

THE WORLDS WITHIN US

Caribbean and Latin American expatriates are helping to reshape Canada's literary landscape.

When writer Neil Bissoondath was first published in 1985, he felt there were expectations that he would write only about the Caribbean.

Bissoondath, who had emigrated to Canada from the island of Trinidad as a young student in 1973, says he “struggled against the label of a ‘Trinidadian writer’ because it was reductive from the very beginning.” Instead, he set the stories in his first book, *Digging Up the Mountains*, in Toronto, Spain and Japan as well as in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Like many writers from the region who have made Canada home, Bissoondath straddles the old and new worlds in his work, creating new ways for Canadians to see themselves. “Canada is such a welcoming place to different voices that you feel free to explore whatever your imagination gives you,” he says.

Since the 1960s, immigrant writers from the Caribbean and Latin America have left their mark on the Canadian cultural landscape. Austin Clarke, who left Barbados in 1955 to study in Canada, has won many literary accolades for his nine novels and five

Nalo Hopkinson's *Mojo: Conjure Stories*; Neil Bissoondath's *Doing the Heart Good*; Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*; Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe*; Neil Bissoondath's *The Unyielding Clamour of the Night*; and Nalo Hopkinson's *Skinfolk*.

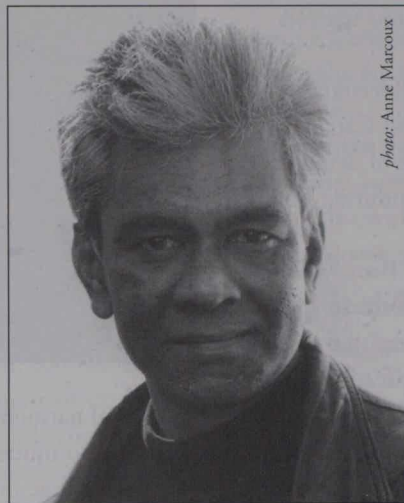


photo: Anne Marcoux

Different voices: Author Neil Bissoondath says that in Canada “you feel free to explore whatever your imagination gives you.”

short-story collections—including the 2002 Giller Prize for *The Polished Hoe*. Born in Trinidad, Dionne Brand has lived in Canada since 1970, and has become renowned as a poet, and, most recently, a novelist. Alberto Manguel, an internationally acclaimed anthologist, translator, essayist, novelist and editor originally from Argentina, became a Canadian citizen in 1982. And a decade after Dany Laferrière arrived in Montreal from his native Haiti in 1976, he published his widely praised first novel, *How to Make Love to a Negro*.

Writers from the region defy easy categorization. Some explore the experience of life as “new Canadians.” Others draw on their place of origin for inspiration. Still others tackle quintessentially Canadian themes. Bissoondath's novel *Doing the Heart Good*, for example, is the story of a 70-year-old anglophone Montrealer who is obliged to live with his daughter and her bilingual family.

Bissoondath's other works include *The Worlds Within Her* and, most recently, *The Unyielding Clamour of the Night*.

Nalo Hopkinson, who was born to Jamaican and Guyanese parents and lived in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana before settling in Toronto in 1977, is best known for her science fiction and fantasy writing set in the Caribbean. However, she has also written erotica, a performance piece and a play, and is currently working on text for a comic book. In addition, she maintains close ties with dub poets, who write a “socially engaged” form of poetry set to music that evolved out of Jamaica.

“People sometimes assume I have one theme or palette, but I don't,” Hopkinson says. “Like any other artist, I go with what grabs me and follow that obsession until it's done. To all of it I bring an awareness of

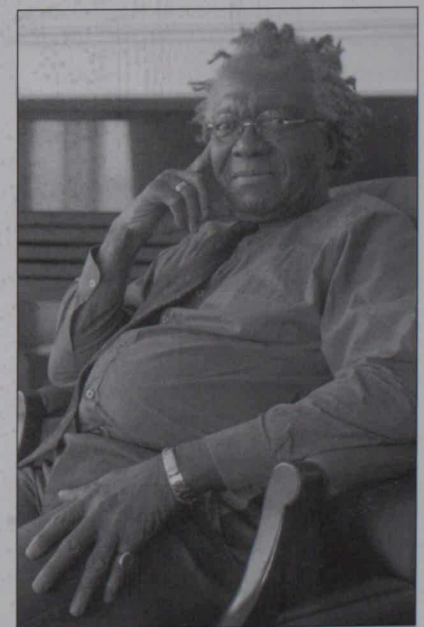


photo: Thomas King

Author Austin Clarke left Barbados in 1955 to study in Canada.