Susan Hosking, Rick Hosking, Rebecca Pannell & Nena Bierbaum Eds.

*Something Rich & Strange* was conceived at the 2005 Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English (CRNLE) conference, held on Kangaroo Island, with many of its ‘chapters’ evolving from papers presented there. The unifying theme and setting is the littoral—that margin between land and ocean, in which a variety of encounters and activities can take place; where all manner of things might wash up on the shore or take root in the imagination.

Contributors were asked to consider various kinds of contact and sea change when preparing their papers. The variety of subjects generated by the theme is quite surprising. The 1975 movie *Jaws* features in one paper entitled ‘Sharks and the Australian Imaginary’, and then in another one can read about Errol Flynn and his relationship with the sea. There are also papers about European arrivals and first contact with Indigenous inhabitants, shipwrecks, massacres, and the history of the Australian beach holiday.

There are papers that focus on Kangaroo Island, such as Margaret Allen’s ‘Otim Singh in White Australia’. Otim Singh migrated from India to Australia in 1890 and was a store owner and respected member of the community for many years at Kingscote. He married the daughter of a Hog Bay farmer and lived in Australia for nearly forty years. The chapter includes interesting photographs of Mr. Singh and his Kingscote store. Rick Hosking’s paper also looks to Kangaroo Island and William Cawthorne’s novel *The Islanders* (1865-66), later reprinted as *The Kangaroo Islanders: A Story of South Australia Before Colonization 1823* in 1926.

A selection of poems is included. Graham Rowland’s ‘Poems’ is a short sequence beginning with ‘The Seacave’ and ending with ‘Sea Mullet’. In between, there are crabs, dunes and a sting-ray – caught, de-spiked and then released back into ocean. Heather Taylor Johnson’s poem ‘What Was and Is and Shall Not Be’ compresses ten years of a relationship into 42 lines and creates a sea change of emotions from a little sea, sand, coconut sweat and sunscreen. The gaiety of its opening stanza moves like a wave, building intensity, then darkening toward a crashing conclusion. Stephen Muecke writes about ‘Indian Ocean Poetry’ and John McLaren reveals the dangers of reading skua poetry. Although most of the poetry is sequentially organized, it would have been useful to have it grouped together in a clearly defined and labeled poetry section.

Naturally, the chapters in this collection are written in an academic style, having started as conference papers. The collection as a whole will appeal to an academic audience and individual chapters will draw their readership according to interest in the themes and subjects they explore. It is not a light reading experience but there are entertaining moments and surprising topics to hold one’s interest. The littoral as a setting has sparked the imaginations of the contributors in sometimes startling ways, culminating in a diverse collection. It is a theme that has potential for further exploration that could well generate another volume.

*Debra Zott*