

The Dead in Exile. By YANG LIAN, translated by MABEL LEE.
[Kingston ACT: Tiananmen Publications, 1990. 77 pp.]

The subject of death has understandably been a particular preoccupation of a number of contemporary Chinese poets since the events of June 1989. The poet Bei Dao has dealt with it in his recent poetry in a relatively direct fashion; Duoduo has done so less bluntly. Yang Lian on the other hand writes of death, and especially the deaths of 1989, in a flamboyant and vociferous manner as if he saw himself as a tribune of the people. In the emotional and undoubtedly sincere way in which he portrays and reflects on scenes and consequences of death he adopts extravagant, almost Mayakovskyan tones.

Most of the poems in this collection were composed abroad, and perhaps written all the more intensely for it. The other theme of the volume is thus quite naturally "exile." The title poem "Dead in Exile" incessantly recalls the poet's onerous sense of distance, the dilemma of the exile. At least the exiled writer can find words to express the sense of loss, and of guilt, that is felt. But for how long can such powers of expression remain unaffected by separation from the writer's home? "For me the inseparable bond between language and the land is so crucial that it is impossible for me to believe in world literature," writes Yang Lian. If the opinions of poets are worth anything, perhaps those who deem modern Chinese poetry a mere manifestation of modern world poetry should take note of such protestations.

Once again Mabel Lee has faithfully conveyed the flavour of Yang Lian's originals in her competent translations, and the English is conveniently and properly followed by the text in Chinese. There is a definite need for both original works and good English translations to be published internationally if modern Chinese writing is to survive, let alone thrive, in the current climate. Unfortunately commercial publishers seem unmoved by such cultural needs.

GREGORY LEE

Contemporary Women Writers, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Edited by EVA HUNG. [Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1990. 130 pp. \$9.50.]

It has been said that women writers tend to describe things which either have happened to them or which they have observed in everyday life. Their works are usually exquisite and full of true feelings, though the world they depict is somewhat circumscribed. *Contemporary Women Writers* shows the extremes of this point of view, because this collection of stories by seven authors brings to the readership the colourful societies, as well as the changing attitudes and social structures, of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Persimmons by Peng Cao, the first story in the collection, is a depiction of the hardships of amahs. Through the unconsciously cruel eyes of the narrator, a little girl from a middle-class family in the 1960s, we can see those unfortunates who are too old to continue their work and yet too poor to retire; nevertheless, they are sincere to each