Kunapipi 32 (1&2) 2010, Contents, Editorial

Abstract

This journal article is available in Kunapipi: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol32/iss1/2
KUNAPIPI
Journal of Postcolonial Writing & Culture

VOLUME XXXII NUMBER 1–2
2010
Kunapipi is a biannual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with notes gathered at the end, and should conform to the Harvard (author-date) system. Submissions should be in the form of a Word or Rich Text Format file sent by email attachment to acollett@uow.edu.au. Image files should be high resolution tif format and submitted on compact disc if larger than 1mb. Please include a short biography, address and email contact.

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Individual: 1 year AUD $60.00
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Internet: http://www.kunapipi.com

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ISSN 0106-5734
Five-Year Subscriptions
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Acknowledgements
Kunapipi is published with assistance from the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the European branch of the Association and the Faculty of Arts University of Wollongong.

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Chandran Nair’s poems have been reproduced from reaching for stones: collected poems (1963–2009) (Ethos Books, Singapore 2010) with permission of the author.

Merlinda Bobis’ short story has been previously published in Heat, 5, (1997) and in White Turtle (Spinifex: North Melbourne, 1999). It is reprinted here with permission of the author and with revisions by the author.

Front Cover:
Mai Nguyen-Long, Keala (2008), papier mâché mongrel dog (avian mesh frame), 85 x 40 x 46cm, (courtesy of the artist and Casula Powerhouse), one of the twelve imaginary mongrels created by the artist for the installation, Pho Dog.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.
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EDITORIAL

As Paul Sharrad explains at the beginning of his article (rather mysteriously entitled, ‘Sang Kanchil meets Sime Darby’), this issue grew out of an invitation to scholars of Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Wollongong to attend a conference at the Universiti Sains Malaysia on Postcolonial Literature of the Asia-Pacific region. Some of the articles in the issue are versions of papers given at the conference (in September 2010), but I took this opportunity to expand from what was primarily a Malaysian nucleus into the larger region that I have nominated ‘South-East Asia’ (including within these covers, Vietnam, Singapore, The Philippines and The Sulu-Sulawesi Seas).

I was surprised at how little I knew about the literature of the region in which I live, even of the literature produced within my own country — in part because so much of the literature written and performed in languages other than English in Australia is ‘less seen’ (in Boitrân Huỳnh-Beattie’s words) and ‘less heard’. Yet not only oral cultures, but literary cultures in numerous languages are a vibrant part of a nation that is mistakenly perceived to be monolingual (by outsiders, but also by a large portion of its citizens). This is a nation of indigenous peoples who spoke many languages (although many of them are now spoken by very few), and a nation of migrants many of whom speak a language in addition to English, or if they do not, have a parent or grandparent who does.

Although I speak and read only English with any fluency, I grew up hearing Greek, Italian, Chinese and unexpectedly perhaps, Latvian. The vocabulary of music lessons was Italian, and the language of ballet lessons, French. French was also the language of choice during the years of my high school education, German coming in well behind in second place, something that changed radically during the period of my own children’s education in which Asian languages dominated. I have also been a member of a choir for most of my life, the words of the music sung in a huge range of languages; so yes I am ‘monolingual’, but no, the everyday world I inhabit is not and never has been.

What I did not realise was the extent of literature published in Australia, written in languages other than English. Particularly exciting then is the publication in this issue of work by Vietnamese Australian poets, in the language of their composition — Vietnamese, and in the language of translation, English. Trần Lộc Bình speaks of the poet, ‘confined in the prison of words’ and when he is utterly desperate, he attempts suicide:

He put his head into the noose dangling from the ceiling of the cell
The noose was braided with words, including many foreign words
He was not dead

The poet resolves to eat himself, from the bottom up — ‘legs, groin, abdomen...’ — until only his head remains — but what to do? ‘He cannot bite, chew and swallow his nose, eyes, ears, forehead, chin, nape and skull’, but he can eat his
lips and tongue. Now he is scared for the first time for even if he eats his lips and tongue he is still not dead and not dead means ‘He will continue to live with a head made of words, scrawny, lonely and silent’. A head full of silent words — words that cannot be spoken or heard is a scary thought — a lonely thought. So the poet decides he must keep his lips ‘to smile and kiss (if possible)’ (these actions do not require words but might alleviate the poet’s loneliness); and he decides he must keep his tongue, ‘To talk, cry and swear, when necessary’. The poet must utter. Whether we hear him or her is a matter of listening, whether we understand, is a matter of translation. Some words require more translation than others. All translation requires effort and the desire for connection.

Many of the contributions to this issue of Kunapipi reveal, in the words of Dolores Herrero, how the multiple histories that circulate in different societies or communities ‘overlap, intersect and compete with one another’:

They can be neither fused into a singular national (or any other kind of) narrative nor completely separated from one another or from their own particular contexts. Hence the need to create ethical discourses that incorporate the stories, desires and frustrations of the multitude of people who make up this global communitas. (238)

I hope that Kunapipi is a kind of communitas, and I here thank all the people who work to make it such: thank you to Greg Ratcliffe, Carmel Pass, Gerard Toomey, Sarah-Jane Burton, and all the academics who so willingly give their time to participate in the (unpaid but much appreciated) scholarly review process.

Anne Collett