

**Elin-Maria Evangelista, Anna McDonald and Nishani Perera (eds.), *Verge 2010: Other Places* (Monash University, Melbourne)**

*Verge 2010: Other Places* opens with an excerpt from Baudelaire's *Voyaging*: 'Tell us, what have you seen?' he implores, an appropriate supplication for the introduction to an anthology dealing with loss, desire, loneliness, discovery and 'the hope of finding a place to belong.'

*Verge* is Monash University's annual anthology of short fiction. First published in 2005, the project has grown over the years into its present incarnation: a professional vehicle for creative writing by emerging writers from within the university. Continuing the partnership with Ilura Press forged in 2008, *Verge 2010* represents the publication's transmutation from a wholly undergraduate-run and managed vehicle to a postgraduate editorship with professional assistance. With mature scope and reflectiveness, *Verge 2010* approaches the theme of *Other Places* by incorporating fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction and memoir into a single anthology that examines the implications of travel and transition of place.

The foreword by editors Elin-Maria Evangelista, Anna McDonald and Nishani Perera is structured as a kind of editorial dialogue about the personal nature of the relationship to travel. This leads into Angelika Nikolov-Arvela's 'The Bridge', which, at first glance, reads like a contemporary incarnation of the story of 'Three Billy Goats Gruff'. A man and a girl haggle over the price of admission to a non-specific European town. She wants to visit, he refuses on the basis that she does not belong there. As her imaginary ties to the town are tested, so is the reader's understanding of 'belonging' and the concept of 'home' deconstructed. Thus Nikolov-Arvela's story neatly sets the tone for the collection to follow.

*Verge 2010* contains short pieces of memoir, creative non-fiction, poetry and fiction. With the exception of the poetry, the classification of these pieces is not altogether clear, however this elision between the categories of prose echoes the dilemmas facing many of the characters in the contained narratives. They recognise the slipperiness of those predefined boundaries around places and experiences. In this way, the very structure of the collection reflects its thematic concerns. The poetry selections are particularly evocative. 'Migrants' by Pam Ingram for example, invokes the imagery of the sea in order to build a feeling of nostalgia in the reader:

Leaving is a gradual dismantling –  
bone by bone  
our houses fall.

Many of the pieces in this anthology trace this sense of dismantling: the physical and emotional displacement that comes from emigration, whether forced or voluntary; the disorientation that occurs upon arrival (Ian Morely's 'Stand Under Us, Don't Understand Us' presents itself almost as an embrace of this disorientation); and the profound longing and sense of loss that accompanies settling in a new place. Of particular interest is the peculiar destabilisation of the sense of self that comes not from the other places themselves, but from the act of moving through them. Above

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all, these stories deal with that pervading sense of *otherness* that accompanies expedition, the negotiation of that *otherness*, and the persistent desire to belong: to find somewhere that feels like home.

In his contribution 'Second to the Right and Straight On Till Morning', Adib Kahn addresses this feeling of 'home', discussing that 'pervasive emotional tension between the tangible reality of living *here* and recalling *there*' in a reflective piece that invites comparison to the expat dilemmas elucidated in Salman Rushdie's 'Imaginary Homelands'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this relationship of place to memory and imagination is a thread that runs throughout the collection. Kahn's narrator finds refuge in memory; others do not react so positively. Damien Stepon's protagonist in 'Clouds' for example, forces uncomfortable and tragic revelations through his desire to reconnect with the place that, in his memory, constitutes 'home'.

It is perhaps within those pieces that present themselves as memoir that some of the most confident writing is to be found. Piers Gooding's observations of the Canadian wilderness are evocative and moving, while Bryony Cosgrove's experiences in New York inject a welcome bite of humour into the reading. There is also the occasional curve-ball: Gabriel García Ochoa's 'The House On Elm Street' is an unexpected break from theme – its literal interpretation, at least – while Shawn Murphy's 'A Brown Leaf Turns' takes the focus on displacement from broad international leaps into a much more domestic sphere. Dash Jayasurita's 'Cherry Blossom' is a particularly intimate and moving portrayal of cultural disconnect that hints at the broader picture and yet maintains this inward focus to subtle but profound ends.

In this edition, *Verge* has opened its doors to a handful of established writers to keep company with those emerging. As well as Kahn, Chris Wallace-Crabbe and John Hawke both contribute previously unpublished poetry selections that complement the tone of the anthology. Ultimately, however, *Verge* is a platform on which emerging writers may find an audience for their work. The 2010 edition offers a selection of promising writers and intriguing, engaging prose.

### **Stephanie Honor Convery**

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<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1989).<sup>2</sup>

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