

Editorial

This issue contains 10 articles, 1 interview, 13 book reviews and 25 poems. It is truly international in scope, as contributors include writers and scholars from various and diverse parts of the world – Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Macao, Malaysia, Singapore, the UK and the USA. It shows that *Asiatic*, although a relatively young journal that has been around for only six years, is gaining in reputation, recognition and influence around the globe – a view that is further reinforced by the journal’s recent inclusion in Elsevier’s Scopus for abstracting and indexing.

The articles in the issue, as always, were selected predominantly through a peer-review process, but some were of course through invitation. It was also our first effort in collaborative work with a conference organiser. The Poetry and Poetics Centre of the University of South Australia organised a conference in November 2011 on Poetry and Poetics of Popular Culture, and we were approached by the conference chair, Dr. Ioana Petrescu, to publish the articles from this conference in a special issue of the journal. I was a little hesitant at first, knowing that the scope of the conference was well beyond the journal’s defined scope, which is limited to Asian Englishes and Asian literature and culture. However, considering that there was much to learn from this collaborative project and that it would bring a new vigour and dynamism to our publication, I accepted the invitation after a bit of Hamletian procrastination (suitably enough, there is an article on *Hamlet* and its popular appeal in this issue). The outcome of this initiative is the five essays listed under “Poetry and Poetics of Popular Culture.” Our initial plan was that Dr. Petrescu would co-edit the issue with me, but this did not materialise as she was held up by other pressing commitments. I would, however, like to thank Dr. Petrescu for creating this valuable link between *Asiatic* and the Poetry and Poetics Centre of the University of South Australia, as well as for all her personal support in putting together this issue.

The five articles in this segment cover a wide range of issues in the field of popular or “pop culture,” from Twitter, comics and graphic novels to popular appropriations of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* on the internet and in various other new media, and there is even an article on wrestling, in which the author vigorously argues for the necessity of developing “in-ring poetics” and considering the sport as an art form. There is also an article on Aboriginal reconciliations in Australia and Canada and how it is viewed by the people differently on the basis of their cultural orientations, and in many cases ends up in a kind of “us”/“them” binary between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of the two societies.

In addition to the five articles on the poetry and poetics of popular culture, we also have an equal number of articles on Asia-Pacific poetry, which bring together poetic works or discourses on poets and poetry from various countries in the region. These articles were mostly solicited to create a forum on the state of poetry in the Asia-Pacific, and to inform readers of some of the major thematic and stylistic preoccupations of contemporary poets in this part of the world. Four of these five articles are by well-recognised and award-winning poets themselves – Dennis Haskell, Boey Kim Cheng, Eddie Tay and Christopher Kelen – while the other is by a reputable Australian academic and scholar of postcolonial poetry, Anne Collett.

In the first article, Australian poet and critic Dennis Haskell reflects on the aims and aesthetics of his own poetry in a world that is largely dominated by pop culture and remains indifferent towards poetry in general. He regrets that poetry remains a neglected art form, mainly because of its deliberate espousal of complexity and an intellectual approach since the beginning of Modernism in the early decades of the twentieth century. He advocates that poetry is meant for the people and should therefore shun intellectual posturing and wilful complexity, and return to its traditional values of simplicity and sharing of the poet's emotion with people in a language accessible to all.

Boey Kim Cheng's article is self-reflective like Haskell's and shares the latter's plaintive tone, but here the cause of anxiety and wistfulness is not from poetry's loss of popular appeal and touch, but instead from a crisis in the poet's personal life arising from his migration from Singapore to Sydney, which has caused a cultural disorientation and a rapture in his poetic imagination, resulting in the gravitation of his work to a poetry of return and homecoming. The essay seeks to identify this moment of change, and traces threads of continuity and the abiding influences which continue to shape his emigrant life and work.

Like Boey Kim Cheng, Eddie Tay is also a migrant poet who has moved from Singapore to Hong Kong, but his piece is not devoted to the experience of re/dis/location and its consequent loss and disjuncture, but rather on how poetry and photography as forms of art help to provide a stay against modern mayhem and technocratic confusion in a bustling metropolis city-state like Hong Kong, and how they help to create meaning in an otherwise arid and rapidly mechanised life in the island nation. In this way, poetry and photography act as cultural productions wherein, the author argues, the everyday life of Hong Kong is made to speak.

Anne Collett's article deals with an anomaly in the case of a New Zealand poet of Maori ancestry, Hone Tuwhare (1922-2008), who was widely acclaimed for his poetic work in his lifetime and was granted multiple awards, including the honours of being named New Zealand's second Te Mata Poet Laureate and one of New Zealand's ten greatest living artists in 2003, and yet his poetry is no longer available in bookshops – indeed, most volumes of his poetry have gone

out of print following his death in 2008. Is this because of the cultural background of the poet, or because of the fact that he was largely an oral poet whose work depended much on tonal variety and natural movement between formal and informal registers, and therefore is not readily suitable for the print medium? The author explores these and other related questions with regard to Hone Tuwhare's poetry in her disquisitive essay.

The last of the five articles in this category is by Christopher Kelen, an Australian poet and national, who has been working as an academic staff at the University of Macau for several years. In the essay, Kelen explores Macao poetry in its various languages – Chinese, Portuguese and English – some of which he has himself translated or co-translated from other languages into English, and shows how the poetry of the place encapsulates its history, identity and culture and helps us to “re-vision” the familiar sights and sounds of the land through the dreams and imaginative filtering/colouring of the poets. The essay covers a wide spectrum of writing from this island nation, which has a long history of occupation and colonisation and has recently been turned into the gambling Mecca of the East.

The issue also features an interview with a young Singaporean poet, Theophilus Kwek, who is only eighteen years old but has already published a volume of poetry, several pieces in journals and anthologies, and has a second book to come out shortly. In the interview, this precocious poet discusses various serious issues about his writing as well as providing an insightful window on to the Singapore literary scene, which I believe will impress any reader and instil a favourable view not only of this poet prodigy, who possesses a wisdom beyond his years, but also about the state of literature and English writing in Singapore in general.

The review section has thirteen items, including reviews of: Malaysian writer Kee Thuan Chye's best seller, *No More Bullshit, Please, We're All Malaysians*, reviewed by Pauline Newton, a regular contributor to the journal; South Australian poet Ioana Petrescu's third collection of poetry, *Persuading Plato*, reviewed by George Polley, an American currently based in Sapporo, Japan, and also a regular contributor to this journal; and Theophilus Kwek's debut collection of poetry, *They Speak Only Our Mother Tongue*, reviewed by Singapore academic Angus Whitehead, who has also conducted the interview with Kwek discussed above and has, moreover, contributed a second review for the issue on an anthology of Singapore writing: Daren Shiau and Lee Wei Fen, eds., *Coast: Fifty Three Works Titled Coast; A Mono-titular Anthology of Singapore Writing*.

There is also a review by Andrew Ng of Korean-Australian poet Dan Disney's debut collection of poetry, *and then when the*, and an edited volume of critical essays from a conference organised by the Australian Asian Studies Association, held in Sri Lanka in 2008, *Change – Conflict and Convergence: Austral-Asian Scenarios*, reviewed by Dieter Riemenschneider, a member of the advisory

board of the journal. There are several other book reviews in the issue, mostly of works by writers from Malaysia and Singapore, but instead of listing them here, let me take the opportunity to thank a few people (in addition to the members of the Editorial Committee and the Advisory Board) who have been regularly supportive of the journal: Andrew Ng (Malaysia), Angus Whitehead (Singapore), Carol Leon (Malaysia), Eddie Tay (Hong Kong), Fakrul Alam (Bangladesh), Gillian Dooley (Australia), Joel Gwynne (Singapore), Katherine Hayford (Australia), Murari Prasad (India), Paoi Hwang (UK), Pauline Newton (USA), Ruzy Suliza Hashim (Malaysia), Santhini Pillai (Malaysia), Satish Aikant (India), Shakila Abdul Manan (Malaysia), Sukhbir Singh (India) and Susan Philip (Malaysia).

In the poetry section, we have works by virtuosic poets such as Dennis Haskell, Syd Harrex, Kaiser Haq, Muhammad Samad and Anges Lam as well as relatively new poets such as Christopher Kelen, Jennifer Jeremiah and Md. Rezaul Haque. We are publishing Muhammad Samad, Jennifer Jeremiah and Md. Rezaul Haque for the first time; the others we have published before. Muhammad Samad is a distinguished Bengali poet and his three poems in the issue were originally written in Bengali. They were later translated into English by two reputable translators of Bengali literature, Professor Fakrul Alam and the late Professor Kabir Chowdhury.

I hope, on the whole, that readers will find the issue rich, engaging and stimulating.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the Honourable Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia, Professor Dato' Dr. Zaleha Kamaruddin, and the Dean of the Kulliyah (Faculty) of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, Professor Emeritus Dato' Paduka Dr. Mahmood Zuhdi Hj. Ab. Majid, for their continuous support and extensive constructive advice in running of the journal.

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