

EnterText volume 5 number 3

Introduction

EnterText is an interdisciplinary journal with a wide range of interests and concerns, but one of its more surprising aspects as it completes its first five years is the way it is attracting submissions from individuals who are themselves exemplars of a distinctive intellectual diversity and cultural hybridity. It is pleasing to see how the journal is developing in this respect, its richness and variety providing a counter to the tendency to compartmentalise and become ever narrower, which both some academic journals and some personal and political philosophies exemplify. As editor, one has no idea what will be offered, particularly for an Open Issue. The contributors to this one are connected with many countries, and work in research areas which often could hardly have been guessed at. It all makes a stimulating reminder of the connectedness of what we do, as inquirers, and the uniqueness of what we are, as people.

In this issue, for example, the reader will find an Iraqi, who has taught for many years in Canada and is now teaching in Saudi Arabia, addressing the Trinidadian-born, Indian-descended writer V. S. Naipaul. An eighteenth-century American woman novelist is the topic of a Turkish woman now living in Milwaukee. A Japanese, British-raised writer is tackled by a Chinese, American-educated woman now working in Taiwan. An Emeritus Professor from North Carolina who has strong links with China and Scandinavia describes using early Chinese poetry to teach today's creative writing students. A Lebanon-born, Catholic-educated woman working in Sydney critiques and

translates the first lesbian novel in Arabic. A lecturer in Kuwait writes about the court of Britain's first Hanoverian king.... I could go on. Here are also a Fulbright scholar working in Malaysia on the creative use of the new digital technologies, a former recipient of a Fulbright award in Tel Aviv who is a poet and professor at a Jewish university in New York, a young Italian-American writer who has studied in the UK, and a poet from Martinique who has won prizes not only from Casa de las Americas in Cuba but from Macedonia and Lebanon. We have a man who lectures in Women's Studies and writes about political philosophy. And we have our first contributions from Bangladesh, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and our first in French-Caribbean Creole. We are proud that such an interesting bunch of people have entrusted us with their work, and hope that they are pleased with those they come to rub shoulders with in the pages of *EnterText*.

Indeed, in this issue the representation of the international Muslim world—not just the Umma (the Islamic faith community) but the wider realm of intercultural connections amongst those with a personal or ancestral Muslim tradition—is particularly unexpected and gratifying. In the West it is normal to understand that there are many different versions of Christian faith and that Western culture is shaped by a Christian tradition which affects all those living in Western-oriented societies (wherever in the world they may be and whatever their personal beliefs may be), but on the other hand, the vigour of stereotypical, negative perceptions of Islam in the West has probably never been stronger. The various and thought-provoking contributions to this issue by people connected to what are perceived as “Muslim countries” are a powerful reminder that the lives being lived within or close to Islam are as various as those related to Christian tradition. As, for instance, contemporary Western political discourse moves to entrench

the idea of Iran as a retrograde, “medieval” and “dangerous” theocracy, it behoves us to keep alive an awareness of some salient facts tending in a different direction, for instance that it is a country where 65% of university students are women.

It is perhaps predictable that creative work is likely to be highly diverse. What is less common in scholarly journals, however, is diversity between items of academic work. In this issue we have ten very different essays, from different fields and representing different approaches, and creative work from five people, including work in translation. The issue opens with an essay which tackles some core questions of political economy. Robert Carley inventively deploys not only Heidegger but Brecht, to expose “the postmodern materialism of high corporate finance as a kind of ontological container for technological progress, the development of productive machine technologies, dead labour, and the positing of living labour through the extension of the horizon of capital across the globe.” This is followed by an historical study of a little-known detail of eighteenth-century British history, the presence of two Turkish servants at the side of George I. Khaled Aljenfawi investigates contemporary discourse about them, and considers their complex positioning as an abject Other which served to deflect criticism of George himself. The eighteenth-century theme continues, but now on the other side of the Atlantic, with Ayse Naz Bulamur’s study of Hannah Webster Foster’s novel *The Coquette*, which is seen as eschewing a moralistic single perspective to present multiple voices and points of view on the position of women in America at the time. Another woman-authored iconic work of similar period, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, is Emily Anderson’s topic in the following essay, in which she too focuses on multiple points of view. The narrators’ testimony leads only to the conclusion that language is ultimately

unreliable and “incapable of representing the most subjective of states,” hence the anxiety of the gothic novel in its quest for expression.

There is then a group of works with a poetic dimension. First are poems from two American poets, Jay Ladin and Robert Klein Engler, dealing, among other things, with ageing, followed by two essays about poetry arriving at very different poetics from a related source. Christopher Funkhouser helps the reader to an understanding of the digital poetry of John Cayley who creates interactive texts, sometimes drawing on ancient Chinese texts, while J. Gill Holland illustrates the usefulness of the poetics of other early Chinese texts as examples to creative writing students working in English today.

The far-eastern theme continues with Chu-chueh Cheng’s essay on Ishiguro which considers his testing of myths and stereotypes in a range of novels. Ishiguro has drawn famously on his own plural heritage as a British-raised writer of Japanese descent, but the focus here is on his conversion of the transience of popular culture’s media representations into the permanence of literary texts. The essay argues that it is “from an insider-outsider’s double vision that [he] detects the fictionalization of national/racial myths, challenges the validity of metonymic presumptions, and exposes the emptiness of cultural signifiers.” The work that follows is a glimpse of a new writer also drawing on her own multiple cultural influences and looking beyond and through them. Ann-Marie Vazzano is a young Italian-American whose autobiography addresses the family history which has shaped her sense of self.

Feminine identities of several kinds are the preoccupation of the group of works which follow. Samar Habib both writes about and translates an excerpt from the first lesbian novel in Arabic, by Lebanese novelist Elham Mansour. She looks particularly at

the reception of the work in middle-eastern reviews and reflects on its pioneering nature. Sanna Dhahir's essay examines the representation of the feminine in a very different writer, a man against whose texts a charge of misogyny is often levelled, the Trinidad-born, Indian-descended Nobel Prize-winning novelist V. S. Naipaul. The essay focuses on his collection *In A Free State* in which, it argues, the male quest for freedom is thwarted by the archetypal feminine, associated with death. The Caribbean theme continues with another woman poet, one who writes in Creole and French, Nicole Cage-Florentiny from Martinique, whose perspective is very different from Naipaul's. Her work tends to focus on the ongoing Caribbean experience of poverty, on racial injustice, international solidarity, and the ongoing problematics relating to a history of slavery.

Her two poems, offered here in Creole, French, and English translation, bring us to the final work of this collection, an essay by Iftekhar Sayeed of Bangladesh, which presents a thoughtful and perhaps controversial argument about the different meanings of freedom to different cultures in a wide-ranging discussion which draws on political economy, philosophy and a range of cultural references, beginning and ending with Tagore. He proposes that in the West the concept of freedom is defined in terms of individual freedom, whereas in the East the concept is a collective one. He traces this to way the West has been shaped by the history of slavery, producing a focus on the individual. The different colonial histories of Asia have, he asserts, allowed their ancient cultures' emphasis on collective interests to survive.

We invite our readers to respond to any of these items. Our Forum awaits your messages, however brief. The name of our journal, *EnterText*, was chosen not just because it suited the way we publish, entering texts online, but because we invite our

readers to join in, entering their own texts, and creating an ongoing dialogue, with each other and with the writers concerned. This is one of the beauties of the web: it is never finished.

The three issues which make up *EnterText* Volume 5 exhibit a fine eclecticism. There are illustrations of art-works in several media, not just text-based, but works in photography and clay, and a survey of an architectural tradition. There are essays on political philosophy, history and many aspects of culture. A number of essays relate to film or literature, but with a particular interest in secondary aspects such as portrayals of cultural identity involving race or gender or sexuality, or social dimensions such as exclusion or censorship. We have essays on all kinds of cultural production, from the museum to the pop concert, in widely different parts of the world, embracing not only Europe but the Americas and Asia, Africa and Australia. Rarely are the essays we publish about one thing only, unlike many of those in journals with a narrow academic focus. As mentioned above, those who offer us their work are often boundary-crossers in their personal and academic and creative lives. We received, for instance, an interesting and scholarly paper about eighteenth-century British silver from someone who used to work in the New York stock exchange (and hope at some point to be sent its revised version). Who could have imagined that contributor? The story of those who submit work which does not, for various reasons, appear in *EnterText* is something else again. We are constantly surprised and delighted by what our readers send in to us.

Some may regard attempts at intercultural connections as futile and inherently unscholarly. We at *EnterText* repudiate the idea of the academy as a kind of centrifuge, in which ever more isolation attends upon ever more esoteric inquiry. We are committed to

the rigour of scholarship, of course. But we are also openly interested in unforeseeable connections, in contact between those working in different fields and in different parts of the world, and in reaching out to a range of readers which would have been unthinkable at any earlier point of world history. The diversity of what we publish is, we believe, our strength, because it is there that readers will find stimulus, challenge, and the new. We trust that while we are offered and can publish items and groups of items which our readers, like ourselves, will respond to with a gasp of surprise, then we are unlikely to stray far from our mission.

Paula Burnett, Editor