Call for Papers

The Specialness of Poetry

Deadline for Submissions: June 30, 2018

Special claims have always been made about poetry. For Plato, poetry carried a special danger: its imaginative and rhetorical projections had the potential to corrupt the citizens of the Republic by leading them away from what is good and true. For other thinkers, including Percy Bysshe Shelley, poetry has a special moral force that must be recognized as necessary to society, even when the political efficacy of individual poems is not obvious or immediate. Theodor W. Adorno argued that the uniquely “virginal” expression of an individual lyric poem implies a protest against a social situation we cannot but feel as oppressive. In a similarly dialectical spirit, Ben Lerner has recently suggested that the unusual hatred aroused by poetry among all literary modes is a form of resistance to—or a negatively expressed affirmation of—poetry as an ideal showing that social values and realities other than the ones we know are possible.

Hovering around all discussions of poetry’s special social power is a recognition of its linguistic strangeness. Stephen Burt tells us that by making language strange, poems offer us the materials of a culture rearranged as “a way for a person to live in the world.” But if readers are automatically struck by many of the properties that distinguish poetry from prose fiction—its highly patterned and often non-narrative and not easily decodable features, its special attentiveness to the parts of a word, for instance—that does not mean these properties have always been well served by literary criticism. As Derek Attridge has recently observed, we are still very far from a precise understanding of why certain structured arrangements of words have the powerful effects they do. Moreover, as Clive Scott and David Nowell Smith have pointed out, literary criticism’s valorization of the printed text has come at the expense of a proper consideration of voice. These critics suggest that to get a purchase on the specialness of poetry in its own terms—and not merely as philosophy’s other—we will need to bring into our discourse the physiology of particular voices and an understanding of how the musical and political voice of poetry can be other to itself and a site in which the subject is unmade and remade.
For the March 2019 issue of Concentric, we invite submissions that offer thought-provoking and original articles on the formal (prosodic, rhythmic, lineal, etc.), linguistic, paralinguistic, vocal, and social specialness of poetry. And we especially look forward to receiving articles that explore the relationship between some of these different types of specialness through a close reading of—or a close listening to—individual poems, sequences, collections, or vocal performances. We look forward to receiving submissions engaging with innovative contemporary poetry, but we also hope to see critically aware writing on poetry from other eras.

Potential contributors should certainly not feel their discussion need be restricted to the largely White, male, European/Western tradition represented by some of the critics and thinkers mentioned above. There is a growing body of politically engaged critical writing about Black, Indigenous, Asian-American, and feminist contemporary Anglophone poetry in which poetic form is treated extensively (see, for instance, the work of Dorothy J. Wang, Anthony Reed, Sianne Ngai, Ben Etherington, and Amy De’Ath). In the Chinese tradition, poets and critics from Bo Juyi in the Tang Dynasty era to Qian Zhongshu nearer our own time have emphasized the exceptional degree of worldly frustration that is productive of—and therefore readable in—great poetry. François Jullien has praised the phenomenological concern in Chinese thought with the conditions allowing for the fullest “tasting” of a poem. Are there analytically rigorous (and comparative) approaches to Chinese and other non-Western poetries that take us beyond familiar understandings of affectivism and expressivism, thereby enlarging our collective poetological discourse? How should we be thinking and feeling the specialness of poetry?

Please send final essays of 6,000-10,000 words, 5-8 keywords, an abstract, and a brief bio to concentric.lit@deps.ntnu.edu.tw by June 30, 2018. Manuscripts should follow the latest edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Except for footnotes, which should be single-spaced, manuscripts must be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman. Please consult our style guide at http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw/submissions.php.

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Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies, currently indexed in Arts and Humanities Citation Index, is a peer-reviewed journal published two times per year by the Department of English, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan. Concentric is devoted to offering innovative perspectives on literary and cultural issues and advancing the transcultural exchange of ideas. While committed to bringing Asian-based
scholarship to the world academic community, Concentric welcomes original contributions from diverse national and cultural backgrounds. Each issue of Concentric publishes groups of essays on a special topic as well as papers on more general issues. 

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For submissions or general inquiries, please contact us at: concentric.lit@deps.ntnu.edu.tw.