

**Sterling Plumpp, ed. *Somehow We Survive: An Anthology of South African Writing.* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1982) 160 pp., \$6.95.**

*Somehow We Survive* takes its title from an included poem by Dennis Brutus and is a collection of poems written in English by non-white South Africans. It is not a new book, having been published in 1982, but it still is worth the attention of Western readers, particularly of those who have not already become students of South Africa's shameful history of apartheid and the growing resistance of black and colored persons, both in direct action and literary activity. As the book is now available in paperback, at a modest price, it is worth having, in spite of its limitations.

The poems are largely what the critic Alice Walker calls working poems and what the poet Keorapetse Kgositsile (who is represented by eight poems and a preface) views as part of a revolutionary movement. The fervor apparent in Kgositsile's preface is both understandable and justifiable, though perhaps a bit misleading in one respect. He points out, with some pride, that the South Africans write many more poems in their native tongues than they do in English and asserts that many white persons are contemptuous of any poetry unless it is in English. Whether his judgment is excessive or not, the fact that the poems in this book—his included—are written for an English-reading, largely Western, audience suggests a strong desire for understanding of, and sympathy and support for, South Africans in their struggle against tyranny and oppression. He also expresses a desire that this collection, which is by no means an exhaustive one, should be followed by many others.

*Somehow We Survive* does not present a great variety of themes and attitudes, as its editor Sterling Plumpp would like to have us believe, and a number of the included writers, like Dennis Brutus, Arthur Nortje, Mongane Serote, Bessie Head and Amelia House, are by now rather well known. Still, the collection is one worth having. One of its definite assets is that it contains a long piece by Amelia House, which originally appeared in *Staffrider* and was a major reason for the banning of the issue which contained it. "Awakening," together with the two letters in an Appendix (one from the Publications Directorate "explaining" the reasons for banning and one from the publishers of *Staffrider* in reply) are very interesting and will reveal a great deal to the careful reader of just how control and repression are exercised in South Africa and how they are dealt with by the oppressed and the controlled. These three items are evidence in a way more eloquent than some of the generalized interpretations and declarations which are the forte of protest poetry. The thoughtful reader will draw a lot of credible passion from reading them—and, additionally, be made more able to understand and appreciate the other poems in the anthology.

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