

# Lee Kuan Yew

## 1978 National Rally Day Speech



“A person who gets deculturalised- and I nearly was, so I know this danger- loses his self confidence... I may speak the English language better than the Chinese language because I learnt English early in life. But I will never be an Englishman in a thousand generations and I have not got the Western value system inside; mine is an Eastern value system. Nevertheless, I use Western concepts, Western words because I understand them.”

# ***Contemporary Asian Australian Poets***

2018 Annual Conference #Let's Create

Standard Module A & EAL/D Module B: Language, Identity and Culture

Angelina Bea (Liverpool Boys High School)

K.A.Bea (2018)



# *Common features of the poems*

- All show an aspect of the migrant voice (displacement, cultural heritage, relocation, disconnection, etc)
- Simple in structure, theme and language
- Quiet and casual in tone
- Vocalised from the perspective of a singular subjectivity (personal tone)
- Poets work hard at crafting the movement of syntax across line breaks
- Short verse line is preferred

# Merlinda Bobis

## ‘This is where it begins’



- Bobis composed this poem for her acceptance speech for the 2006 Philippine Gawad Balagtas Award, a national award that she received for her poetry and fiction in Filipino, Bikol and English.
- The poem first appeared in a journal in the US, it was then included in the anthology ‘Contemporary Asian-Australian poets’, and is now among the 75 poems published in her latest poetry book ‘Accidents of Composition’. The poem was published under the new title ‘Each Other’s Arc’.

- **Key ideas of the poem:** the act and cultural significance of storytelling (the intergenerational connections), the role of memory and its effect on identity, the effect and importance of words and language for individuals living in a community
- Overall, it is a poem that shows appreciation for her culture and tradition
- Note: simple language features (proper nouns, verbs, enjambment, alliteration & repetition)

- The human body parts (eyes, lips, ears and hands) work in harmony throughout the poem, woven through each stanza to establish a strong connection between the persona's childhood memories and the reality of the present.

<p><i>Eyes (Ojos)</i> <i>Story (Imagination)</i></p>	<p><i>Lips (Labios)</i> <i>Word</i></p>	<p><i>Hands (Manos)</i> <i>Gesture (Actions)</i></p>
<p>'how they conjure ghosts under the bed' – stanza 5</p> <p>'all our eyes collect into singular seeing' – stanza 9</p>	<p>'we tell it over and over again' 'how they make ghosts speak'- stanza 5</p> <p>'or that little tickle when a word hits a hidden crevice in the ear' stanza 7</p>	<p>'Father gesturing' –stanza 6</p> <p>'Between the hand and the pen' – stanza 8</p> <p>'our hands follow each other's arc, each sweep of resolve' stanza 9</p>



# Eileen Chong My Hakka Grandmother

- Published in Chong's 2012 novel 'Burning Rice'.
- The poem is an autobiographical piece addressed to her grandmother who was born in the Hakka community in Canton.
- Using the architecture of the world-heritage Hakka houses, the poem cleverly invites responders to journey with the persona through the imaginary pursuit of her historical culture.



- This imaginary encounter with her grandmother highlights both the complexities of migration (foreign place) & the subtleties of her personal, social and cultural identity. The absence of her grandmother's voice implies disconnection, establishing distance that is not only through time, but through geography and language.

- ***Language:***

Auxiliary verbs. In the first stanza, 'could' is used as a past conditional, complemented by 'If'. 'Would' is repeated continuously throughout each stanza except the last, signalling the desire of the persona to experience her imaginings with her grandmother, while also weighing up the possibilities of such an encounter in this imaginary world

Irony: The final stanza is particularly significant because of its abrupt ending. After attempting to make a connection with her grandmother, the persona confesses 'we are guest people without land or name...wild birds seeking a place to call home'. It is ironic in the sense that the whole poem has attempted to communicate connection to history, to culture, to place and to significant people & yet the persona is moving further and further away from this identity.



- Verbs & adjectives: Usage of verbs and adjectives strengthen the meaning and expression of nouns in the poem. For example, in stanza 1, **'feet unbound** and **pummelling** the ground'. The adjective 'unbound' connotes the ancient Chinese tradition of women binding their feet. Here, with the persona, the grandmother, as a younger person, is free to run through the fields. They run so fast and hard as if to 'pummel' the ground. The present participle 'pummelling', not only assists with the image of both characters running, but also connects strongly with time, and the persona's wish to bring her present self into the past
- Synaesthesia: The entire poem relies on the senses to communicate the deep emotional experiences of the poet. In an interview published in *Southerly Journal*, Chong writes 'What nourishes and underpins my work is my inability to feel any way but deeply and to respond emotionally to the world around me'.

# Ee Tiang Hong

## ‘Some New Perspectives’



- Ee Tiang Hong is a Malayan poet of Chinese ancestry.
- He migrated to Australia after the racial riots that occurred on May 13, 1969.
- The events, circumstances and consequences of the riots led Hong to believe that leaving the country was better than facing the humiliation of being treated as a puppet by the government.

- The racial riots resulted in the government favouring Malays through changes that affected every aspect of everyday life including changes to social and economic policy, education, and language (English replaced by Malay).
- Each of these changes had a detrimental impact on the cultural identity of the minority groups. The community that Hong belonged to, the Peranakans, were reputed for their high status, education and culture.
- This enshrining of the Malaysians as the dominant ethnic group to the eventual disappearance of his own, caused a deep bitterness in Hong who continued to hold on to his sentiments many years after settling in Perth, Australia.
- The poem challenges and disrupts prevailing assumptions and beliefs about both individuals and communities.

- Nouns: the listing of nouns in the first line sets a framework within which we can understand and interpret the rest of the poem.
- Personal Pronouns: Simple but very important to take note of the progression (you & me > I am > your > ours). Voice of the self and other is particularly important in light of the title 'Some New Perspectives'.
- The ending serves as a twist which appears to challenge our perceptions, reminding responders that the challenge identified by Ee is actually a universal one.
- Phonography > Sibilance (satisfy, say, space, silences, smithereens, spurts and starts): As with alliteration, it draws attention to points of emphasis in the poem. This is particularly evident in the final stanza where the emphasis is made stronger with the additional techniques of caesura and enjambment (...conceptual smithereens, in spurts and starts). The use of imagery through these techniques + emotive word choice (conceptual smithereens) contributes to the climactic ending of the poem.

# Miriam Wei Wei Lo

## ‘Home’



“My intention in "Home" was to fuse image and emotion. The idea of 'home', for anyone who has experienced dislocation or uncertainty about identity, is complex. The greater the dislocation or uncertainty, the deeper the complexity. Personally, I have lived in three different nation-states (Canada, Singapore, and Australia). I am also the product of a mixed-race marriage (my father is Chinese-Malaysian and my mother Anglo-Australian). My father was born in incredible poverty. I live in relative affluence. I know what it is to live in a city where the lights never go out and the traffic never really stops, and I know what it is to live in a small country town where the entire town centre takes up one street.

K.A.Bea (2018)

“Where is home? What is home? Is it the memory of what I grew up with? Is it something I look back to or forward to? Is it something I experience now?”

The other notion of 'home' that is central to the poem in question is the belief that 'home' could be an other-worldly place - a place not confined to the space-time dimension of this universe. Perhaps all the 'homes' we experience in this life-time are shadows or imperfect copies of a perfect Ideal - a Home that is both Place and Person - perfect 'at-home-ness' and deepest connection.

My understanding of this Place/Person is heavily influenced by my Christian beliefs. A good way into understanding "Home", especially the second section ("Without Warning"), would be to read the following:

## *Biblical references:*

The first chapter of the gospel of John

- 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:4

Other reference:

- the final two chapters of *The Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis.

Perhaps especially this (from *The Last Battle*):

"It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right fore-hoof on the ground and neighed, and then cried:

'I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.'

- Although references to her cultural influences are present in the poem, this poem is more than a metaphorical representation of South-East Asian perspectives. It is rather more individualistic in its approach as Lo appears to be more concerned about 'Home' as an other-worldly place, shaped by her Christian beliefs.



# Part One: One day I will find it

There is a constant tension between the ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ (biblical paradigm) that exists in this section as the persona uses present images, emotions and memories to imagine what it could/should be like. “It sometimes looked a little like this” (Narnia)

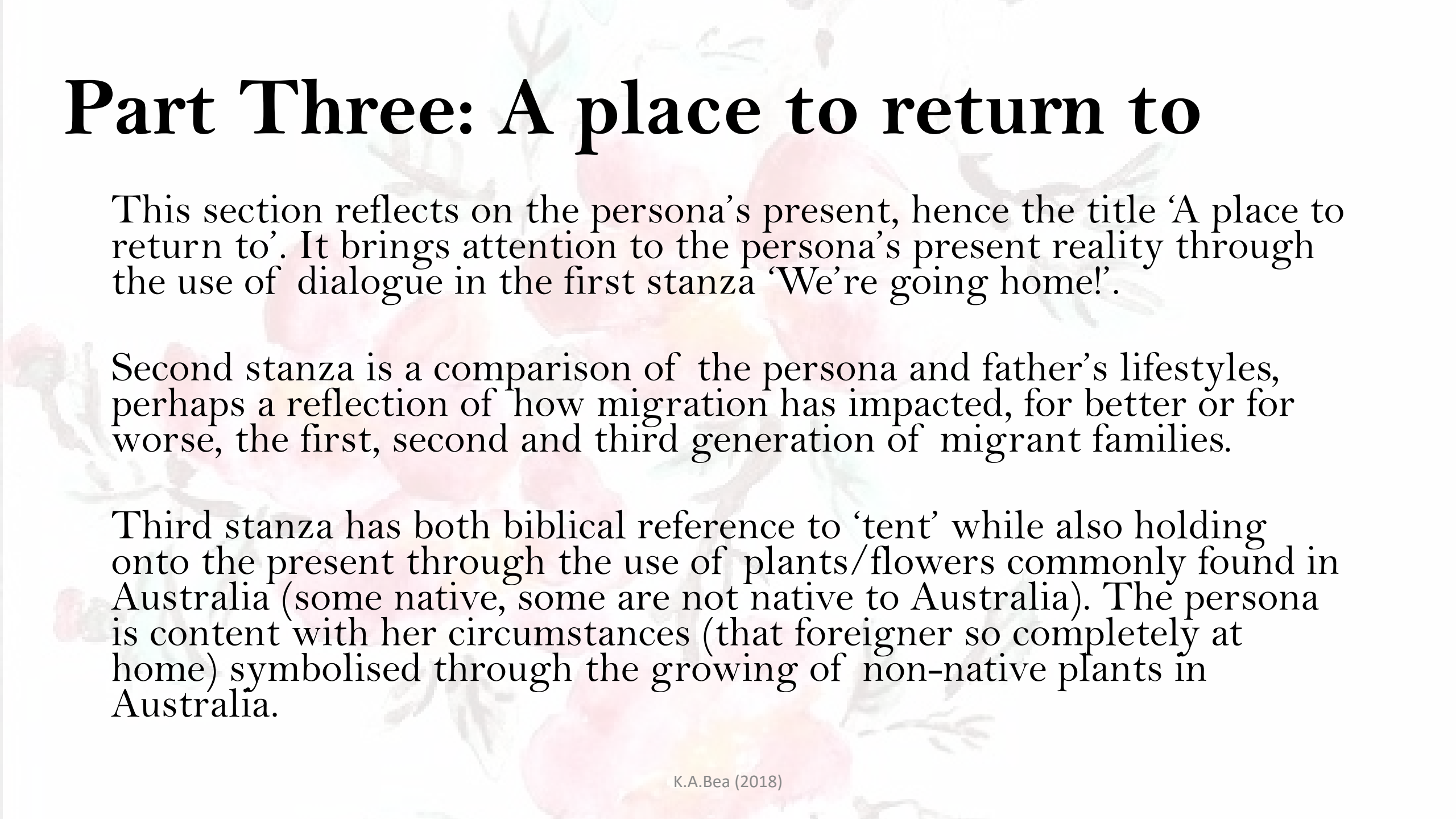
Biblical References: ‘two stone tablets’ (could potentially be a reference to the two stone tablets used by Moses to write the 10 commandments) & ‘a thin wafer of honey’ (manna: the food given to the Israelites in the wilderness on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land). Biblical allusion is used early in the poem to create a strong Christian framework. The Biblical motifs serve as an introduction to the second section of the poem.

# Part Two: Without Warning

Identification of 'home' as 'that other place', a home that is heaven. This section has no reference to her cultural background but is a spiritual confession of her beliefs. There are two parts to this section. The first half focuses on the present body & death, while the second half is marked with the realisation 'Someone is at work in me,' focuses on the heavenly dwelling and the bodily transformation that is occurring 'now' but 'not yet' (translating this corrupt language of my body... into the pure language of that other place).

Biblical Allusion: Metaphors, symbols, motifs 'light', 'word', taken from the Bible passages quoted above. The use of similes to '...like a knife, like a nail', 'taking my body like breath', 'like the strong kiss of a bridegroom', 'like death, in all its finality'

# Part Three: A place to return to

This section reflects on the persona's present, hence the title 'A place to return to'. It brings attention to the persona's present reality through the use of dialogue in the first stanza 'We're going home!'.

Second stanza is a comparison of the persona and father's lifestyles, perhaps a reflection of how migration has impacted, for better or for worse, the first, second and third generation of migrant families.

Third stanza has both biblical reference to 'tent' while also holding onto the present through the use of plants/flowers commonly found in Australia (some native, some are not native to Australia). The persona is content with her circumstances (that foreigner so completely at home) symbolised through the growing of non-native plants in Australia.

# Ouyang Yu

## The Double Man



- Ouyang Yu is one of top 10 influential Chinese poets in the Chinese diaspora. He is most likely one of the most academically studied Asian-Australian fiction writers of his generation. Leaving China in the late 1980s to pursue his studies in English, Yu felt like he had been forcibly pushed back into his Chinese ethnicity.
- In an interview (Foreign-ness, UNSW), Yu stated ‘Living in Australia is like living after death’, in the sense that he is constantly having to fight against the dominant ‘white’ grain. He neither identifies as an ‘Asian Australian poet’ or a ‘writer of colour’, but states ‘I don’t care what you call me’.
- For Yu ‘Home is poetry- that’s where I’m at home. Home is word’.

- The Double Man was published in 'Two hearts, two tongues & rain coloured eyes' (2002), his second book of English poetry. Poem explores concept of 'border-crossings'- sense of the double, culturally, linguistically and ethnically.
- **No punctuation (no capitalisation, use of pauses):** symbolises Yu's apparent indifference to culture, or social/poetic norms, also symbolises loss of cultural identity. There is one capital 'M'. The loss of an M spells 'otherland' which is the name of a literary journal Yu edits.
- **Repetition:** Different types of repetition utilised to create a strong voice in the absence of punctuated phrases/clauses/lines, The continued repetition throughout the poem creates confusion & contributes to the sarcastic and humorous tone.

Type of Repetition	Example
Diacope	<p><b>‘i possess two countries/or else/ i possess neither’</b>  <b>“When i go to china/i say i’m returning to my home country/when i go to australia’</b></p>
Epanalepsis	<p><b>‘my past motherland is my past/ my present motherland is my present’</b></p> <p><b>‘i have nullified my home/ i have set up a home’</b> &gt; location, place and the individual, migrant experience.</p>
Anaphora	<p><b>‘.my motherland is my past/my motherland is my present’</b>  <b>‘i possess two countries/or else/i possess neither’</b>  <b>‘ when i go to china... ‘when i go to australia”</b></p>

# Ouyang Yu

## New Accents

Published in 'The Kingsbury Tales' (2008), which serves as a pun for Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'. 'The Kingsbury Tales' follows the journey of a foreigner called 'O', who encounters people and experiences that make him more aware of himself as a migrant/exile in Australia.

His poetry raises the question of what it means to be Australian & challenges assumptions that all are welcome into Australia's multicultural society. In fact, the persona holds a deeply rooted bitterness influenced by his experiences of racism.

Not only is he bitter towards Australia, but he is also critical of China and its pursuit of 'Westernness'. The poem highlights attitudes towards the folly of having an accent that is not distinctly 'English' sounding.

**Key Ideas:** Transnational identity, Bicultural identity, Diasporic identity, absurdity of translation and the English language, challenges idea of cultural acceptance for migrants, to be accepted into a culture there are certain qualifications that an individual must have, regardless of that individual's identification of personal ethnicity, language or origin.

**Malapropism:** 'Anguish' for 'English', later played with in the concluding lines 'With their English/And my Anguish'. Particularly important for this poem, malapropism is used to highlight the apparent ignorance of those with 'new accents', while also being used for humorous effect.

**Oxymoron:** 'Wonderful Anguish', in its pronounced sense 'Anguish' forms an oxymoron, which ironically draws attention to the experiences of migrants from non-english speaking backgrounds. In trying to speak the wonderful english dialect, they are left with the bitterness of realising that they can never attain perfect English pronunciation. They are labelled the 'fool' by native speakers 'They tried to fool me around because I couldn't speak 'Anguish'. To speak English is 'Anguish' for speakers of non-English backgrounds.



# Vuong Pham 'Mother'

'Mother' is the opening poem from his collection 'Refugee Prayer'. Pham's parents came to Australia from Vietnam as refugees. This poem is a direct address to his mother. Pham lived his mother's dream by becoming an English teacher. He is a devout Catholic, evident in the title of his collection of poems.

**Key ideas of the poem:** intergenerational experiences of refugee families, displacement, generational links, narration of memory and experiences (narrative poetry with unmetered rhyme), sacrifices of first generation for the next, migrant life in Australia for refugees from non-English speaking countries

- **Dialogue:** Use of dialogue gives a certain voice and character to the one speaking. It also invites responders to listen to the intimate conversation that is happening between mother and child. It is important to note that the mother never speaks of her experiences in Saigon, whenever the past is spoken of, it is happening in the imagination of the persona, who is making inferences based on his memories/knowledge of the Vietnam war.
- **Metaphor:** ‘Jigsaw pieces of memory lock together, my past made whole’ This serves as a significant moment in the poem as the persona realises his mother’s passion and how he is living it for her.
- The importance of the English language and the sacrifices made for her son to learn is shown later in the poem as she worked to pay for his tuition “so I could learn to spell ‘persistent’ correctly- praying that I might speak an unbroken English tongue and never be confined to the labours of factories”. This metaphor also communicates the persona’s completed sense of discovery. The poem isn’t about ‘discovering’ his mother’s hidden past, but rather piecing the puzzles together in appreciation of her sacrifices in Australia.

- **Descriptive Language:** Each memory that the persona paints for his mother is written in colourful, descriptive language to make the imaginative & emotive experiences of the responder stronger:

<p><b>Memory #1 CHILDHOOD</b> ‘My minds eye turns to childhood’</p>	<p><b>Stanza 3</b> Sibilance ‘shadows, stirring, star ... supper while sleeping’ Enjambment ‘to shadows/stirring beneath star fruit trees’ Nouns ‘star fruit trees’, ‘cherry tomatoes’, ‘lotus-dotted ponds’&gt; natural images of Vietnam, symbolises his mother’s peaceful interaction with nature.</p>
<p><b>Memory #2 YOUTH</b> ‘About mother’s youth, before the bloodshed began in Saigon’</p>	<p><b>Stanza 5</b> Emotive language ‘bloodshed’, ‘the city she will no longer call home’ Synaesthesia ‘driving, yellow scooter, spiriting past, soothing aromas, familiar crescendo’, ‘landscapes of water’</p>
<p><b>Memory #3 ADULTHOOD (Life in Australia)</b></p>	<p><b>Stanza 6</b> Imagery ‘when she stitched floral pyjamas, tablecloths, bed sheets together...’ &gt; picture of poverty?</p>
<p><b>Memory #4 JOURNEY FROM SAIGON</b></p>	<p><b>Stanza 6 and 7</b> ‘Eyeballs ribboned with flames incandescent, a disorder of diaspora animate in the missile storm’- serves as a powerful image of the violence and destruction that forces one to flee its home country due to war. The metaphor is made more powerful through the use of alliteration ‘disorder of diaspora’, the use of plosives creates a verbal reflection of the events and emotions felt by fleeing refugees. It helps visualise the harsh reality of war. Imagery &amp; simile ‘the cerulean depths of sea stirred on the horizon like some agitated womb boats wet as one long vowel’</p>

# Jaya Savige

## Circular Breathing



Jaya Savige wrote this poem while travelling alone in Rome. It was published in his anthology 'Surface to Air'. This poem was inspired by the experience of seeing and hearing a non-indigenous man playing the didgeridoo in the Piazza di Santa Maria.

Triggered by memories of 'home', Savige dedicated the poem to his friend (contemporary Indigenous Australian poet) Samuel Wagan Watson. There are also distinct memories of being in Watson's house with renown Indigenous musician, William Barton. The place, sound and memories of home were, according to Savige, "intense for me to hear Ancient culture amongst ruins of Ancient Empire, a major European power".

- **Key ideas of the poem:** Imperial/colonial cultures, self and home, cultural identity as an “Australian” and the shame felt in being a part of a nation that has been indifferent towards Indigenous culture, the poem calls out the hypocrisy of its individuals ‘why claim the sound as ‘home’ and yet be indifferent about it when at home?’
- **Link to Module:** Clear focus on language, culture and identity, although Savige admits he doesn’t understand why this poem was chosen for selected study under the title of ‘Contemporary Asian Australian poetry’. The only connection with Asia is the ‘Om’, which is a reference to Hinduism. It is more a comment on Indigenous culture, language and identity & the hypocrisy and injustice towards Indigenous Australians.
- The title ‘Circular Breathing’ is directly linked to the act of playing the didgeridoo. It is also a metaphor of ‘life’, raising the question of what allows a culture to continue to breathe.

- **Poetic Style/Form:** free verse tradition with a colloquial tone. The poem is not written in strict metre. First and last stanzas have 7 lines, the second and third have 6 lines, symmetrical/sandwiched in.
- **Phonology:** Internal & End-rhyme schemes + internal music of lines through consonants and assonance 'listening & glistening', 'hum & Om' (imitate the sound of the didgeridoo+ Om is an obscure link between Ancient Indian sound 'om' and Indigenous culture), 'lurch & church'.
- **Proper Nouns:** 'Pizza di Santa Maria', 'Carabinieri', 'Armani', 'Ray-Ban', 'Dolce & Gabbana', 'Holden', 'King George Square'. Juxtaposing of words from different cultures and languages, identifies Rome as a 'melting pot' of cultures.
- **Extended Metaphor:** the sound of the didgeridoo serves as an extended metaphor that echoes throughout each stanza. 'A drone as deep as unexcavated ruins' > alliteration.
- **Religious Paradox:** 'around the spire of Rome's oldest Christian church' is a direct allusion to Christianity in Australia & its impacts on Indigenous Australians.

# Maureen Ten (Ten Chi'In U) Translucent Jade

Maureen Ten is a Malay-Chinese poet who migrated to Australia in 1989. The title of the poem 'Translucent Jade' has multiple meanings. Jade is a symbol of goodness, preciousness and beauty. The Chinese term for jade is 'Yu' which is often used in family names. 'Yu' or 'U' is the name that Ten inherited from her grandfather. When struck, translucent jade also produces a sound, which is a symbol of music, hence the references to sound within the poem. The poem explores the impact of migration on cultural identity. When migrating, it is common for parents to give their children English names to assist with settling into the culture of an English speaking country.

**Key ideas of the poem:** Identity, Cultural inheritance, Changing/adapting to be accepted into a culture

**Links to Module:** The poem ties together the intimate connections between language (names), culture and identity. The significance of an inherited name in comparison to the name migrants 'put on' for cultural acceptance is considered and challenged throughout the poem.

**Truncated Sentences-** Middle section of the poem (second stanza) uses truncation to emphasise the significance of the persona using her grandfather's gift 'Pristine. I tried it on.'

**Anaphora-** 'Sometimes I ...' communicates the mixed emotions of the persona as she comes to the realisation that in her connection to her name, she finds a disconnection to her culture '...as if from a world I hadn't inhabited but had heard stories about.', 'an imposter', 'hidden aspects I could own'

**Rhetorical Questions-** 'what vibrations are these?', 'Does this begin to become me, do I to it belong?' The questions serve to show the persona's gradual acceptance of her name as the responder imagines the sound of the jade being struck in the background. Sound and meaning create layer upon layer for the responder. The questions also emphasise the greater meaning behind the importance of name and its connection to identity.

The concluding lines of the final stanza 'This translucent, slow-yielding music Chinese name' bring the ideas of the whole poem together.



The background of the slide is a soft, watercolor-style illustration of various flowers. The primary colors are shades of pink and light yellow, with some green foliage interspersed. The flowers are rendered with a delicate, painterly texture, giving the background a gentle and pleasant feel.

**THANK YOU! 😊**

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