distinctive voice in contemporary poetry. She is, the *New Statesman* declared, "one of the finest poets alive".Her poem 'A Different History' dealing with the issues of globalization and westernization, featured in the poetry anthology used for IGCSE English examinations, for examination in 2014.

Bhatt now lives in [Bremen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bremen), [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) with her husband, the German writer Michael Augustin, and daughter. She is a Visiting Professor in Creative Writing at [Nottingham Trent University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nottingham_Trent_University).

Jackie Kay

Jackie Kay was born in [Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh) in 1961 to a Scottish mother and a Nigerian father. She was [adopted](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoption) as a baby by a white Scottish couple, Helen and John Kay, and grew up in [Bishopbriggs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishopbriggs), a suburb of [Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow), in a 1950s-built Glasgow housing estate in a small Wimpey house, which her adoptive parents had bought new in 1957. They adopted Kay in 1961 having already adopted Jackie's brother, Maxwell, about two years earlier. Jackie and Maxwell also have siblings who were brought up by their biological parents. Her adoptive father worked for the Communist Party full-time and stood for Member of Parliament, and her adoptive mother was the Scottish secretary of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In August 2007, Jackie Kay was the subject of the fourth episode of [*The House I Grew Up In*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_House_I_Grew_Up_In), in which she talked about her childhood.

Initially harbouring ambitions to be an actress, she decided to concentrate on writing after [Alasdair Gray](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alasdair_Gray), a Scottish artist and writer, read her poetry and told her that writing was what she should be doing. She studied English at the [University of Stirling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Stirling) and her first book of poetry, the partially autobiographical *The Adoption Papers*, was published in 1991 and won the [Saltire Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saltire_Society) Scottish First Book Award. Her other awards include the 1994 [Somerset Maugham Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerset_Maugham_Award) for *Other Lovers*, and the [*Guardian First Book Award*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guardian_First_Book_Award) Fiction Prize for *Trumpet*, based on the life of American jazz musician [Billy Tipton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Tipton), born Dorothy Tipton, who lived as a man for the last fifty years of his life.

She writes extensively for stage (in 1988 her play *Twice Over* was the first by a Black writer to be produced by Gay Sweatshop Theatre Group), screen and for children. Her drama *The Lamplighter* is an exploration of the [Atlantic slave trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade). It was broadcast on [BBC Radio 3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC_Radio_3) in March 2007 and published in poem form in 2008.

In 2010 she published *Red Dust Road*, an account of her search for her natural parents. Her biological parents met when her father was a student at [Aberdeen University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aberdeen_University) and her mother was a nurse.

Jackie Kay was appointed [Member of the Order of the British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_the_British_Empire) (MBE) on 17 June 2006. She is currently Professor of Creative Writing at [Newcastle University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newcastle_University), and Cultural Fellow at [Glasgow Caledonian University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow_Caledonian_University). Kay lives in [Manchester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester). She took part in the [Bush Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bush_Theatre)'s 2011 project *Sixty-Six Books*, with a piece based upon a chapter of the [King James Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_James_Bible).

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer born on November 18, 1939 in Ottawa, Canada. The internationally-known author has written award-winning poetry, short-stories and novels, including The Circle Game (1966), The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), Snowbird (1981), The Blind Assassin (2000), The Tent (2006) and more. Her works have been translated into 30 different languages.

Novelist, short-story writer, poet, and critic. Born on in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Margaret Atwood is one of today's leading fiction writers. She studied at the University of Toronto and Radcliffe College, becoming a lecturer in English literature. Her first published work was a collection of poems entitled The Circle Game (1966), which won the Governor-General's Award.

Since then Margaret Atwood has published many volumes of poetry and short stories, but is best known as a novelist. Her controversial The Edible Woman(1969) is one of several novels focusing on women's issues. Her futuristic novel, The Handmaid's Tale (1985) — which was later turned into a film by Harold Pinter—was short-listed for the Booker Prize, as was Cat's Eye in 1989. She finally won the award for The Blind Assassin (2000). Other critically acclaimed works by Margaret Atwood include The Robber Bride(1994), Alias Grace (1996), and Oryx and Crake (2003). Her Survival (1972) is widely considered to be the best book on Canadian literature.

In 2006, Margaret Atwood had several new publications: The Tent, a volume of tales and poems; Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda, a children's book; andMoral Disorder, a collection of short stories. She continues to be a popular author worldwide; her works have been translated into more than 30 different languages.

John Agard

**John Agard** (born 21 June 1949 in [British Guiana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Guiana)) is an [Afro-Guyanese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afro-Guyanese) playwright, poet and children's writer, now living in [Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom). In 2012, he was selected for the [Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen%27s_Gold_Medal_for_Poetry).

Agard grew up in [Georgetown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgetown,_Guyana), British Guiana (now Guyana). He loved to listen to cricket commentary on the radio and began making up his own, which led to a love of language. He went on to study English, French and Latin at A-level, writing his first poetry when he was in sixth-form.

Leaving school in 1967, he taught the languages he had studied and worked in a local library. He was also a sub-editor and feature writer for the [*Guyana Sunday Chronicle*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guyana_Chronicle), publishing two books while still in Guyana.

His father settled in [London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London) and Agard moved to Britain with his partner [Grace Nichols](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Nichols) in 1977, settling in [Ironbridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ironbridge), [Shropshire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shropshire). He worked for the [Commonwealth Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_Institute) and the [BBC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC) in London.

His awards include the 1997 [Paul Hamlyn Award for Poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Hamlyn#Paul_Hamlyn_Foundation), the [Cholmondeley Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cholmondeley_Award) in 2004 and the [Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen%27s_Gold_Medal_for_Poetry) in 2012.

Agard was Poet-in-Residence at the [National Maritime Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Maritime_Museum) in 2008. His poem [*Half Caste*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Half_Caste_(poem)) has been featured in the AQA English [GCSE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GCSE) anthology since 2002, meaning that many students (aged 14 – 16) have studied his work for their GCSE English qualification.

Agard now lives in [Rye, East Sussex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rye,_East_Sussex).

Olive Senior

**Olive Marjorie Senior** (born 23 December 1941) is a Jamaican [poet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poet), [novelist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novelist), [short story](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_story) and [non-fiction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-fiction) writer currently living in [Toronto, Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toronto,_Canada).

Born in rural Jamaica in in [Trelawny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trelawny,_Jamaica), [Cockpit Country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockpit_Country), the seventh of ten children, she attended to [Montego Bay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montego_Bay) High School For Girls. At the age of 19 she joined the staff of the [*Jamaica Gleaner*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gleaner_Company) in [Kingston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston,_Jamaica) and later with the Jamaica Information Service. Senior later won a scholarship from the Thomson Foundation to study journalism in [Cardiff, Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiff,_Wales). As a Commonwealth scholar she attended [Carleton University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carleton_University) School of Journalism in [Ottawa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottawa), Canada, where she earned a degree in 1967.

While at university she began writing fiction and poetry. On her return to Jamaica, she worked as a freelancer in public relations, publishing and speech writing before joining the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the [University of the West Indies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_the_West_Indies), where she edited the journal *Social and Economic Studies* (1972–77). In 1982 she joined the [Institute of Jamaica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_of_Jamaica) as editor of the [*Jamaica Journal*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamaica_Journal). As the managing director of Institute of Jamaica Publications, Senior oversaw the publication of a number of books on Jamaican history and culture.

After [Hurricane Gilbert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Gilbert) hit Jamaica in 1988, Senior moved to [Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), where she lived for short periods in [Portugal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal), the [Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands), and the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom), before settling in [Toronto, Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toronto,_Canada) in the early 1990s. Senior returns to Jamaica and wider Caribbean frequently while keeping the region remains a central theme to her work. Senior writes, lectures and provides workshops around the word.

Senior has published three collections of poems: *Talking of Trees* (1985), *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), and *Over the Roofs of the World* (2005). Her short story collection *Summer Lightning* (1986) won the [Commonwealth Writers Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_Writers_Prize); it was followed by *Arrival of the Snake Woman* (1989, 2009) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995). Her first novel, *Dancing Lessons* (Cormorant Books), was shortlisted for the 2012 [Commonwealth Book Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_Book_Prize) in the Canada region.

Her non-fiction works include *The Message Is Change* (1972), about [Michael Manley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Manley)'s first election victory; *A-Z of Jamaican Heritage* (1984, expanded and republished as *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* in 2004); and *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* (1991).

Senior's upcoming non-fiction book, *Dying To Better Themselves: West Indians and the Building of the Panama Canal*, is scheduled for a September 2014 release - 100 years after the opening of the [Panama Canal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panama_Canal), 15 August 1914.

An extended critical evaluation of Senior's work can be found in *Olive Senior* by Denise deCaires Narain (2011) by Northcote House Publishers (UK) in collaboration with the [British Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Council) as part of the Writers and Their Work series.

Senior's work often addresses questions of [Caribbean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean) identity in terms of gender and ethnicity. She has said: "I've had to deal with race because of who I am and how I look. In that process, I've had to determine who I am. I do not think you can be all things to all people. As part of that process, I decided I was a Jamaican. I represent many different races and I'm not rejecting any of them to please anybody. I'm just who I am and you have to accept me or not."

In 2005, Senior was awarded a [Musgrave Gold Medal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musgrave_Medal) by the Institute of Jamaica for her contributions to literature.