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Introduction

Catherine Batt

Elleke Boehmer

John McLeod

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Introduction

Abstract

This special issue of *Kunapipi* is a tribute to the work and career of Professor Shirley Chew, who retires in June 2003 as Professor of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures in the School of English, University of Leeds, UK. She has occupied the Chair at Leeds since 1993, but her association with the School of English dates from 1974. Along with other scholars at Leeds, such as Arthur Ravenscroft, William Walsh, Lynette Hunter and David Richards – and in association with international figures such as the late Anna Rutherford – Shirley has dedicated her academic career to the teaching, researching and promoting of literatures in English from Commonwealth countries.

CATHERINE BATT, ELLEKE BOEHMER AND JOHN MCLEOD

Introduction

This special issue of *Kunapipi* is a tribute to the work and career of Professor Shirley Chew, who retires in June 2003 as Professor of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures in the School of English, University of Leeds, UK. She has occupied the Chair at Leeds since 1993, but her association with the School of English dates from 1974. Along with other scholars at Leeds, such as Arthur Ravenscroft, William Walsh, Lynette Hunter and David Richards — and in association with international figures such as the late Anna Rutherford — Shirley has dedicated her academic career to the teaching, researching and promoting of literatures in English from Commonwealth countries.

This rich diversity of essays, memoirs, poems, and impressionistic fragments has been specially commissioned from Shirley's colleagues, former students, co-editors and collaborators, and many friends, to mark her retirement and celebrate her unique achievement in the field of Commonwealth and post-colonial literatures. Shirley's remarkable, often fierce, and demanding, yet always generous attention to both the politics and the aesthetics of the literatures in English, has touched the lives and work of many over the years. These writings bear witness to those valued interventions and, we hope, take them into interesting, or unprecedented creative and reflective directions.

Born in 1938, Shirley Chew was educated at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Singapore. A graduate of the National University of Singapore and Oxford University, she arrived in Leeds in 1974. She expected to stay only for one academic year; instead, Leeds was to become her home. The late D.J. Enright wittily recalls these early years in his contribution, 'Curriculum, Curricula'. As a teacher of generations of undergraduates and the supervisor of numerous doctoral theses in the area of Commonwealth and post-colonial literatures at Leeds, Shirley has guided and inspired a wealth of students from around the world, many of whom have proceeded to work centrally in the area. She has also acted as editor of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (1992–1996) and *Kunapipi* (1997–1999), arguably the two most important academic journals in the field. Numerous contributors to each have benefited from her editorial excellence and wisdom over the years. In addition, she has edited several important books which include *Unbecoming Daughters of the Empire* (1993, with Anna Rutherford), *Into the Nineties: Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1994, with Anna Rutherford and Lars Jensen), *Borderblur: Poetry and Poetics in Contemporary Canadian Literature* (1996, with Lynette Hunter) and *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics* (1999, with Alistair Stead) which



Shirley Chew

(Photo: Courtesy of Catherine Batt, June 1996)

includes her celebrated essay on V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987). Her most recent success, which Nima Poovaya-Smith vividly describes in a memoir of their long-standing collaboration and friendship, has been to launch an important new journal, *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings* (2001), a project she conceived and of which she is General Editor. In addition to these achievements, Shirley has maintained her research interests in Victorian and Twentieth-Century English literature — interests which have fed back into her post-colonial preoccupations. A new edition of Arthur Hugh Clough's *Selected Poems* (1987), which she edited for Carcanet, is about to appear.

Importantly, through her editorial work for journals like *Moving Worlds* and *Kunapipi* and her support of bodies such as Yorkshire Arts, Shirley has energetically championed, encouraged and published the work of many creative figures — poets, novelists, dramatists and artists. Indeed, her selfless, often tireless promotion of the very best creative endeavours by artists from a variety of countries with a history of colonialism speaks volumes about the nature of her commitment to the field of Commonwealth and post-colonial studies, and many important creative artists — not only those collected in this issue — are quick to acknowledge the debt they owe to Shirley.

While this festschrift features a broad heterogeneity of topics, styles, and critical approaches, there are probably three key link-elements which match or map onto Shirley Chew's achievements. The first element relates to the collection's sheer diversity, which speaks eloquently of the generosity of Shirley's critical perceptions, and her wide-ranging interests. For her there are no limits to where the post-colonial imagination may reach, or which territories, cultures and networks it may seek to embrace, which boundaries it may cross or 'blur'. The second element concerns the interesting recursive loop characterising several of the contributions whereby the personal — memories of birth and friendship, moments of reading pleasure or of self-division — becomes a lens through which to focalise theoretical and critical concepts relating to representative post-colonial experiences; or in which those concepts are used to illuminate aspects of debates around identity and self-definition. The third element constitutes the crucial cross-over between creative and critical practice, which many of the essays here enact or think through.

Inspired by Shirley's lifelong engagement with both creative and critical accomplishments, a number of the contributions take as their theme the interrelationships between creative and critical acts — in fact, this may be regarded as the overarching theme of the collection. Rather than conceiving of the critical act as dependent upon or subsequent to a creative work of the imagination — or, contrariwise, the creative text as an antecedent to critical thought — this collection engages with the many ways in which the dynamics of creativity and criticism function multifariously within *both* critical and creative texts. It explores such questions as: in what ways might a poem or memoir

establish a critical consciousness about its own production or the creative works of others? Can the writing of a creative piece of work be considered to engender a critical reading of an existing text, historical situation, or tradition? In what ways do creative texts constitute their own kinds of critical consciousness which contribute, but are not irreducible, to the institutions and practices of 'cultural criticism'? To what extent is scholarly translation creative? In what ways might creative writing act as a form of critical reading? How might a response to a painting or a photograph inspire the critical consciousness of a creative artist? Is it possible to distinguish absolutely between creativity and critique?

These issues are, at one level, theoretical; but the contributors explore such dynamics in practice. Poetry becomes a space for critical consideration of both reading and writing. Romesh Gunsekera's poem 'Second Reading' celebrates the 'illuminated page'; Steven Matthews's 'Amours De Non-Voyage' pays tribute to Shirley by wittily engaging with Arthur Hugh Clough's 'Amours De Voyage' (1858); while in 'She Travelled', Elizabeth Cook hauntingly traces childhood recollections in a revisiting of places past. The conventional critical essay connects with the memoir as a means of exposing the fertile conjunction of creative and critical impulses, as in Elleke Boehmer's searching critique of the 'chromatics of identity' in apartheid South Africa. Recalling how Shirley once encouraged her to write of her childhood, Meenakshi Mukherjee too offers a recollection of her time as a lecturer which, although in a very different cultural context to that of Leeds, resonates intriguingly with Shirley's experience. John McLeod brings together the personal, the creative and the critical from another perspective in his reflections on the literature of post-colonial London.

South Asia has been a key area of Shirley's academic and intellectual interests. Appropriately, several critical essays engage with the history and culture of the region. Ranjana Sidhanta Ash explores the cultural politics of the translation of women's writings in Indian vernaculars into English. Alex Tickell's essay excavates how S.M. Mitra and S.K. Ghosh's 'informative romances' negotiate a transnational yet patriotic collaboration with the British Raj. In a characteristically photographic piece, Mick Gidley investigates the interplay of mirrors, memories and camera lenses in Mukul Kesavan's fiction. Githa Hariharan soberly investigates V.S. Naipaul's political responsibilities along the trajectories of the Indian and Caribbean diasporas. A Caribbean theme is central to the essay by David Fairer, which re-reads James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* in the light of twenty-first century views of this eighteenth-century poem. David Richards dwells upon Derek Walcott's painterly responses to the art of Watteau as a way of engaging with the Caribbean poet's historical sensibilities.

The rapport between creative and critical purposes lies at the heart of Stuart Murray and Lynette Hunter's post-colonial readings of Tim Winton and Frank Davey respectively. Befitting Shirley's enthusiasm for transcultural writings and exchanges, there are contributions which also engage with British and European

literatures. John Barnard's essay looks at Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* as a self-reflexive meditation on critical reading in a secular age, while Alistair Stead interprets Henry Green's 1920s English novels as a relentless quest for a creative-critical idiom. Catherine Batt looks at how a Middle English romance, *Sir Orfeo*, in constituting itself as a critical reading of a classical myth, itself becomes part of a creative vernacular dynamic. Finally, Inga-Stina Ewbank, in 'Open to Encounters', discusses translation as an always inadequate and yet powerfully responsive act.

Ultimately therefore, this issue collectively questions the binary of creative *contra* critical, as well as exposing the ways in which each term is cross-hatched with the other — replacing the cutting edge of the virgule (creative/critical) with the engendering passage of the hyphen (creative-critical). It aims to offer no final theory but rather a range of practices which demonstrate ultimately the myriad ways in which the creative-critical relationship has been, and can be, excitingly re-configured.

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