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The Year That Was

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Abstract
AUSTRALIA, CANADA, PAKISTAN, SINGAPORE

This journal article is available in Kunapipi: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol9/iss3/20
In some ways Les Murray and an Oxford anthology are strange bedfellows. A republican with a passion for the Koori and Celtic heritages in Australia, Murray might have been expected to reject the invitation to edit *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse*. Instead, he exploits it.

As an anthologist, Murray gives the strongest representation so far to poetry from Aboriginal Australia; there’s a strong representation of vernacular poetry generally, and enough stroppy republicanism to make anglophiles dismiss this anthology under the heading ‘The Empire Strikes Back’.

Not as satisfactory are his decisions to limit all poets equally to a maximum of three poems, and to avoid including the pieces usually chosen to represent the best-known poets. This means that the selections from Judith Wright and A.D. Hope among others are eccentric, to say the least. Another liability is that only 15% of Murray’s poets are women.

Alarmingly, this has been a standard percentage in Australian anthologies (most of them edited, incidentally, by poets rather than academics). Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn at last put that right in *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*. It’s an eclectic anthology, stimulating in its acknowledgement of many feminisms, and the poems are not inevitably about *being a woman*. Essential reading.

Colin Johnson, Australia’s first Aboriginal novelist, publishes an astonishing first collection of poems in *The Song Circle of Jacky and Other Poems* (Hyland House). Bobbi Sykes has spoken of the need for Aborigines to create heroic figures in their writing, and Johnson’s Jacky is an affirmation of Aboriginal strength in the struggle against colonialism. In both subject matter and language, this book breaks new ground in placing Aboriginal experience in an international context.

Two other first collections are particularly strong. Philip Hodgins’ *Blood and Bone* (A & R) is a book many people won’t want to read. Hodgins has chronic myeloid leukemia, and it’s incurable. The book’s refusal of euphemisms, from the title onwards, and its confrontation with
death in a society increasingly incapable of responding to mortality, are inescapably political and subversive. Hodgins’ hard-edged imagery sometimes reminds you of Robert Gray, but the vitality of the language of death here recalls Anne Sexton. A rewarding challenge for readers who can cope.

Less intense perhaps, but remarkable for the range and cohesiveness of its vision is Jan Owen’s Boy With Telescope (A & R). Her poems are philosophical, funny, sexy — buoyant with life. A sequence of poems is set in a suburban spa; a wonderful comic poem called ‘Freud and the Vacuum Cleaner’ about a woman who’s been through six phallic symbols in ten years. This collection is a real find.

More a novel in verse than a long poem, Alan Wearne’s The Nightmarkets (Penguin) explores the fate of the ‘60s generation with an extraordinarily detailed sense of social and political context. Although the ease of the vernacular is sometimes strained by rhyme, one of Wearne’s considerable achievements here is the differentiation of his six narrators.

Other highlights of the year’s publishing in poetry are Phantom Dwelling (A & R), a collection of spare new poems by Judith Wright; Rhyll McMaster’s Washing the Money (A & R), which makes intelligent use of a photographic essay; Bruce Dawe’s Towards Sunrise (Longman Cheshire), Andrew Taylor’s Travelling (UQP) and Nearer By Far (UQP) by Richard Tipping.

Often stern but always stimulating, The Lyre in the Pawnshop (Uni of W.A. Press) collects Fay Zwicky’s essays and reviews, mostly on Australian poetry and American literature. Zwicky’s fondness for an unfashionable thinker like Steiner is typical of her uncompromising individualism and her essays such as those on the Australian laconic and on the absence of love in poetry written by Australian men have provoked considerable comment.

In fiction, although Patrick White had declared he was through with the novel and would now write only plays, Memoirs of Many in One (Jonathan Cape) made one young critic, dubbed the ‘Literary Rambo’, wish he had kept his word. Others were lavish in their praise of this excursion into postmodernist trickery. It’s a minor novel, with White in a playful mood: a bit unsubtle, but fun.

Not the word for Christina Stead’s I’m Dying Laughing (Virago), a novel published posthumously but written and reworked for over twenty years. Like Sam Pollit, Emily Wilkes-Howard is simply overwhelming, and her story too is of the destructiveness of passion and political ideals. Set in McCarthyist America and in Paris, I’m Dying Laughing is too long, but nevertheless one of Stead’s three or four major works.
Though far less ambitious, the year's best novel is Elizabeth Jolley's *The Well* (Penguin), winning her at last the Miles Franklin Award. Here's Jolley in her darker mood, with a gothic feel to this wheat-belt tale of two mutually dependent women and possibly a dead man down a well. Right from the title, its apparent simplicity resonates with suggestion: Kerryn Goldsworthy, for example, called it an inverted Rapunzel story.

Again from Western Australia, Tim Winton's *That Eye the Sky* (McPhee Gribble). Winton's young narrator, Ort Flack, seems almost simple-minded but there's an intensity in his view of family and death and belief that's absolutely compelling. As in *The Well*, and writing by other Australians such as Astley and Hanrahan, I'm constantly reminded here of fictional worlds from the southern United States.

Probably David Foster's most difficult novel, *The Adventures of Christian Rosy Cross* (Penguin) is an exploration of the strange connections between alchemy and Christianity in Rosicrucianism. Given the bizarre fiction of Rosicrucianism itself, there's no point wondering where Foster's erudition in this picaresque satire leaves off and his invention begins. His ebullient language gives you two choices: submit, or run for it!

Kate Grenville's *Dreamhouse* (UQP) is well written but the characters are so unlikable. On the other hand, Archie Weller's collection of short stories, *Going Home* (Allen & Unwin) is so badly written but its vision of race relations in Australia compels both shame and sympathy. Little radical anger, though. Unlike the cautious optimism of Colin Johnson's poems, its unrelieved hopelessness about the future for Aborigines is, in the long run, politically conservative.


The year's two best plays are Tony Strachan's play of life on an Aboriginal reserve, despair, and the power of the imagination, *State of Shock* (Currency) and Michael Gow's *Away* (Currency). Although the virtuosity of Gow's language is less evident here than in, say, *On Top of the World*, part of the tremendous appeal *Away* has had is that, like all his plays, it speaks for a generation disillusioned by the 60s' failure to deliver anything more than affluence.

Several books useful to the study of Australian Literature: Dorothy Green's revised *Henry Handel Richardson and Her Fiction* (Allen & Unwin); two collections of interviews with Australian writers, *Yakker* (Picador) edited by Candida Baker and *Rooms of Their Own* (Penguin) edited by
Jennifer Ellison; and a study of narrative in Australian film and fiction, Graeme Turner’s National Fictions (Allen & Unwin).

Those interested in Barbara Hanrahan’s fiction will find the highlighting of various influences and the sexuality of her work useful in Barbara Hanrahan: Printmaker by Alison Carroll (Wakefield Press). And finally, redressing the balance and telling the story of Catholic girlhood in Australia, Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids ed. K. & D. Nelson (Penguin) is variable, but includes outstanding memoirs by such writers as Veronica Brady and Anna Rutherford.

In Australian children’s literature, after a shaky history, fantasy continues to figure prominently. A sleeper when it was first released Gillian Rubinstein’s Space Demons (Omnibus) became one of the year’s most popular books for older readers. It’s about a wealthy but unhappy boy who unexpectedly zaps a gun out of the computer game he is playing into his hand, and what happens when he turns it on one of his friends. This novel says so much quite succinctly — perhaps too insistently towards the end — but I couldn’t put it down.

Taronga (Penguin), Victor Kelleher’s frightening view of a future in which Sydney’s zoo is the only safe place to be, and All We Know (A & R), Simon French’s beautifully written study of an adolescent girl, are the other outstanding books for older readers.

Paul Jennings’ funny and surreal short stories in Unreal and Unbelievable! (both Penguin) are, with Robin Klein’s books, favourites of readers 10 and over. And finally the outrageous Sister Madge’s Book of Nuns (Omnibus) with poems by Doug Macleod and loopy illustrations by Craig Smith tells of Sister Helga who ate too many reindeer meatballs when she was young, grew antlers and became the convent hatstand; the Sisters of No Mercy, who form a bikie gang and rip through the local supermarket in a modern Cleansing of the Temple; and many other sisters from Our Lady of Immense Proportions.

This book is loved by readers of all ages, including nuns.

MARK MACLEOD

CANADA

Exciting things are happening to Canadian literature. The range, variety and quality of this year’s writing is remarkable. Much of the innovative writing is coming out in attractive paperback first issues from small
regional presses, although the major publishers are holding their own. The novel of the year was Timothy Findley’s *The Telling of Lies* (Viking/Penguin), a powerful mystery probing the painful area where the political and the moral collide, so elegantly written the style seems almost to redeem the horrors of the subject matter. On a smaller scale, the eleven stories in Alice Munro’s collection, *The Progress of Love* (McClelland & Stewart) work much the same miracle, ranging from tragedy to comedy without missing a beat. These were deservedly the high profile publications this year, but there was much, much more worth our attention.

Findley also brought out a revised edition of *The Butterfly Plague* (Penguin), first published in 1969. Scott Symons broke a long silence with *Helmet of Flesh* (McClelland & Stewart), a cranky, misogynist yet compelling tale of a woman-hating, Canada-hating man, York Mackenzie, who discovers the ‘complete antidote’ to these curses in Marrakesh. Aritha van Herk’s irreverent *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* (McClelland & Stewart) provides the antidote to Symons. The novel takes the form of a ‘Notebook on a missing person’, an unnamed narrator’s quest for the mysterious underwear saleswoman, Arachne Manteia, from her childhood in Vancouver through her marriage in Calgary and her journeys across Alberta to her disappearance in the North. Anne Cameron’s *The Journey* (Spinsters/Aunt Lute) rewrites history from a feminist perspective, tracing the travels of two women through the Canadian West to the Pacific. For laid-back whimsy turn to David McFadden’s *Canadian Sunset* (Black Moss), as it chronicles the cross-Canada travels (focussed on Vancouver, the Kootenays and Toronto, with a side-trip to New Mexico) of a helicopter salesman and his unlikely contacts with painters, writers and mystics. But Paulette Jiles’s delightful *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola: A Manual of Etiquette for Ladies Crossing Canada by Train* (Polestar) provides the ultimate post-modernist parody of this suddenly popular Canadian subgenre, the amorous journey. Here ‘the train is a perpetual performance, a carnival, a traveling medicine show, a sort of genteel psych ward going around the bend’.

Jiles’ *The Late Great Human Road Show* (Talon) imagines a post-nuclear Toronto in a science fiction format, more successfully than Helene Holden’s treatment of a similar theme — the aftermath of an unspecified disaster — in *After the Fact* (Oberon). Leona Gom’s *Housebroken* (NeWest) is an elegiac romance, exploring the friendship of two women in Chilliwack, the agoraphobia of Susan and the guilt of Ellen, who could not help her, across the backdrop of contemporary B.C. politics. Helen Potrebenko’s *Sometimes they Sang* (Press Gang), with a similar setting
(Socred B.C. in 1979), makes a stronger polemical statement but is no less engaging for it. As the author explains in a Note inserted in the middle of the story: ‘...this is my book and Odessa will act like the women I know rather than the women portrayed in real writers’ novels.’

The winner of this year’s Seal First Novel award, Jo Anne Williams’ *Downfall People* (McClelland & Stewart), treats cross-cultural encounters in a West African setting. Among other first novels, Leslie Hall Pinder’s *Under the House* (Talon) exposes the repressive silences of respectable family life, Jane Urquhart’s *The Whirlpool* (McClelland & Stewart) develops an historical mystery, and David Gilmour’s *Back on Tuesday* (Coach House) narrates the Lowryesque musings of an ineffective father who has kidnapped his daughter and fled his efficient wife in ugly Toronto for the worst bar at the end of the world in Jamaica.

Hugh Hood’s *The Motor Boys in Ottawa* (Stoddart) is number 6, the middle point in his New Age series, and extremely topical now that its subject, the Canada/U.S. Auto Pact, may be up for revision in the free trade talks. It’s vintage Hood, almost unbearably tedious but fascinating to the student of his brand of Canadian conservatism. David Helwig’s *The Bishop* (Viking) is a quiet, realistic novel exploring religion and morality in a Kingston setting. Matt Cohen’s *Nadine* (Penguin) is another realistic character study on Jewish themes. Andreas Schroeder’s *Dustship Glory* (Doubleday) treats the strange obsessions of a man who built an ocean-going steamship in the middle of the prairie, over a thousand miles from the nearest port. Also in the documentary fiction vein, Heather Robertson brought out the sequel to *Willie: Lily: A Rhapsody in Red* (Lorimer). And Josef Skvorecky’s *Dvorak in Love*, translated by Paul Wilson (Lester & Orpen Dennys), fictionalises the dead composer’s life.

One of my favourite books of this year is Clark Blaise’s * Resident Alien* (Penguin), accomplished, haunting stories that record, Blaise writes, his ‘obsessions with self and place; not just the whoness and whatness of identity, but the whereness of who and what I am’. Audrey Thomas continues her analysis of male-female relationships in stories set in the Gulf Islands and Greece in *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck* (Penguin). Janice Kulyk Keefer, who won first prize in the CBC Radio short story competition for the second year in a row, has published her first collection of stories, *The Paris Napoli Express* (Oberon). Janette Turner Hospital’s *Dislocations* (McClelland & Stewart) continues her exploration of her title theme and includes the story which provided the genesis for *The Ivory Swing*. Edna Alford’s *The Garden of Eloise Loon* (Ooolican) contains some haunting stories. Unfortunately, the interconnected stories of Ray Smith’s *Century* (Stoddart) fall somewhat flat. John Metcalf’s two
novellas and three stories in *Adult Entertainment* (Macmillan) are sophisticated and accomplished. Alister MacLeod, another meticulous craftsman, brought out *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories* (McClelland & Stewart). Anne Cameron’s *Dzelarhons: Myths of the Northwest Coast* (Harbour) provide more magic, feminist fables as a sequel to *Daughters of Copper Woman*.

Essential poetry publications for the year are Margaret Atwood’s *Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New 1976-1986* (Oxford) and *The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, ed. Russell Brown (McClelland & Stewart). These are surely two of our best poets. Two of the most ambitious new books are Christopher Dewdney’s *The Immaculate Perception* (Anansi) and Robert Bringhurst’s *Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music* (McClelland & Stewart). Both are post-modernist, experimental, boundary-crossing works that mix diagrams, calligraphy, maps, fragments of prose and poetry and glossaries of the terms and references used throughout. These are challenging books that elate in their efforts to rethink the mysteries of how we think and perceive (Dewdney) and — more interesting to me and probably the readers of this journal — of how to learn to ‘speak across and against’ the colonial culture to which we belong (Bringhurst). Yet both also have their overly intellectualised moments which make one long for the lyric simplicity of what Bringhurst terms ‘breathing through the feet’. In a similar attempt to fuse science and poetry Pier Giorgio di Cicco sees physics as ‘meta-poetry’ and hunts ‘holistic paradigms’ in *Virgin Science* (McClelland & Stewart), a less compelling book.


In a year of increasingly politicised fiction, one of the most political books to appear has been Brian Fawcett’s unclassifiable *Cambodia: A book for people who find television too slow* (Talon). This is a collection of philosophical fictions with an articulated essay-like subtext that claims to locate itself in the ‘interzone between the First and Third world’. Its tone of angry self-righteousness irritated most of my friends but I liked it for its dark humour and serious questionings. Paul de Barros provides a similar attempt to combine documentary journey and fictional stories with *North/South explorations in Big Plans* (Talon). Talon has also published
Michael Mercer's play, *Goodnight Disgrace*, based on Conrad Aiken's friendship with Malcolm Lowry.


Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies made the short list for the Booker Prize this year although neither won it. The Canadian Book Information Centre promoted what it termed 'Canada's ten best young fiction writers' in a contest named 45 Below. The winners were: Sandra Birdsell, Matt Cohen, Janette Turner Hospital, Susan Kerslake, Bharati Mukherjee, Paul Quarrington, David Adams Richards, Sarah Sheard, Guy Vanderhaeghe and Aritha van Herk.

DIANA BRYDON

PAKISTAN

The year began with the installation of an elected government and the gradual easing of the larger socio-political tensions in the country made room, even if grudgingly, for other kinds of social and cultural expression. On the whole, it was a year filled with literary festivals, commemorations and fresh resolves for the future.

A four-day conference in March celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Progressive Writers Association (circa 1936) at Karachi. In attendance were major writers and critics from Pakistan and India. The conference reviewed the present situation and re-affirmed its pre-Independence objectives. Some of the *élan* and flavour of its proceedings were conveyed by the columns and editorials in the national dailies, such as 'Writers Call for End to Imperialist Influences' (*The Muslim*, 10 March). In April the four-day World Punjabi Conference was held at Lahore, with participants coming from many different countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and
North America. Apart from these events, the Writers’ Group in Lahore and Margalla Voices, a poetry group in Islamabad, were also quite active, with an impressive schedule of readings, talks and discussions. Indeed, a pleasant surprise is the development of a poetry-reading and lecture series at the prestigious Quaid-e-Azam Library in Lahore, whose schedule includes a good deal of English literary activity under what amounts to a fairly benevolent kind of official patronage. The President’s new directive to design and encourage book-publishing programmes throughout the country will be implemented by the Pakistan Academy of Letters and the National Book Council of Pakistan.

Among publications, those in the categories of fiction, anthologies and non-fiction were voluminous, qualitative and most written about in the press. Ahmed Ali’s third novel, *Rats and Diplomats* (Karachi: Akrash Publishing), is a first-person, humorous narrative, allegorical in design and satirical in purpose. The novel takes Ali’s English work on to a different path and effectively contradicts the rumours heard for some time that Ali’s migration had somehow cooled the creative fires first seen in *Angare* (Burning Coals, 1932), and still better seen in *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and *Ocean of Night* (1964). Zulfikar Ghose’s tenth novel keeps us in South America. *Figures of Enchantment* (London: Hutchinson; New York: Harper & Row) presents such *figures* as those of beautiful or attractive women, or of sums of money, of lottery tickets and island paradises, which haunt the characters as the delusions they must pursue and destroy. The everyday desires lead to disproportionately severe ironic reversals of a kind that were the characters not so well evoked or sympathetically portrayed the result would have been a ringing farce. It is a deep psychological outlook, and the most artful of story-telling which transform the material of this novel into the reflective rhythms and overtones of tragedy. The many ironies of fate which Ghose’s characters must endure, besides those of exile and failure to obtain love or anything else they set out for, include the supreme irony that some of them are not who they are supposed to be. But the supposition itself is questionable. Sense of time and identity change under the stress of circumstance or the whimsy of reincarnation, and even the text of the novel itself is a remanifestation of an earlier verbal identity in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*; with its own analogues of Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and such other references as are irrepressible to the English-educated memory. In a sense, Ghose’s Brazilian trilogy (1972-1978) as a whole was a ‘Frontier Novel’ incorporating the ‘Historical Romance’. The place and the setting have since depended less on external referents and more on place as merely a ‘setting’; though without being innocent of what place it is. The journey
since has been more and more into the ‘interior’ of the human soul as enlightened by a powerful moral vision.

The two better poetry collections, both first books, were Selected Poems (Lahore: Nirali Kitaben) by Jocelyn Ortt-Saeed and Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Nomad and Other Poems (Rawalpindi: Subah Publications) by Raja Changez Sultan.

At least five fine anthologies were published during the year. Inspirations (Lahore: The Quaid-e-Azam Library Publications), edited by Hina Babar Ali, includes poems by Pakistani and American poets: Inamul Haq, Michael Lynch, Hina Babar Ali, Taufiq Rafat, Alamgir Hashmi, Waqas Ahmad and Elizabeth Sewell. A Various Terrain: An Anthology of Pakistani English Poetry (The Quaid-e-Azam Library Publications), edited by M. Athar Tahir, includes poems by Aneeq Ahmad, Hina Babar Ali, Inamul Haq, Alamgir Hashmi, Waqas Ahmad Khwaja, Taufiq Rafat, Jocelyn Ortt-Saeed and M. Athar Tahir. Selected Short Stories from Pakistan—Urdu (Islamabad: The Pakistan Academy of Letters), edited by Ahmed Ali, contains some of the best contemporary Urdu short stories in good English translation, while The Penguin Book of Modern Urdu Poetry, selected and (all of it) translated by Mahmood Jamal, shows a dedicated translator at a critical disadvantage as an anthologist and a compiler. He defines the ‘Modern’ in Urdu rather narrowly; and accordingly he chooses some poets and poems of questionable quality or translatability, while excluding some major work. Jamal’s is a laudable effort, to be followed up and bettered by a more coherent and a more comprehensive anthology. The Worlds of Muslim Imagination (Islamabad: Gulmohar Press), edited by Alamgir Hashmi, appeals to the present writer to resist commenting critically and confine himself to description; it is ‘an anthology of modern and contemporary multilingual literature of the Islamic countries since the great poet Iqbal’. The book includes poetry and fiction originally written in English as well as works translated into English from other Pakistani and world languages, plus a number of scholarly articles by such critics as Bruce King, Adele King, P.J. Stewart, Roger Allen, Prithwindra Mukherjee and Eric Sellin.

Among translations, two volumes stand out: The Prison House (Karachi: Akrash Publishing), a selection of Ahmed Ali’s Urdu short stories translated by the author himself; and Journal of South Asian Literature: The Writings of Saadat Hasan Manto (Michigan State University, East Lansing), a special issue edited by Leslie A. Flemming, which contains a number of short stories by Manto in English translation by various hands. The stories included in the special issue are sometimes different from those to be found in the earlier The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan...
Manto (Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd., 1985), in which the biographical and critical sections were written by Leslie A. Flemming (as also contained earlier in the Stateside edition of her work) and all of the short stories were translated by Tahira Naqvi. The present special issue also contains critical pieces about Manto, an interview with a Manto friend and a Manto bibliography. So, in more ways than one, the 1985 and the 1986 editions of Manto by Flemming complement each other.

Also of interest may be Karamatullah Khan Ghauri’s China Doll, Urdu short stories in the author’s own English translation published in Beijing (International Culture Publishing Corp.); certainly no less than Ashfaq Hussain’s Urdu poems in English translation by various hands, The Day Will Dawn, which was published in Toronto (Pakistan-Canada Amity Forum). The second, revised edition of Al-Qur’an: A Contemporary Translation (Karachi: Akrash Publishing), by Ahmed Ali, was also published during the year, drawing a long subscription list from far and wide.

In non-fiction, the Forster-Masood Letters (Karachi: Ross Masood Education and Culture Society of Pakistan), edited by Jalil Ahmad Kidwai, complements the sections relevant to the two correspondents in Selected Letters of E.M. Forster, edited by Mary Lago and P.N. Furbank. Other books to note in this category are: Disastrous Twilight: A Personal Record of the Partition of India (London: Leo Cooper and Secker & Warburg), by General Shahid Hamid, one-time A.D.C. to Field Marshal Auchinleck; Contemporary Muslim World (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture) and Islamization of Pakistan (Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd.) by Afzal Iqbal, diplomat and scholar; The Lighter Side of the Power Game (Lahore: Jang Publishers) by Muhammad Asghar Khan, formerly Air Marshal and Chief of Pakistan Air Force and currently a politician; Memoirs and Other Writings of Syed Amir Ali (Delhi: Renaissance Publishing House), edited by Syed Razi Wasti; Political Legacy of Jinnah by K.F. Yusuf; and Volume II and Volume III of The Collected Works of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah (Karachi: East and West Publishing Company), edited by Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada. For general, leisurely reading, a charming, personal book is Iftikhar Haider Malik’s Pakistan, People and Places: Reflections on Living and Travelling (Islamabad: Margalla Publications).

Further, Kaleem Omar and Shuaib bin Hasan both continued to write their highly popular, though highbrow, columns: ‘Letter from Karachi’ in The Star and ‘Books and Writers’ in The Pakistan Times, respectively. Two new English daily newspapers, The Nation (Lahore) and The Frontier Post (Peshawar), began to publish last year, and both have been putting out attractive weekly magazines, which carry items of literary and
cultural interest. And although the English theatre had no major events, Hassan Habib published *The Story of Mrs Simpson and King Edward: A One-Act Play in Three Scenes* (*The Frontier Post Magazine*, 20 May, pp. 14-15, 18), while Shahryar Rashid had his short play *The Whale* broadcast by the B.B.C. *The Journal of the English Literary Club: Session 1984-1985* also came out during the year, and it contained interesting work by Pakistani writers and critics. *Annual of Urdu Studies* (Chicago), No. 5, which appeared late in 1986, had special sections devoted to N.M. Rashed, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

The critical yield has been good, while the attention is noticeably on the contemporary. Much of the critical writing published during the year concerned writers like Ahmed Ali, Zulfikar Ghose, Alamgir Hashmi, Daud Kamal, Saadat Hasan Manto and N.M. Rashed. Two important books published during the year were: *Pakistan: Literature and Society* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers) by Fahmida Riaz and *Punjabi Literature — After Independence* (Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Board).

Among articles, I must mention ‘The Literature of Pakistan’ (with a select bibliography) by Alamgir Hashmi (*World Literature Written in English*, 26, 1, 192-199), which may serve well as a starting point for a study of Pakistani Literature in English. Also of interest may be a fine article by Bruce King, ‘From Twilight to Midnight: Muslim Novels of India and Pakistan’ (in *The Worlds of Muslim Imagination*, ed. Alamgir Hashmi (Islamabad: Gulmohar Press, 1986), pp. 243-259), which discusses the work of Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, Zulfikar Ghose and Salman Rushdie.

Finally the prizes. Bapsi Sidhwa won the Pakistan Academy of Letters’ Patras Bokhari Award for 1986 for her novel *The Bride* (1983). A new national prize for younger writers, the Townsend Poetry Prize, has been announced. According to the press release, ‘the Townsend Poetry Prize was established to encourage English-language creative writing in Pakistan, and is a tribute to the work of individuals who are making a positive though quiet contribution toward intercultural communication and the enrichment of community life’. The prize was created by Professor Alamgir Hashmi, who knew Ms Townsend in Lahore in the early 1970s as a working colleague in the arts and as a friend. The Townsend Poetry Prize will be administered by the American Center in Islamabad.

ALAMGIR HASHMI
1986 was a most eventful year for literature and the arts in Singapore. Two major events coincided to make the year among the most memorable ever. The Seventh Triennial Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the bi-annual Singapore Festival of Arts were held in the same month — June. For the first time in the history of the Singapore Festival of Arts it was decided to have a Writers’ Week as an integral part of the overall programme. The ACLALS Triennial and the Writers’ Week were held back to back so that maximum results would be achieved in terms of Readings and Discussions. For two whole weeks, therefore, Singapore’s literary scene bustled with activities. The ACLALS Conference had attracted over two hundred participants from about thirty countries and Writers’ Week brought in some twenty-five writers and academics from about sixteen countries. It was an exciting time. Never before had Singapore seen so many literary types assembled at the one time. For the organisers there was a sense of euphoria coupled with anxiety; for those interested in matters literary a golden opportunity to meet and listen to some of the best contemporary writers offered itself, and for Singaporeans at large there was a definite pride in having come of age. The incorporation of a Writers’ Week into the official Festival of Arts cannot be over-emphasised: it marked the beginning of a new ethos in the nation’s sense of Culture.

It would be difficult to describe all that happened at the two events and to mention the names of all those who contributed to the success of the occasions, but Kunapipi readers will be familiar with the names of Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, Charles Causley, Timothy Mo, John Tranter, Nissim Ezekiel, Raja Rao, Kamala Das, Nora Vagi, Albert Wendt, Vincent O’Sullivan, Sam Selvon, Lee Kok Liang, Ee Tiang Hong, Blanche D’Alpuget, David Dabydeen. These writers, together with many others from the Commonwealth and from outside the Commonwealth, joined their Singaporean counterparts in a real literary bash. There were readings everywhere: at the National University, at various branches of the National Library, at junior colleges, at schools, and at public auditoriums. There were readings and forums during lunch-time and in the evenings. The aim was to attract as large a public as possible.

Alas, this large public was not always there. Part of the problem, I suspect, lay in the very inadequate publicity given to the literary events. By the time people became aware that all these exciting writers were in Singapore, the Festival was about over. Perhaps we also had been over-
ambitious in planning such a packed and full programme. Whatever the reason, the lessons learnt will help in the organising of future literary events.

This is not the place where a report of the ACLALS Conference should be given, but a few words are in order. The Conference had a very relevant theme: ‘The Writer as Historical Witness: The Commonwealth Experience.’ After twenty years of its existence, the energies of the Association were rightfully channelled into the discussion of such a theme. Some excellent papers were delivered and useful exchanges took place formally and informally. When the selection of Papers from the Conference is published readers will know just how high the standard of presentations was. The Conference was seen by all to be a great success. Participants were kept busy throughout the day with academic sessions, readings of poetry and prose, cultural programmes and the delights of Singapore (of which there are many!)

There was a successful Book Launching during the ACLALS Conference. Among the many books launched were two titles from Singapore, both by the present writer: *Palm Readings* and *Critical Engagements*. The first is a collection of poems written by Singh over the years 1965 and 1986. Readers will discern common themes, among them, displacement, anxiety, prejudice, loneliness.

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shadows move outside my door
metaphysical propositions
do not console as they once did
nor the brownness of earth without water.
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*Critical Engagements* is described as ‘the first book to be wholly devoted to a serious discussion of poems written by Singaporeans’. Scholars from all over the world (among them Yasmine Gooneratne, Louis James, A.V. Krishna Rao, Shirley Lim, Anne Brewster, Dorothy Jones) critically examine a given poem so as to provide a frame for further reference. The book also contains a short anthology of poems and a select bibliography. Teachers and students of Commonwealth literature will find it an invaluable book of practical reference.

Robert Yeo’s *The Adventures of Holden Heng*, a novel, was launched with great pomp and ceremony at the Writer’s Bar of Raffles Hotel later in the year. The novel, dealing with the sometimes comical and sometimes unfortunate attempts of a young man to find suitable female companions in an environment not easily responsive to his kind of needs, gave rise to considerable controversy regarding Yeo’s depiction of women and their role. While the controversy may have been based on a mis-reading of the
novel (the present writer fails to perceive any real injustice!) it did certainly enhance the sales. I gather that a reprint is imminent. The novel aimed for a popular audience and got it. Perhaps more Singaporean writers will now shed their 'élitist' approach and write for a mass readership?

The Department of English of the National University brought out a collection of poems by a young poet: Angeline Yap. Angeline had been featured in various anthologies for quite some time and it was time she came out with an individual collection. She writes well, with a fine control of the language giving the poetry a persuasiveness hard to resist:

we are but silent men;
single voices, after all, of no account
we do not speak
but accuse in whispers
that mount and crush.

If she continues writing the way she does in *Collected Poems* readers can look forward to the confident maturity of an engaging new Singaporean poet.

One other important book published this year — but which has not had the impact it deserves — was Arthur Yap’s *Man Snake Apple*. Those who know the Singaporean poetry scene will be interested in this new collection from Yap. *Man Snake Apple* marks a departure from Yap’s intriguing language-games and registers a new emotional preoccupation. Curiously enough the collection reminds one of Yap’s first book *Only Lines*. Yap is now responding to matters of the heart. Poems to close friends reveal the significance of feelings and bonds which transcend geography. There is a spiritual dimension as well, and it would appear that Yap, having explored those wonderful linguistic permutations which delight the academic to no end, is now returning to the source of poetic commitment. *Man Snake Apple* is only a very slim volume but its importance can go unnoticed.

The government-supported *Singa* magazine continues to publish creative efforts of several Singaporean writers as does *Focus*, the Journal of the University’s Literary Society. Considerable excitement surrounds the development of theatre in Singapore with Max le Blond’s direction of *Emily of Emerald Hill* (a play by Stella Kon), which at the Edinburgh Festival received rave reviews in the British press. It is tragic that this play, in spite of the Minister’s support, should have been turned down by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation. Antiquated attitudes continue to plague the healthy and natural growth of the literary arts at at least this
official level. We can only pray that the people in charge of radio and television in Singapore will realise soon how crucial it is for a nation to know its literature through significant media.

KIRPAL SINGH

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN SLEMON is a Canadian who has recently completed his doctorate at the University of Queensland. He has now taken up an appointment at the University of Edmonton in Alberta. With Helen Tiffin he is editing a collection of essays, *After Europe: Critical Theory and Post-Colonial Writing*, to be published by Dangaroo Press.

HELEN TIFFIN teaches at the University of Queensland. She has published widely in the area of post-colonial literatures and literary theory. She has co-authored (with Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths) a monograph on post-colonial literary theory and is currently working on a book on counter-discourse.

DIANA BRYDON teaches at the University of British Columbia. She has recently completed a book on Christina Stead and has published widely in the field of post-colonial literatures and criticism.

VERONICA KELLY teaches at the University of Queensland. She edits *Australian Drama Studies* and is editor of a collection of essays on Louis Nowra.

GERRY TURCOTTE is a Canadian from the province of Quebec. He has published fiction and poetry in both French and English and is at present completing his doctorate in English at the University of Sydney.

ANDREW TAYLOR teaches at the University of Adelaide and is one of Australia’s major poets. In 1986 he was Australasia/Pacific winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for his collection *Travelling*.

MARK MACLEOD teaches at Macquarie University. His first collection of poetry, *Finding Echo Point*, with photographs by Reece Scannell, will be published by Dangaroo Press in August 1988.

REECE SCANNELL is photographer at Macquarie University. See above for publication details of his book of photographs.

DIANE FAHEY is an Australian poet who has won major awards in Australia, including the Mattara Prize and the Wesley Michel Wright Prize. Her latest collection of poetry was shortlisted for the ABC Bicentennial Poetry Australia Award. Dangaroo Press published her second collection of verse, *Metamorphoses*, in 1988.

KATE WALKER is an Australian writer who is well known for her books for children.

GRAHAM MORT was born in Lancashire in 1955. He works as a writer and creative writing tutor and is Chairperson of the Northern Association of Writers. With Maggie Mort he founded the poetry magazine and press *Giant Steps*. His first book of poems, *A Country on Fire* (1986), was given a major Eric Gregory Award by the Society of Authors. His third collection of poetry, *Sky Burial*, will be published by Dangaroo Press in 1988.