

1990

## The Year That Was

Mark MacLeod

Diana Brydon

G N. Devi

Alamgir Hashmi

Rajiva Wijesinha

*See next page for additional authors*

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## The Year That Was

### Abstract

AUSTRALIA 1989, CANADA 1988, INDIA 1988, INDIA 1989, PAKISTAN 1988, PAKISTAN 1989, SRI LANKA 1989, SOUTH AFRICA 1987,

### Authors

Mark MacLeod, Diana Brydon, G N. Devi, Alamgir Hashmi, Rajiva Wijesinha, and Cherry Clayton

# The Year That Was

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## AUSTRALIA 1989

More than twenty five percent of Australian titles published are for children, and yet children's books - that's *all* children's books: not just Australian - are given at most one or two percent of the total review space in the press.

This appalling gap helps to explain why the adult literary mafia (as they're lovingly known) are so ignorant of writers as successful as Robin Klein or Paul Jennings. Mention Robin Klein to any Australian under twenty: instant recognition. She's a real star. Ask most of the people dropping names and canapes at awards ceremonies, writers' festivals and the like who Robin Klein is and they've never heard of her.

*Came Back to Show You I Could Fly* (Viking) is a great opportunity for them to change that, and it's the winner of the Children's Book Council's Book of the Year Award for Older Readers. An eleven-year-old boy is totally fascinated by an eighteen-year-old girl who is outrageous and kind and, although he doesn't see it at first, addicted and pregnant. Some adults seem to fear that it's a book about drug addiction for twelve-year-olds, but it's not really about drugs at all: it's a beautiful and moving story about friendship and a child's innocent belief in the worth of a human being whom everyone else has rejected.

Patricia Wrightson's *Balyet* (Hutchinson) is a more difficult novel for older readers, but equally moving. *Balyet* is the ancient spirit of an Aboriginal girl cursed by her people to drift forever in the mountains as no more than an echo, restless for silence and death. And it's her tortured presence that fourteen-year-old Jo encounters on a camping trip. Friendship is a possibility but so too is death.

Four other outstanding novels for older readers made it a difficult year for the Children's Book Council judges. Brian Caswell's *Merryl of the Stones* (UQP), Libby Hathorn's *Thunderwith* (Heinemann), *Skymaze* (Penguin), Gillian Rubinstein's sequel to *Space Demons*, and Victor Kelleher's *The Red King* (Viking) all deal with spiritual experiences in other dimensions.

For younger readers, Margaret Wild and Julie Vivas collaborated in a wonderful picture book, *The Very Best of Friends* (Margaret Hamilton Books). The idyllic farm life of a middle-aged woman called Jessie is shattered when her partner, James, dies. Jessie kicks James's cat William out of the house, and the cat becomes a disturbing image of rejection. It's only when Jessie realises that the cat is all she has left of James that she invites it back in.

Interesting that the need for friendship is such an insistent theme in children's books at the moment. Perhaps it's a reaction against the solipsism which is the logical extension of the nuclear family and video games, among other factors.

Fiction for adults is dominated by Elizabeth Jolley's *My Father's Moon* (Viking). A novel which has been criticised for its flatness and its lack of Jolley's energetic sense of humour the painful recollections here of wartime England indicate that the novel was difficult to write. I like its honesty and seriousness, and for a novelist as full of postmodernist (read: 'evasive') tricks as Jolley is, this is about as close to autobiography as it gets.

Marion Halligan's *The Hanged Man in the Garden* (Penguin) is an impressive collection of linked stories. Whenever critics need to contextualise emotional repression in women, they seem to reach for poor old Jane Austen and she turns up in all sorts of places from Bombay to Manhattan. Here she is in Canberra, the diplomatic city: appropriate setting for Halligan's particular brand of middle-class restraint. Very different from the passionate marginalised sexuality of Mary Fallon's *Working Hot* (Sybylla Press) and Susan Hampton's *Surly Girls* (Collins Imprint).

In its authorial omniscience, Angelika Fremd's *Heartland* (UQP) is old-fashioned enough to make Eurocentric theorists once again despair of Australian literature, but this simplicity very quickly becomes irrelevant. Fremd's portrait of German migrants adjusting to life in Australia and of a young woman adjusting to her sexuality has an urgency that convinces me it simply had to be written. The kind of urgency that makes it difficult to be patient with much more technically assured fiction that eventually seems to be about nothing. Robert Drewe's collection *The Bay of Contented Men* (Pan), Brian Matthew's *Quickening* (Penguin), and Laurie Clancy's *City to City* (UQP) are all impressive: well written, assured, and varied but nowhere near as compelling as *Heartland*. The ideas in these collections are often interesting, but the emotions rarely so.

Kerryn Goldsworthy's *North of the Moonlight Sonata* (McPhee Gribble) and Sue Woolfe's *Painted Woman* (Hudson), on the other hand, manage to balance both.

The year's best anthology is Helen Daniel's *Expressway* (Penguin). Daniel starts with Jeffrey Smart's 1962 painting 'Cahill Expressway', and has 29 writers respond to it. What sounds like just another exercise from a professional writing class turns out to be a complex demonstration of the act of reading. Daniel says she wanted a painting 'already well-known, in some way already participating in cultural dialogue', and the stories by writers including Elizabeth Jolley, Glenda Adams, David Malouf, and David Ireland, together with Daniel's own signpostings, result in all sorts of new spaces and constructions.

The one outstanding collection of poems this year, Robert Adamson's *The Clean Dark* (Paperbark Press), has taken just about every prize there is. As surely as Murray creates the north coast farming country in his poetry, Adamson again here makes the Hawkesbury River north of Sydney his own. But there's a remarkable advance on his use of the river in, say, an earlier collection like *Where I Come From*. The charming naivety is replaced by depth and balance in lines which are often arrestingly beautiful. This collection places Adamson among the two or three best romantic poets Australia has.

Though very different in his use of childhood and nature, Peter Skrzynecki also produces his best collection so far in *Night Swim* (Hale & Iremonger). And Ania Walwicz's prose poems are finally collected in *Boat* (A & R). Sneja Gunew has made impressive claims for Walwicz's work, celebrating her (rather belated, I would have thought) homage to Dada and Stein. Certainly no one else in Australia is quite like her, and she creates the broken rhythms of thought and speech with intensity. But eventually, the absence of punctuation in almost every piece sends me running from the book, desperate for a full stop. For me, Walwicz works much better in performance than on the page. Good, though, in small grabs - from this large book.

I almost feel that Barbara Hanrahan is a prose poet in *Flawless Jade* (UQP); she has some of the hypnotic rhythms of Walwicz's writing, but she leaves me here wanting more at the end. It's a novel, and Hanrahan's best for some time, but what stays with me is the imagery. The actual 'story' of this young Chinese woman Wing-ye is secondary to the images of otherness and of women's repression which resonate long after the prose narrative is gone. The imagery is her story. Hanrahan always

has a wonderful eye and ear, nowhere sharper than in the rich new subject matter here.

And, finally, several books that will be useful to the study of Australian literature. Top of the list, *Patrick White Speaks* (Primavera Press). Handsomely produced with a great range of photographs that tell their own story, this collection of White's reluctant speeches and public statements is inspiring in its commitment, depressing in its repeated disappointment, and always engrossing in its changes and contradictions as this very private writer grapples with public responsibility.

Ignore the appallingly cheap photographs in Candida Baker's *Yacker 3* (Picador) - you'll have to: sometimes you'll barely be able to tell who it is! - and go straight to the interviews with Robert Drewe, Randolph Stow, Glenda Adams, Kate Grenville, Frank Moorhouse and others. Baker proves once again her ability to get the best out of even the most difficult interviewers.

*Poetry and Gender: Statements and Essays in Australian Women's Poetry and Poetics* (UQP), David Brooks and Brenda Walker (eds.). The poets' own statements are more interesting than some of the essays on their work, but the interplay is stimulating.

*The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970-88* (Penguin) by Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman sometimes tries to do everything and ends up with much less, but it's a useful start for students interested in some of the signposts in recent Australian fiction.

So few critical studies deal with poetry that Susan McKernan's *A Question of Commitment: Australian Literature in the Twenty Years After the War* (Allen & Unwin) becomes more appealing for its commentary on the poets and modernism than on the fiction.

*Christina Stead: a Life of Letters* (McPhee Gribble) by Chris Williams has good source material put together in a sometimes ordinary way, useful nevertheless on a writer who resisted personal celebration as Stead did.

A reprint, finally, of J.J. Healy's *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia* (UQP; first pub. 1978), its still misleading title made an even more clearly historical document by the tremendous growth of Aboriginal writing in recent years. And alongside it, Adam Shoemaker's *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988* (UQP). Both good books on their respective subjects; neither of them by an Aboriginal writer, however...

MARK MACLEOD

## CANADA 1988

Several of Canada's best known writers published novels exploring the theme of betrayal this year. Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (McClelland & Stewart) brings a retrospective, wry attention to childhood and women's friendships as seen through the eyes of a fifty-year old painter named Elaine Risley. The first half resonates with a lonely child's anguish and need to be accepted; the second half falls apart after she survives her crisis and grows up. This is an accessible book that will be pleasing to Atwood devotees and ordinary readers alike, but despite some wonderful moments it seems unresolved and stylistically dissatisfying. In particular, one is made too aware of the limitations of this first person narrator who lacks the ironic placing that makes *Surfacing* work so well. Much more disappointing, however, are new novels by Robertson Davies and Morley Callaghan, which merely rework old material in a

familiar vein. Davies' *The Lyre of Orpheus* (Macmillan in Canada; Viking in Europe) completes his Cornish trilogy with more mixing of the modern and the mythological. This time the focus is on King Arthur and the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere. Callaghan's *A Wild Old Man on the Road* (Stoddard) returns to Paris, the Judas theme and the rivalry between male mentor and protegee over the artist's role and a beautiful woman. Hugh Hood's *Tony's Book* (Stoddard) takes his New Age series into the 1960s and '70s through the intertwining stories of four central characters.

David Adams Richards' *Nights Below Station Street* (McClelland & Stewart) deservedly won this year's Governor General's Award. In a moving celebration of the daily lives of Canada's dispossessed workers in the Maritimes, those unemployed, marginally or seasonally employed, injured on the job, or alcoholic, this novel stretches the limits of realistic dialogue and of a fragmented and open-ended narrative structure. From the other end of the country and illustrated with photos, reproductions, charts and drawings, comes Ann Rosenberg's hybrid text, *Movement in Slow Time* (Coach House) - a comic tour de force that loses punch as it proceeds. She parodically relocates Dante's *Divine Comedy* in 1986 Vancouver, with the levels of hell created by Social Credit cuts to social welfare programs, expenditures on wolf hunts, the real estate boom connected to Expo 86, unemployment insurance lines and therapy classes for the victims of wife abuse. The narrator's male muse, who had once led her to an erotic heaven, now frustrates her desire through his immersion in a homosexual liaison. Satire yields to self-pity; delight to a yawn. Daphne Marlatt's long awaited *Ana Historic* (Coach House) playfully enters 'the cultural labyrinth of our inheritance' in a language-centred fiction that tells feminist history and story, always 'reading us into the page ahead'.

Tim Wynne-Jones' *Fastygange* (Lester & Orpen Dennys) is a psychological thriller that plays with the conventions of story-telling and horror. Tom Henighan's *The Well of Time* (Collins) creates a Canadian Viking saga around Ingrid of Wayland, a heroine who must journey through many dangers to save her community. Bryan Moon's *The Western Kingdom* (Oberon) plays such heroic myth-making against the ordinary small-town lives of children seeking their adult identities in a low-key, inconclusive but interesting story.

Several unusually sophisticated first novels attracted attention this year. Rick Salutin's *A Man of Little Faith* (McClelland & Stewart) learns the truth of Marx's dictum that 'we make our own history, but not in circumstances of our choosing' (264). After a lifetime of avoidance in which he survived the Holocaust and came to Canada, Salutin's Jewish Oskar (following in the footsteps of Günter Grass and Peter Carey?) takes a stand against resurgent fascism in Alberta and finds himself freed. Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Constellations* (Vintage) probes themes of isolation and community and the fine line between interference and involvement through the story of a Parisian stranger's arrival in a small Acadian community. In *Atmospheres Apollinaire* (Porcupine's Quill), Mark Frutkin dramatizes the Parisian origins of cubism and surrealism to consider the exotic conjunctions of European modernism and its 'discovery' of African primitivism. Neil Bissondath's *A Casual Brutality* (Macmillan) relocates Naipaulian angst in an immigrant fleeing Casaquemada (a thinly disguised Trinidad) for Toronto. The book is accomplished but echoes Naipaul so cleverly and so closely that one feels one is reading a parody. The stylistic quirks working variations on colonial nothingness come across so strongly they drown out any pretense at character development or the evocation of a specific time or place. This is allegory for the converted.

Jane Barker Wright's *The Tasmanian Tiger* takes a Canadian couple to Tasmania to explore women's friendships, the violence beneath ordinary surfaces and (echoing the

Azaria affair) what happens after 'the two great institutions of motherhood and justice had charged and butted heads and bloodied themselves for our nightly amusement' (150). Bill Scherbrucker's *Mimosa* (Talon) should be more interesting than it is. It's an attempt through photographs, informal interviews and memories to retrieve his mother's life as part of the white expatriate community in Africa, but it seems too cluttered with facts and details to come alive more than fitfully with the poetic force it might have had. Although billed as a 'post-feminist *Beautiful Losers*,' Ann Diamond's *Mona's Dance* strikes me as pretentious and derivative meta-fiction. Richard Taylor's *Cartoon Woods* (Oberon) reads like an unintentional parody of Atwood's *Surfacing*. Nazneen Sadiq's *Ice Bangles* (Lorimer) is a naive account of a middle-class Pakistani woman's life as an immigrant in North America.

*Stones* (Viking/Penguin), Timothy Findley's new collection of short stories, centres around our terrible need, at all costs, to love and be loved. The Bragg and Minna stories chart familiar Findley territory, the self-destructive tendencies of the upper middle class finding expression in sexual ambivalence and a fascination with slumming. A bit precious, Salinger-style, but very well done. The mysterious metamorphoses in 'Foxes' and 'Dreams' are compelling and horrifying. But 'Stones' itself, about war's psychological victims and a son's need for his needy father, remains the most moving story. William Goede's *Love in Beijing and Other Stories* (Cormorant) documents the lives of foreign experts in China. Bonnie Burnard's *Women of Influence* (Coteau), Ally McKay's *Human Bones* (Oberon) and Pat Krause's *Best Kept Secrets* (Coteau) explore a range of perspectives on Canadian women's lives. *Women of Influence* won the Canada/Caribbean best first book regional award of the 1988 Commonwealth Writers Prize for its technical mastery of several points of view, its stylistic command and the compelling interest of its handling of theme. In two other fine collections, Roma Gelblum-Bross, in *To Samarkand and Back* (Cormorant) treats the trauma of a European childhood fleeing the Nazis and Farida Karodia, in *Coming Home and Other Stories* (Heinemann), dramatizes the various traumas induced by life in South Africa. Candace Jane Dorsey's *Machine Sex and Other Stories* (Tesseract) transposes political and feminist themes into a science fiction format. Gladys Hindmarch's *The Watery Part of the World* (Douglas & McIntyre) narrates what it feels like for a woman to ship out on a BC coastal freighter, putting the focus less on event than on experience - what is seen, heard and desired.

Richard Outram achieves an astonishing range of linguistic register and literary allusion in his delightful collection of poetry, *Hiram and Jenny* (Porcupine's Quill). This is a beautiful, idiosyncratic and impressive book. Lorna Crozier's *Angels of Flesh, Angels of Silence* (McClelland & Stewart) includes satiric, comic and political poetry of an unassuming but compelling intensity. One finds a highly intellectualized lyricism in Christopher Dewdney's *Radiant Inventory* (M & S), a collection that plays variations on 'The love which springs/glistening from our work'. Anne Szumigalski and Terrence Heath write together in a dialogue of 'self and other, other and self' in *Journey/Journee* (Red Deer College Press), poems that speak of 'journeys and sojourns', voyaging inward and outward, the exotic and the quotidian.

Other noteworthy poetry collections include Bill Bissett's *what we have* (Talon), *Infinite Worlds: The Poetry of Louis Dudek*, ed. Robin Blaser (Vehicule), *Habitable Planets: Poems New and Selected* by Patrick White (Cormorant), J.M. Cameron's *The Music is in the Sadness* (Porcupine's Quill), Joan Finnigan's *The Watershed Collection*, ed. Robert Weaver (Quarry), Fred Wah's *Music at the Heart of Thinking* and Dennis Cooley's *Soul Searching* (both Red Deer College, Writing West series). Uma Parameswaran's *Trishanku* (TSAR) explores through several voices, lyrical and conversational, the adaptation of immigrants from India to new lives in Canada. Through standard

English and Caribbean dialect, Nigel Darbasie explores similar themes in *Last Crossing* (Nidar).

Surrealistic dreams and surprising turns of phrase give Jan Horner's *Recent Mistakes* (Turnstone) the energy and clarity of poetry that you want to return to. Ironies and intensities startle and amuse in this clever if uneven first collection. Among other first published books, the following stand out for their achievement of a distinctive literary voice: Mia Anderson, *Appetite* (Brick), David Manicom, *Sense of Season* (Procepic) and Bonnie Bishop, *Elaborate Beasts* (Red Deer College).

David French's *Salt-Water Moon* (Talon) is a warm and comic Newfoundland love story that has won several Canadian drama awards. Shortlisted drama for the Governor General's Awards included Dennis Foon's *Skin and Liars* (Playwrights Canada); Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (Fifth House), a much acclaimed play by a native writer about life on the 'rez' (the reservation); Maureen Hunter's *Footprints on the Moon* (Blizzard) and George F. Walker's *Nothing Sacred* (Coach House).

DIANA BRYDON

## INDIA 1988

The literary event that attracted maximum public attention in India in recent months was the Indian Government's official ban on importing Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Prior to that Penguin India declined to reproduce its edition in India, thanks to its literary advisor Khushwant Singh, who himself has weathered many literary storms. The other important event was the making of a TV serial from the *Mahabharata*, a perennial source of literary inspiration in India. The popularity of the serial is, ironically, a reflection on 'progress' in Indian literary tradition. It is a tradition that at once moves forward and backward. Two international literary events created some news. The Bharat Bhavan at Bhopal held an international poetry festival in January 89, which featured several important Commonwealth poets. The poems read were immediately translated into fourteen Indian languages and published by various little magazines. The other 'show' was the Festival of Russia, which turned out to be a non-event in literary terms. Whatever one says of India's political philosophy of Socialism, the literary influences imbibed in the country are still largely of Western origin. It is because of this that Feminism receives a louder applause than Orientalism.

Two remarkable books to come out last year, both by relatively less known women writers, were Jai Nimkar's novel, *A Joint Venture*, and Imtiaz Dharker's poems, *Purdah*. Nimkar, whose first novel, *Temporary Answers*, was published by Orient Longman, carries her interest in human relationships into her second novel, *A Joint Venture* (Minivet, 1988). It concentrates on the dynamics of a marriage; but it is far from being an obsessively personal enquiry. The novel reflects in a realistic mode the changing social scene of Western India. It is in a sense the first novel about the middle-class Indian women who grew up in a genuinely post-independence milieu. Dharker, whose *Purdah* was published in the OUP's Three Crown Series in 1988, has been active in the poetry circles of Bombay. But *Purdah* should put her up on the national scene as a major young poet. It is a book of poems of anxiety, sensitivity and a sad acceptance of alienation of several types. The tone of the poems reminds one of the poems by R. Parthasarathy and Jayanta Mahapatra. But these poems are strongly rooted in the experience of being a woman:



## A Woman's Place

Mouths must be watched, especially  
if you are a woman. A smile  
should be stifled with the sari-end.  
No one must see your serenity cracked,  
even with delight.

If occasionally you need to scream, do it  
alone but in front of a mirror  
where you can see the strange shape that the mouth makes  
before you wipe it off.

Poetry volumes published last year included a large number of self-promoted, poor collections. It will remain a riddle for the future historians of the English language how India produced innumerable verse-writers while English still remained a reference language without much emotional content in India. Among the few volumes that may interest the academics involved in Commonwealth literature one could mention *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* edited by V.K. Gokak (Sahitya Akademi, sixth print), *Collected Poems (1957-87)* of Dom Moraes (Penguin India, 1988), and Nissim Ezekiel's *Collected Poems* (OUP). One hopes that this is the last reprint of the *Golden Treasury*, for it needs very substantial inclusions and exclusions. Ezekiel's collection will be welcomed by the teachers and students of Indian poetry in English, particularly since Ezekiel's early poems have been unavailable for a long time. Ezekiel criticism can now gain a historical perspective.

Poetry criticism in Indian-English has been of poor quality, and a title like Madhusudan Prasad's (edited) anthology on *Living Indian-English Poets* (Sterling, 1989), though competent, does not break any fresh ground. In contrast, the poetry-criticism in Indian languages is much sharper and more sensitive. The kind of serious scholarly enquiry that one sees in a title like Sudhakar Marathe's *T.S. Eliot's Shakespeare Criticism* (B.R. Publishing, 1989) is rarely seen in criticism of Indian-English poetry. Is it that India does not have enough classics still in the genre?

The situation in the area of drama is still worse. In its history of 175 years Indian-English literature has not produced even half a dozen dramatists. The only names one can think of in a historical perspective are those of Sri Aurobindo, Nissim Ezekiel and Pratap Sharma. But the plays that have had any success in the theatre have been translations from Indian languages such as those by Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Badal Sarkar. It was gratifying, therefore, to see last year the publication of a first-rate play originally written in English by Gieve Patel. Patel, who has already made a name for himself as a poet and a painter, brought out *Mister Behram*, an immediate success on stage too, which is about Parsi life in 19th century India. *Behram* should immediately take its place, with Rohinton Mistry's fiction book, *Tales from Ferozsha Baag* (Penguin, Canada, 1988), as a classic of Parsi literature in Indian-English.

Literary production in the area of fiction has been qualitatively more satisfying. Rafiq Zakaria published his first novel, *The Price of Power*, a not too indirect comment on the political scene. So did Gopal Gandhi, whose first novel, *Saranam*, deals with the complexities of Sri Lankan rural life. Just as there is a spurt of activity among relatively unknown and new writers, there is also interest in reproducing some good but forgotten writers. In 1989 Penguin India reissued R.K. Laxman's *Sorry, No Room* (IBH, 1969) under a new title, *The Hotel Riviera* (1988), and Aubrey Menen's *The*

*Abode of Love* (Scribners, 1956) and *The Prevalence of Witches* (Chatto & Windus, 1947). R.K. Laxman has acquired international fame as a cartoonist, and is known to Commonwealth readers through his comic illustrations to his brother Narayan's novels. Like Aurobindo's brother, Monomohan, and V.S. Naipaul's, Shiva, Laxman's work has received an unfavourable comparison with that of his brother, though I think Laxman's story telling is as masterly. *The Hotel* is a hilarious tale of sexual repression and erotic wish-fulfilment in middle-class, inhibition-ridden Indian society. The quality of his humour, because it has a touch of a deep compassion, is certainly superior to that of the more cerebral Rushdie. Aubrey Menen has been somewhat unfortunate, in that in spite of being a gifted writer, whose *The Space Within the Heart* (1970) is perhaps the best literary autobiography by any Indian writer, he has rarely received the deserved critical attention. He died this year. Penguin has given him a fitting tribute in reproducing his novels.

The old writers too have been active; but Raja Rao's much expected *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (Vision Books, 1988) has been a big disappointment. It has hardly anything new that is not already there in *The Serpent and the Rope*. It is the kind of experience that we had reading A.K. Ramanujan's *Second Sight* a few years back. Critics of expatriate literature may like to reflect on the process of artistic emaciation caused by too long a stay outside one's own culture. In comparison to Raja Rao's 'Indian' fiction Prafulla Mohanti's English 'fiction' is more readable. Mohanti, whose *My Village, My Life* has become a classic of rural Indian life, came out with *Through Brown Eyes* (Penguin India, 1989). In stark contrast to Nirad Chaudhari's *A Passage to England*, Mohanti's passage is full of disillusionment, disgust and the black Anglophobia. One wishes he had avoided making simple comparisons between things British and things Indian. And more than that one wishes he had consulted the excellent collection brought out some twenty years back by B.C. Parekh, *The Black Intellectual in Britain*, in which a writer like Dilip Hiro has explored the theme of social tension with far greater maturity. The book has a long chapter on education at Leeds, which, one thinks, tells more of the writer's subjective difficulties than of any objective social problems. However, Mohanti has an extremely alluring prose style.

The books that qualitatively stand out among last year's publications are Nina Sibal's *Yatra* (Women's Press, London, 1988), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (Ravi Dayal, Delhi, 1988), Ranga Rao's *Fowl Filcher* (Penguin India, 1987) - all novels - and Manohar Shetty's *Borrowed Time* (Praxis, Bombay, 1988), a volume of poems. The three novels mentioned have great narrative sophistication. *Yatra* is the story of the Punjab spanning a period of a century and featuring over fifty characters. It is, in conception, a cross between Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Sharma's *The Days of the Turban*. Ghosh's first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, was clearly written under Rushdie's influence. The new novel, which also has the same sophistication of style, is not free of that influence. The plot of *The Shadow Lines* has a Rushdie-like combination of personal fate and national destiny, wit, fantasy and a wide span. One hopes that, with such fine writers as Sibal and Ghosh, there will be an exploration of some other forms of realism too. Ranga Rao's *Fowl Filcher* is a first novel; yet a very mature novel. It too shares with the new generation of Indian fiction an acute sense of the comic and a stinging social awareness. Its hero rises from the position of a village dog-catcher to that of a politician's aide, reflecting in his progress the social changes in free India. But one suspects that Ranag Rao has tried to follow Raja Rao's style of *Kanthapura* rather too closely.

In contrast, Shetty's poems show originality. His achievement cannot be compared to Kolatkar's or Ramanujan's as yet. But, *Borrowed Time* shows a definite improve-

ment over his first volume, *A Guarded Space*. The poet also shows that, unlike the majority of Indian poets, he is consciously disciplining his style into a polished and terse form.

### The Banyan Tree

My feet - prehensile fingers -  
Grasp the earth, the earth  
Embraces me, my dreams  
Engraved circles of memory.

My faithful trails tap  
The same ground, spread  
My word, my legacy, under  
The long arms of my laws.

My palms stir outward to bless  
All who flourish from me; and  
My crown grows, grows  
Beyond the winds' conspiracy.

In Shetty Indian-English has found a serious poet, after Aurobindo and Ezekiel, who treats poetry with a sensitivity to metre and music.

The book I very strongly recommend for the readers of this article, however, is not one published originally in English but is a translation of Urdu. It is a collection of Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories, *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* (Verso, 1987; Penguin, 1989). Manto, who assumed Pakistani nationality after independence and lived in Lahore till his premature death in 1955, has been probably the most powerful story teller of the Indian subcontinent. The translations of his stories by Khalid Hasan succeed in conveying the power of the Urdu originals. His stories related to Bombay are about the underworld peopled by pimps and prostitutes; but like Premchand of Hindi and Gorky of Russian, Manto shows a profound understanding of the conditions of squalor and poverty. The other translation which should not go unmentioned is that of Satyajit Ray's detective fiction, originally written in Bengali, brought together under the title *The Adventures of Feluda* (Penguin, 1989), Feluda being the Bengali avatar of Sherlock Holmes. Ray's style is lucid, and Chitrita Banerji's translations show understanding of the grace that the original Bengali versions have. Translation activity is becoming increasingly important in Indian academic and literary circles. One hopes that Indian-English literature will receive strength from Indian literature in English translation in the years to come.

G.N. DEVI

## INDIA 1989

Literary history in India is a daunting task. First, there is the amazing multiplicity of languages and cultures which contribute to and shape literature. Then, there is the perplexing co-existence of diverse, and often opposing, literary trends. The year that was in Indian literature saw a simultaneous success of a highly realistic screen-play

published in book form, *Salaam Bombay*, and a thumping come-back of one of the most ancient mythological narratives through the TV serial on the *Mahabharata*. The reading public received the new young writers and the old established writers with equal curiosity. While the number of works written in English increased, so too did the number of translations from Indian languages into English. In short, the year was a typical Indian year, which showed once again that all trends stay on in India forever.

Of the new enterprises three need a special mention. Dr Urvashi Butalia, a Delhi based feminist scholar, launched an ambitious publishing programme, 'Kali for Women'. Kali's mission is ideologically feministic and commercially anti-colonialist. Its interest is not confined to writings in English alone, for it has taken translations from Indian languages too for publication. The first few titles that have been published by this experimental publishing house display high literary taste.

*The Bombay Literary Review* edited by Vilas Sarang and his colleagues is a remarkably well produced journal of the English Department of Bombay University. In its quality of production it is decidedly superior to any other literary periodical published in India before. The two issues of the *Review* published so far carry valuable creative and critical contributions, among them a play each by Nissim Ezekiel and Gieve Patel, translations of Tukaram's poems by Dilip Chitre along with his essay on translation. The journal has found patronage from *The Times of India*, and should have a long life. Equally well-produced is the new journal launched by the English Department of Delhi University, a scholarly review that looks more like any conservative scholarly journal in Britain. The themes handled in it too are conservative and close to the established literary canon.

Though not as new as the above, I need to introduce the Garutman venture. Garutman (which means a mid-flight eagle) is a non-commercial publishing programme for translations of works from Indian languages. Its aim is to make the best in Indian literature available to the Western world so that some day Indian works start getting nominated for the Nobel Prize. Whatever one thinks of this aim, the titles published by Garutman certainly mark important mile-stones in Indian languages literature. The most notable among these are: *Avasthe* (The Condition), a Kannada novel by U.R. Ananthamurthy translated by Shantinath Desai; *Magadh*, a collection of Shrikant Verma's Hindi poems translated by Ajit Khullar; and *Carvalho* of Tejaswi translated by a group of young Berkley poets and edited by Vidya Niwas Misra.

The last year saw a spurt in translation activity. The National Academy of Letters, apart from publishing two translation journals, has announced special awards for translated works. Several seminars were held on literary translation at Calicut, Hyderabad, Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Baroda. Indian universities are slowly introducing translation studies as a component of literary programmes. One feels that the fact that India is essentially a multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation is catching up with the syllabus makers in Indian universities. It is a welcome change.

Penguin India, which has by now become well established as a promoter of Indian literature, has started publishing translations. It brought out a reprint of David Ruben's translation of Premchand's works. Premchand, who wrote in Hindi and Urdu, is probably India's Gorky, and has an abiding appeal to readers all over the world. Though his works written in a high realistic mode are reprinted periodically, realism has not made any significant dent in the world of Indian fiction. One has to wait and see, therefore, if the latest title, *Deliverance*, will perform that miracle.

Among other titles from Penguin that deserve mention are Anees Jung's depiction of womanhood in her non-fictional *Unveiling India: A Woman's Journey*, Shashi

Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, and Allen Ginsberg's *Indian Journals*. I found Ginsberg utterly disappointing, maybe because the expectations were too high. But Tharoor's experimental novel combining modern Indian history and ancient mythology may have a chance of being remembered for some time. Much more interesting is *Salaam Bombay* by Mira Nair and Sooni Taraporevala. Like its English counterpart, Hanif Kureshi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, it is a report on the making of that memorable film together with the original screen-play. Mira Nair is in her late twenties, and so raises hope for more distinguished work in cinema and print to come from her.

Of the novels published recently, worth remembering and buying, are Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August: An Indian Story*, Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama*, and Gita Mehta's *Raj*. All three were published outside India. *English August*, which has nothing to do with either England or the month of August, is a slim first volume by its young author about an Indian civil servant who discovers himself and his country in an outpost civil station. *The Trotter-Nama*, which sounds like the *Babarnama* or the memoirs of the great Moghal emperor) presents the Anglo-Indian ethos. Sealy's language has all those, by now predictable and yet highly readable, 'inimitable' qualities of style that Salman Rushdie has introduced in Indian English literature. Black humour, fantasy, history and social irony combine in his rendering of Anglo-India, and make his first novel highly memorable. Gita Mehta's *Raj* depicts the life and struggles of Jaya Singh, a princess torn between conventions and the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, who ushers her kingdom into modernity. In many ways it is a cross between Manohar Malgonkar's popular pulp *Princes* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. But the style of Mehta is captivating. Today, Indian English fiction is blessed with the presence of so much new talent: Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy.

To the above list one must add a few more names: Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Jai Nimkar, Nina Sibal. I have commented upon Sibal's *Yatra* and Nimkar's *Joint Venture* in my last year's report. Shobha De, who has been doing a dashing editorial job for several periodicals, has brought out a rather bulky novel, *Socialite Evenings*. It is not a classic by any standard. The story line is that of cinema-like life. But what is worth noting is that De has an impressive vocabulary. When India produces hundreds of such novels, it will also start producing literary classics of world standard regularly. To build the middle level is as important a contribution to literary culture as to produce great works. Shashi Deshpande has been consistent in her work, and has added another slim volume to her credit, *That Long Silence*.

R.K. Narayan, who is now well advanced in age, has published another beautiful novel, which shows that his fictitious Malgudi is as dynamic as his own creative imagination. This *Novel for Malgudi* adds to the charm his enigmatic fiction exercises all over the English-speaking world. In comparison, Raja Rao's long promised *The Chessmaster and His Moves* is thoroughly disappointing. It is a long work which does not compare well with his own *Kanthapura* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

There was much poetry published last year; but clearly the generation that should replace Kamala Das, Kolatkar, Mahapatra and Ramanujan has not arrived yet. Oxford University Press, India, is the only reputed house that has taken up publishing good poetry on a regular basis. But it has not added much to its poetry programme after publishing D'Souza, Mahapatra, Imtiaz Dharker and G.S. Sharatchandra. The more eye-catching titles to come out from OUP have been a paperback edition of M.N. Srinivas's *A Village Remembered*, and Sudhir Kakar's psychoanalytic study of Indian womanhood. P. Lal's Calcutta-based Writers Workshop has produced poetry volumes, which are poetry only in principle. But the bindings and covers of his publications

are invariably done in good taste. New Ground and The Clearing House, both from Bombay, are dormant. Much of the poetry publication in India is done individually by the poets. It is, therefore, impossible to keep track of the activity.

Like poetry, literary criticism shows nothing worth recommending. The more fashionable, and perhaps able, Indian critics reside abroad. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha are the best examples of this tribe. Those who live in India and produce meaningful critical work, mostly work within the parameters of the regional languages. The best that I came across in criticism was an essay by Dilip Chitre, 'Life On The Bridge', about literary translation (*Bombay Literary Review*: 1). It was a pleasant surprise to have the doyen of Commonwealth studies in India, Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah, receive an honorary title of Padmavibhushan conferred on him by the President of India this year. Professor Narasimhaiah, or 'C.D.' as he is known to our discipline, deserves to be congratulated.

G.N. DEVI

## PAKISTAN 1988

The country's return to democracy towards the end of 1988 has meant that the official and unofficial media-ban on writers, at least for the time being, seems like a bygone practice. There is yet the twin challenge of reborn freedom and greater writer responsibility, which are likely to be the central issues for writers during the next decade.

The point is accentuated by the ideological tremors set off by the inter-regional proscription of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Penguin/Viking), as well as the threat to the author's life. This writer cannot comment on his novel or on the one by Adam Zameenzad, *My Friend Matt and Hena the Whore* (London: Fourth Estate), since the books are not available in Pakistan. It may be doubted if such a furore about the Rushdie could have followed a disciplined reading of the work as fiction. Yet, for what it is worth, it is not for the first time that a crucial question has been asked at numerous times and places: why do ex-patriate writers transported to the former imperial loci tend to flout or (ab)use privileged cultural texts of the societies in which they no longer function as citizens? A number of such works have also won major Western prizes, while other important works (with Western themes and materials) by the same writers have been passed over in dignified silence.

The other two outstanding novels were *Ice Bangles* (Toronto: Lorimer) by Nazneen Sadiq and *Ice-Candy-Man* (London: Heinemann) by Bapsi Sidhwa. The last-named novel concerns the Partition events of 1947, and is more interesting for its characterization, developing narrative techniques and the child's point of view than what it actually has to tell about the events.

In poetry, quality rather than quantity was the operative rule. Late Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the major Urdu poet, occasionally wrote in English. *Unicorn and the Dancing Girl* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers) offers samples of his English verse as well as Daud Kamal's translations and original compositions. Alamgir Hashmi's *Inland and Other Poems* (Islamabad: Gulmohar) is his seventh poetry collection to date and collects work done during 1984-1988. His poems were also published during the year in such anthologies and magazines as *The American Poetry Anthology* (Santa Cruz, CA),

*Mornings in the Wilderness: Readings in Pakistani Literature* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel), *Prophetic Voices* (USA), *Visions* (USA), *New Letters* (USA), and *Edinburgh Review* (UK).

While the only critical volume published during the year was Alamgir Hashmi's *The Commonwealth, Comparative Literature and the World* (Islamabad: Gulmohar), numerous articles and reviews in Pakistani and foreign publications contributed substantially to a well-informed and lively discussion of the current literary topics. The authors most written about were Ahmed Ali, Ustad Daman, Mirza Ghalib, Zulfikar Ghose, Alamgir Hashmi, Mohammad Iqbal, Daud Kamal, Qadir Yar, Taufiq Rafat and Bapsi Sidhwa. Comments and criticism on these authors were generally published in such places as *The Nation* (Lahore), *The Muslim* (Islamabad), *Herald* (Karachi), *The Journal of Indian Writing in English* (India), *Dawn* (Karachi), *Viewpoint* (Lahore), *The Journal of the English Literary Club* (Peshawar), *Third World International* (Karachi), *The Pakistan Times* (Lahore), *New Literature Review* (Australia), and *World Literature Today* (USA).

Two ambitious anthologies also appeared. *Mornings in the Wilderness: Readings in Pakistani Literature* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel), edited by Waqas Ahmad Khwaja, is a compilation of Pakistani literature originally written in English, and of that in Urdu in English translation. Khwaja also provides a rather long 'introduction' to the literature, in keeping with the popular notion here that the length of the 'introduction' makes for a respectable book. The Special Issue of *The Journal of Indian Writing in English* (Gulbarga, India), with the title *Writing in English from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh* (Vol. 16, No. 2), is the first such to concentrate on the given region and Klaus Stuckert, the guest editor, has put in much effort to get the best writers to contribute to it. He has, indeed, met with much success in this effort, and a number of outstanding Pakistani writers are there in the company of the writers from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This special issue is likely to remain an important reference for some time.

The Translations section is relatively thin but for Naomi Lazard's *The True Subject: Selected Poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). The volume grew out of a degree of collaboration between the poet and the translator. The translations, in 'contemporary' English according to Lazard, are free of metre and rhyme and propose to improve upon or supersede Victor Kiernan's translation. There are some very effective translations in the book; and also those to which Faizians will disagree and pull out the originals for. The book must be welcomed, nonetheless, as a devoted rendering of Faiz for the end-of-the-Century English audience, which may not have had an earlier access to the poet, his work, and his culture.

In non-fiction, the autobiographies of Benazir Bhutto (*Daughter of the East*, London: Hamish Hamilton) and Wajid A. Burki (*Autobiography of an Army Doctor in British India and Pakistan*, Rawalpindi: Burki House) stood out, though they both focus much on their professional careers. S. Shahid Hamid's book is much too thin on material for an autobiography, while Khalid Hasan's volume, *The Umpire Strikes Back: People and Politics in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard), though of 'current' interest, indicates little development over the column-length-essay style seen in his earlier volume.

Another lively columnist and prominent writer on both social and 'current' subjects died in December. Mohammed Indrees, editor of *The Pakistan Times*, had begun, in the 1950s, with the Government College's *The Ravi* and continued to work in Lahore. His passing away was described by the editorial-writer of *The Muslim* (Islamabad, 30 December) as 'the end of an era in English journalism'.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

## PAKISTAN 1989

The past dormant decade for English studies appears to be approaching its expected end with some definite academic markers. Three major conferences broke the 'ideological' ice during 1989. The 'First International Conference on English in South Asia' was held at the premises of the University Grants Commission, Islamabad in January, and it drew a large number of academics from far and wide who presented papers on a wide variety of topics. Also in attendance were such writers as Ahmed Ali, Anita Desai, Rajiva Wijesinha, Chitra Fernando, Alamgir Hashmi, and Bapsi Sidhwa; they all gave critical papers as well as readings of their creative work. At its conclusion, the meeting elected the Standing International Conference Committee on English in South Asia, with Professor Alamgir Hashmi as the Chairman. Another important event took place at the University of the Punjab and the Quaid-i-Azam Library, Lahore, where Mr Ismail Bhatti and Ms Shaista Sonnu put together the very first 'National Seminar on Pakistani Literature in English'. Critical papers and creative readings at this conference also were lively, interesting, and well attended. Press coverage of the event was fairly enthusiastic even if the issues discussed required better handling.

The third conference took place in October. It was organized by the Voice of America in the form of a poetry reading and a live dialogue over the satellite which were heard and witnessed by audiences in several countries linked to the American audio-visual network. The theme of the dialogue was 'Poetry as an Instrument of Social Change', and the poems to be read were chosen accordingly. The poets who participated in this conference were Alamgir Hashmi, Khwaja Shahid Hosain, Waqas Ahmad Khwaja (all Pakistani), and Anthony Hecht (American). The literary press in the country enthused about this conference, but generally misrepresented the nature of its contents and the substance of the arguments given.

The several individual volumes of verse published during the year varied in quality from average to indifferent if not downright bad. The poetry in the anthologies and the magazines, however, offered better standards and performance. Zulfikar Ghose contributed poems to the special issue on him of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Vol. 9, No. 2), *A New Anthology of Verse*, edited by Roberta A. Charlesworth and Dennis Lee (Toronto: Oxford University Press), and *Trade Winds*, edited by R.B. Heath (London: Longman). Alamgir Hashmi contributed poems to *Span #29* (Australia), *Third World*, edited by Jim Villani, Naton Leslie and Rose Sayre (Youngstown, Ohio: Pig Iron Press), and the *Anthology of Magazine Verse and Yearbook of American Poetry 1986-1988*, edited by Alan F. Pater (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Monitor Book Company). Daud Kamal's poems appeared in the *Journal of South Asian Literature* (Vol. 22, No. 1), while Athar Tahir had his poems in the *Journal of South Asian Literature* (Vol. 22, No. 1; Vol. 22, No. 2).

In fiction, Adam Zameenzad's third novel, *Love Bones and Water* (London: Fourth Estate), is the only booklength work to draw particular attention. It would be of interest for its symbology, narrative technique, as well as existential angst. Speechlessness is equated with impotency and a futile existence. Thus the novel creates a powerful, if brutal, allegory of subjugation and annihilation of the Gray Man - and men and women like him - at the hands of murderous politicians of Gulroza. Tariq Rahman's first collection of short stories, *The Legacy and Other Short Stories*, edited by Harish Narang (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers), though much less burdened with the sameness of theme, largely has such unvarying stretches of 'type-writing' as effectively confessed by one of his narrators: 'Typing broke a man's pride; it took



away one's manhood' ('The Moustache'). Javaid Qazi published a fine story, titled 'From "Alien Harvest" - The Ski Trip', in *The Toronto South Asian Review* (Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 56-67).

The other titles in fiction were reprints. The D&Y Printers of Karachi put out the third edition of Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah's *The Young Wife and Other Stories*; the collection was first published in 1958. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, first published in 1988, was brought out in a Penguin edition although the edition cannot be sold in Pakistan legally.

The anthologies were all undistinguished if not dilettantish. In the first, the 'Pakistan Dossier' in *Frank #10* (Paris), guest edited by Tariq Rahman, the English work is not represented well, nor are the translations of acceptable quality. *The Inner Dimension* (Lahore: Quaid-i-Azam Library Publications) and *Silence on Fire* (Lahore: Quaid-i-Azam Library Publications), both edited by M. Athar Tahir, offer such uneven and shoddy texts that it will be difficult to evaluate the volumes for a standard.

In translation, Ahmed Ali's *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press) has been quite popular, and has already sold in several hardback and paperback editions besides being adopted as an Oxford title in India. The collaboration between Iftikhar Arif and Brenda Walker has been very fruitful, resulting in a fine bilingual (English-Urdu) edition of Arif's poems in the parallel-text format: *The Twelfth Man: Selected Poems of Iftikhar Arif* (London and Boston: Forest Books). The quality of translation is quite high and the selection of poems is fair. Forest Books has done a good job of producing a readable volume with appropriate Urdu calligraphy. Other good translations, of prose works generally, appeared in the journals.

In non-fiction, Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) has been a popular memoir, invoking memory but exorcising desire, and amplifying in her distinctive euphuistic style the fascinating contradictions of her enterprise. What has particularly grabbed the Pakistani audience is the realistic aspect - the referential visage of an extremely private book affecting public communication. The personal, creative, and communicative (language) aspects have not been noted at all by the critics. Omar Kureishi's *The System* (Karachi: Wings Press) is a journalist's book, which recalls his essays and columns published earlier; he writes in good humour and means well. M.R. Kayani's *The Whole Truth* (Lahore: Pakistan Writers Cooperative Society) collects four of his separate volumes of inimitable essays, but unfortunately the advantage of having them all in one volume is upset by clumsy presentation; the original separate pagination for each volume has been retained and the present volume is not explained well as a 'book'. Benazir Bhutto's autobiography, first published as *Daughter of the East* (1988), was republished in the United States as *Daughter of Destiny* (New York: Simon and Schuster), while a new edition of the *Speeches and Statements* of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was issued by the Government of Pakistan (Islamabad: Ministry of Information).

Criticism was impressive both in volume and quality. Important articles were published by Ahmad Ali (in *Third World International*, Karachi), Alamgir Hashmi (in *The Muslim Magazine*, Islamabad; *The Pakistan Times: Midweek Edition*, Lahore and Islamabad; *Dawn Magazine*, Karachi; *Weekend Post*, Lahore and Peshawar; *CRNLE Reviews Journal*, Australia; *The Ravi*, Lahore; and *Critical Approaches to the New Literatures in English*, edited by Dieter Riemenschneider, Verlag Die Blaue Eule, Essen, West Germany), Robert Baumgardner (*The Nation*, Lahore), Hina Babar Ali (*Journal of South Asian Literature*, USA), Shahrugh Husain (*Third World Quarterly*, London), and Tariq Rahman (*CRNLE Reviews Journal*, Australia). Criticism on general topics generated

much critical energy and debate, while the authors who drew the most critical attention were Benazir Bhutto, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Alamgir Hashmi, and Bapsi Sidhwa.

There were at least two interesting special issues of journals. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (USA) (Vol. 9, No. 2) was the *Milan Kundera/Zulfikar Ghose Number*. The original work by Ghose and the critical articles in it will be very useful, although the issue has some serious critical and bibliographic gaps. *The Journal of the English Literary Club* (copyrighted 1988 but published in 1989) was devoted to the late Daud Kamal, with a substantial collection of his poetry and some critical pieces about him. Generally, the text here is not dependable and the critical writing is softer than usually expected, possibly because the issue was intended as a memorial volume.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

## SRI LANKA 1989

The most important event in 1989 for Sri Lankan writing in English was the establishment under the aegis of the English Association of Sri Lanka of an English Writers Cooperative. This is perhaps the best indication of the surge of self-confidence that has affected writers in the field during the eighties in comparison with the tremendous diffidence of previous decades that accompanied the downplaying of English in the period after independence was achieved in 1949.

Membership of the Cooperative is confined at present to a dozen or so writers who have previously established themselves in various ways, but the pages of self-journal, *Channels*, are open to new and aspiring writers, too. Two issues of *Channels* appeared in 1989, edited by Maureen Seneviratne and Kamala Wijeratne, respectively. Amongst well-known writers whose contributions appear are Jean Arasanayagam, James Goonewardene, Anne Ranasinghe and Punyakante Wijenaike. Of the younger writers featured Madhubashini Dissanayake in particular deserve mention for the new perspective she presents on what used to be a hackneyed staple of writers in English, the clash between rural and urban values.

The Cooperative also provides an imprint for selected works, a much needed step in the absence of active publishing houses in Sri Lanka for creative writing. Two titles have appeared this year, Chitra Fernando's *A Garland of Stories*, a collection of her very popular children's stories (and including a few not previously published), strikingly illustrated by Prasanna Liyanage; and Rajiva Wijesinha's novel *Days of Despair*, a sequel to his 'witty and bitter exploration of Sri Lankan political life', *Acts of Faith*. The later novel explores the wider dimensions of the present conflict in Sri Lanka, and deals in political intrigues in other countries of the subcontinent, too.

There were few other publications during this year, the most unfortunate lacuna involving *Navasilu*, the journal of the Sri Lankan branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the English Association. Number X, edited by Kamal de Abrew, has been ready for the press but financial complications held it up and it is now due out only in early 1990. Another disappointment was the *English Association Anthology of Contemporary Short Stories in English*, a companion to the Poetry Anthology that appeared in late 1988 and rapidly established itself as a definitive teaching text. Political disruptions, particularly violent in Kandy where the editor, Prof. Ashley Halpe, functions from the University of Peradeniya, held up

the preparation of the manuscript, but that too should now be out early in the new year.

The most interesting collection that did appear was the *Shenelle Book of Sri Lankan Short Stories*, edited by Bandula Padmakumara and Lasanda Kurukulasuriya, based on a competition conducted the previous year in association with the British Council by the fashion magazine *Shenelle*. Qualms felt in some quarters about *Shenelle's* trendy basis proved unfounded in that entries were generally of a very high quality. The final publication that emerged, incorporating stories that won prizes and some of those that had been commended and also a few that had gained favour with individual judges or the editors, proved particularly satisfactory. Amongst new names that won attention as a consequence were, apart from Ms Dissanayake, Gamini Akmeemana (albeit he, though previously unpublished except for some slight pieces in the *New Lankan Review*, had twice won the Sri Lankan Arts Council award for Drama in English), Lawrence Leelasena, Alfa de Silva and Damayanthi Fernando.

The last two of these were also featured in volume 7 of the *New Lankan Review*, edited by Rajiva Wijesinha, which has appeared annually since its inception in 1983, albeit in somewhat slimmer form this year. A feature of the journal this year was its domination by women writers, and the increasing assurance with which writers who had begun to establish themselves in the eighties now deal with subjects of social and political concern. Mention should be made in particular of Nirmali Hettiarachchi (winner of the Deutschewelle Prize for Short Stories from South Asia, awarded in 1987), whose 'A sense of security' captures very tellingly the trauma caused to individuals by the less obvious aspects of the violence and terror practised throughout the country in the last few years by all sides of the political divide; and Maureen Seneviratne and Vijitha Fernando who explore very different dimensions of the ethnic conflict as it affects Tamils and Sinhalese, respectively. In addition Jean Arasanayagam displays yet another aspect of her powerful talent, moving away from both ethnic conflict and her complicated ancestry in the wittily contemporary poem 'Historical Conversations' and the intensely personal 'A Walk through the Woods'; while Reggie Siriwardene, the only male to be featured apart from the editor (whose introductory political meditation could not perhaps be characterized as especially creative), displays his assured command of form in 'Returning to Roots'. Incidentally, the rather sad treatment of creative writing by the media in Sri Lanka can be gauged from his aside 'On seeing Sivakumaran's review of my poems in the "culture" page of the *Island*' -

The barbarous *Island* prints bits of my poems as prose!  
They lie like bloodied fragments fallen from a vulture!  
If I were to protest, they'd shriek, 'Our precious space!'  
What do they serve, the authors of the crime? Why, culture!

Meanwhile the Arts Council, following political confusion and various conflicts within ministries, has fallen into abeyance, so the awards for writing in English, along with all others, have not been made. This is particularly unfortunate, since the inception of these awards some years ago, and their annual presentation since, did much to build up self-confidence amongst writers in English, and a sense of acceptance within the cultural life of the nation. Of course the paucity of publications in 1988 suggests that there would have emerged nothing quite as good as P.B. Rambukwelle's exciting first novel, *The Desert Makers*, which won the last award for fiction; nor, while established poets have continued to produce, were there signs of a new talent that has been consistent enough to produce a book, as Yvonne Goone-

wardene did with *A Divisive Inheritance*, which won the poetry prize; still, as with Gamini Akmeemana's plays, it is likely that there exist unpublished manuscripts which could benefit both from the exposure and from the financial awards that the Arts Council is able to provide.

Finally, it should be noted that the Writers Cooperative has been conducting regular Workshops for Readers during the year, and from 1990 will, in conjunction with the English Association, conduct Workshops for Readers, too; almost a necessity in as much as universities have been closed for a couple of years, and the school curriculum up to Ordinary Level does not include any literature at all. In addition, the British Council has opened a low-price-publications outlet, which was initially intended only for its own publications in the field of simplified readers, but provides a marketing facility for the Writers Cooperative and for journals and anthologies. A standard price of \$2.50 for copies of journals and \$5 for copies of individual books is charged; the prices include airmail postage, and remittances should be made payable to 'The British Council, Colombo', and sent to its Cultural Affairs Office, British Council, 49 Alfred House Gardens, Colombo 3.

RAJIVA WIJESINHA

## SOUTH AFRICA 1987

For a full overview and bibliography of South African publications in 1987, Dorothy Driver's annual compilation in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (Vol. 23, No. 2, 1988, in this case) is thorough and invaluable. She sketches both the political/cultural background of the State of Emergency declared in 1985 and provides information on anthologies, literary prizes, interviews, criticism, non-fiction and further bibliographical sources for the student and researcher working in the field.

Despite the emergency, bannings and sporadic clampdowns on cultural activities, the climate of dissidence and the awareness of new cultural potentialities fuelled both performance and written culture in 1987. Leaders in the field of highly politicised performance poetry, such as Mzwakhe Mbuli, enjoyed a high profile, and such performance poetry, often linked to trade union activity, is now being published by organisations such as COSAW (the Congress of South African Writers), which has played an educational and distributive role in encouraging young writers, publishing a magazine, and hosting lively conferences on current topics. The establishment of a black feminist publishing house in Johannesburg, Seriti sa Sechaba, has given black women a new forum, and a volume such as Cikizwa Nzube ka Mokoena's *A Pot of Poetry* (Johannesburg: Seriti sa Sechaba) shows how one new writer attempts to formulate her experience in Christian philosophical terms. Another volume from the same source was Sybil Dhlamini's *Letters to Jesus*. What emerges here is the newness and difficulty black women experience in using a literary English to communicate troubled personal lives under the conditions of apartheid society and traditional prejudice.

The pressure to create a sense of tradition and heroic struggle by African women of the past, very necessary to build present confidence, is seen in Christine Qunta's *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Skotaville). The actual historical roles of black women are illustrated in two interesting research publications from the Killie Campbell Africana Library: *Not Either an Experimental Doll: The separate worlds of three South African women* (Pietermaritzburg: Univ. of Natal Press) edited by Shula Marks,

and *Paulina Dlamini: Servant of two Kings*, translated and edited by S. Bourquin. The former consists of correspondence between Lily Moya, a young Xhosa schoolgirl, Sibusisiwe Makhanya, a Zulu social worker, and Mabel Palmer, an older English Fabian mentor to Lily. This volume follows the recent illuminating use of life-history in socio-political documentation, in this case the texture of mission schooling and maternalistic liberalism in the forties and fifties, including the problems of dependence which Marks has made a highlighted topic of her own in political analysis. One senses a moral judgment of the white mentor involved in the self-righteous tone of the following: 'The love, support and attention Lily desperately craved were denied her to the end' (p. 42). This simply expresses a later form of liberalism, and a sentimental one at that.

The story of Paulina Dlamini consists of the reminiscences of a Zulu woman who was an adolescent in King Cetshwayo's household, providing lively sidelights on the power of the king, its uses and abuses. Later she became an exemplary Christian evangelist. Both books reveal the recent interest in uncovering women's history, especially in firsthand accounts, though in both cases there are forms of mediation which are interesting in themselves. The work of productive and impeccable researcher Karel Schoeman has also played a role here: his *The Recollections of Elizabeth Rolland (1803-1902)* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau) builds on his earlier work on Victorian missionary lives in South Africa. The most substantial and fascinating volume of letters during this year was Richard Rive's *Olive Schreiner Letters 1871-99* (Cape Town: David Philip) drawing on a vast range of manuscript resources, and with accurate textual readings, historical detail and biographical research by Russell Martin. Other interesting non-fiction, still in the field of women's studies (there were some books by men, and I will reach them soon) included Alan Paton's *Beyond the Present: The Story of Women for Peace 1976-1986* (Johannesburg: Brenthurst). We seem to have moved beyond the era of high liberalism just sufficiently to provide some analysis of its successes and failures.

Given these last years of political turbulence and rapid change, stimulating international interest on a new scale, anthologies have emerged attempting to showcase a cross-section of contemporary and engaged talent for this international readership. One such was *A Land Apart: A South African Reader* edited by writers Andre Brink and J.M. Coetzee and reprinted by Viking Penguin of New York in 1987 after its Faber appearance the previous year. *From South Africa* was a special edition of *Triquarterly* magazine (*Triquarterly* 69, Spring/Summer 1987, Northwestern University), edited by David Bunn and Jane Taylor. The volume includes visual material, new writings drawn from a variety of contemporary voices, key critical pieces, stories, poetry and extracts from novels. The choice is lively and representative, conveying a politicized cultural context but also giving a South African readership the chance to survey much of the field.

New fiction also revealed the talent of a younger generation of writers trying to explore the intersection of private griefs and public turmoil, especially in the landscapes of Cape Town. Michael Cope's *Spiral of Fire* (David Philip) has much charm and verbal talent, even though its most graphic scene is one of a suicide which has little to do with the obvious social conflicts in Cape Town's squatter camps in the eighties. Nevertheless, the effervescent writing does try to connect personal quest and a wider sense of political violence, and it does convey the texture of white lives grappling with a sense of helplessness in the face of that violence. But the most striking and impressive debut volume was Zoe Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (New York: Pantheon Books), a most assured and eloquent collection of stories which captures a segment of experience in Cape Town never previously chronicled

because there has never been the talent of an insider's voice to express female 'mixed race' life with such honesty and intelligence: an intelligence which knows it must move on and away from its own community but can at the same time record what it was like to be a part of it. It is a poignant and honest book, with a promise of major powers in its handling of narrative structure and imagery.

Sheila Roberts's *Jacks in Corners* (Ad Donker) is an uneven but entertaining work of meta-fiction wanting to prove that white South Africans are still material for fiction. There are lively pen-portraits, insights into sexual behaviour and power contests, but perhaps less success in probing the political morality of commitment or exile: the spy whose death is meant to move us is a right-wing agent. Given current revelations of right-wing espionage and murder, it's hard to care about him at all. What Roberts is good at is catching the failures and flatulence of human flesh, and the dishonesty which keeps us in pursuit of its pleasures. Daphne Rooke's *Mittee* was rescued from the oblivion of the fifties by Ian Glenn and Chameleon Press of Cape Town, though it does not live up to the claims made for it, despite its readability. It does tell of black/white female relationships, yet its constant recourse to events themselves, often melodramatic or schoolgirlish in tone, reveals a lack of imaginative coherence and of aim. It is a much better written ancestor of E.M. Macphail's *Phoebe and Nio* (Hippogriff Press) which is also good at catching social details but does not know how seriously to take itself and lapses into surface hilarity and an astonishingly novelettish ending. If we are going to sympathise with white South African women, it's not enough to record their experience within tired forms and conventions; some moral vision is needed as well.

Nadine Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature* came out to mixed and puzzled responses and it is a problematic rendering of a possible future for white South African women. She explores an alternative route to the difficult commitments of *Burger's Daughter*, that of 'natural' sexual spontaneity. One strange result is that black men become sex objects and aestheticised fantasies, which does make a change from the past, but which reduces the heroine's probability, not to mention her credibility as a late-developing political spokesperson. There are always interesting achievements in Gordimer's fictional experiments with political time, but perhaps *A Sport of Nature* betrays the anxiety that white women may be fairly dispensable in the future, as dispensable or indispensable as anyone else. That is what may be hard for white South Africans, including writers, to accept, but casting a white woman as consort to the liberated future flies in the face of this more ordinary requirement.

Christopher Hope's *Black Swan* (London: Hutchinson) is an elegant but rather slight fable set in the 1960s and focused with some acerbity on terrorism and militarisation. It provides a new angle on a recurrent topic of black fiction in the seventies. Stephen Gray's *John Ross: the true story* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) is lively enough but suffers from divided aims and perhaps from being imaged against the TV series at the time. It wants to write the 'real' account of a mythologised Natal hero, yet without the scholarly material of sources being built in one never knows what exactly belongs to previous legends, historical documents or Gray's imagination, for he also wants to fabulate around a young white boy and reclaim him for pro-African sympathies rather than a defensive settler mythology. As a result it is often vivid but puzzling and inconclusive.

There was not much 'traditional' written poetry in 1987, with Farouk Asvat's *A Celebration of Flames* (Ad Donker) and Mongane Serote's *A Tough Tale* (Kliptown Books) being the most noticeable. A long poem came from Guy Butler: *Pilgrimage to Dias Cross: A Narrative Poem* (David Philip). Don Mattera's *Memory is the Weapon* (Ravan) is a very touching and humane autobiography of the writer's life in Sophi-

town, his family and friends, his involvement in gang warfare and street life, and what religion and politics could offer by way of alternatives.

Possibly two of the most significant critical contributions of 1987 were Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey) and Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* (Methuen) which both attempt to theorize a broader literary production than a South African one but include it in a politico-theoretical overview. This seems to be one way of approaching South African literature which will be increasingly useful as South Africa moves out of its isolated and sometimes defensive separation from the rest of the international community. Insider and outsider views and publications have also begun to meet in the pages of the *Southern African Review of Books* established in London. There is a new maturity and range in critical production around South African literature, with creative writers like Njabulo Ndebele and J.M. Coetzee making keynote contributions towards a better informed historical understanding and a humane vision of the future.

CHERRY CLAYTON