

This Issue of the *Annual*

THE AUS IS GRATEFUL to Ralph Russell for the many items he has contributed to this issue: a letter, a book review, a rejoinder, an interview. The rejoinder, especially, raises some important questions about the interface between literature and society. Can there be a social context for Urdu lyrical poetry (the *ghazal*)? Can it be anchored to discrete and definable time which may then impact upon it in predictable ways through its instruments of culture? In other words, can we read the *ghazal* as a “social document?” Or must poetic imagery remain divorced from social reality? At a deeper level, such questions inevitably render ambivalent, even as they seek to foreground, the very notion of literature’s autonomy in critical discourse. The rejoinder was occasioned by Frances W. Pritchett’s invitation to Ralph Russell to debate the issue with her in the pages of the *AUS*. We could not have asked for more. Pritchett has been grappling with the subject for a long time now, Russell even longer. It is hoped that others will also join them in exploring the subject further, adding their own insights to it. In the meantime, we are happy to announce that starting with the next issue, Ralph Russell has most generously accepted to write for us the story of his long association with Urdu, under the title “Urdu and I.”

To the degree it has been possible, the *AUS* has tried to highlight the writings of a single writer in each of its issues. Thus, since the *Annual*’s relocation to Madison, Ismat Chughtai and Zamiruddin Ahmad were featured in #8, and Ahmed Ali in #9. In this issue we present not one but two special sections: the first on Hasan Manzar, one of Urdu’s finest short story writers; and the other on Urdu itself.

Hasan Manzar, prolific, continually active as a fiction writer, has nevertheless received, regrettably, little critical attention and comment. In the few cases where his presence has been noted, as in *Yatra* 5 (1995), his exuberant creations have been propped up to support ideological agendas as utopian as they are anachronistic (cf. pp. x–xi). Here, then, for the first time ever, we present translations of eight of Hasan Manzar’s short stories. Their refreshing variety, it is hoped, will prove that any attempt at taming or circumscribing the creative vision by foisting extraneous agendas upon it is, essentially, an act of transgression against its nature. The section was made possible by the assistance of Faruq Hassan who agreed to translate more than half the Manzar stories. My gratitude to him makes me the more acutely conscious of an important omission: the exhaustive interview with the author originally planned to lead the section. Ajmal

Kamal, editor of the Karachi-based Urdu quarterly *Āj* and an astute and discriminating reader of world literature, was commissioned to do the interview. When he finished transcribing the work, conducted in Urdu, the political situation in Karachi, which had been steadily deteriorating for some time, suddenly took a turn for the worse. The daily assault on human dignity and sanity, the eruption and escalation of the political culture of violence, it would seem, killed the smallest desire to seek refuge in literature. The senseless daily killings dramatically exposed the vulnerability of literature itself. One is reminded of a line from “Prisoner(s),” a short story by Intizar Husain. Referring to the 1971 carnage in what was then East Pakistan, Javed tells Anwar, “But at least we knew why things were happening—we were at least aware of what was going on.” Can one say as much of Karachi today? When values crumble, when innocent bystanders are mowed down by snipers’ bullets, it’s little wonder if “*yārān farāmūsh kardand ‘ishq*.” Here is a telling passage from Ajmal Kamal’s letter of 29 July: “I can’t tell you when I’d be able to resume normal correspondence. Today, nobody, indeed nothing, is normal in this city any more. Which will come first: death or madness?—that’s the question, but one purely academic. The most bearable of nightmares that assault the mind day and night is to be cut down on the street by a stray bullet. Every other prospect is comparatively more frightening.”

The section on Urdu gelled around two pieces: Ajmal Kamal’s “Censorship in Pakistani Urdu Textbooks” and C.M. Naim’s “The Situation of the Urdu Writer: A Letter from Bara Banki, December 1993 / February 1994.” It sort of grew on its own, somewhat like “*rāhrai ātē rahē aur kārvān bantā gayā*.” The resulting assortment—a collage of sorts, a kaleidoscope of genres—does tell us, in spite of its interrupted rhythms, something of the situation of Urdu in India, Pakistan, and, to a lesser degree, the West. And this section has benefited immeasurably from the willing cooperation of Akeel Bilgrami, Christina Oesterheld, Alok Rai, and Zia Shakeb.

One hears it said from time to time that periodicals—weeklies, monthlies, annuals, or whatever—live or die with their third issue. The first issue is inaugural; it is a birth of sorts, and this in itself stirs excitement and interest. The second issue draws on this initial interest and seeks to further it, while at the same time serving as a kind of platform for working out the editorial and presentational kinks that arise with the first issue. But with the third issue, the novelty has begun to wear off, and the project becomes one of consolidation, reputation, and standard-bearing. This is our third issue of the *Annual* since its relocation to Madison, and now that the work is mostly behind us, we’re heaving a sigh of relief. We’re both thrilled with the support we’ve received from our readership, and confident that we’ve made it past a difficult hurdle. But of course, the work continues. See you next year.

M.U.M.