

Book 2.0

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## EDITORIAL

**MICK GOWAR AND MARK TURIN**

While we were preparing this special issue of *Book 2.0*, an announcement was made by a sub-commission of the International Commission on Stratigraphy that in its opinion, the Earth had entered a new epoch of geological time: the Anthropocene, or the age of humans.<sup>1</sup> This was no cause for celebration, however, because the human species was not being honoured for its astonishing achievements. Tragically, a quite different sense of ‘man-made’ lay behind the new designation: the dominant influence of humankind on the environment and climate and the changes wrought by human activities, both intentionally and unintentionally; ‘man-made’ in the sense of the ‘wonder’ products of ‘that low, dishonest’ (Auden 1979: 86) century just past, which have proved so overwhelmingly harmful to the planet and to ourselves: air travel and the motor car that turn the air toxic, the detritus from the cheap and convenient oil-based textiles and plastics that are poisoning the oceans, and will continue to do so for millennia.

To the destruction of habitats, the rapid reduction in biodiversity – the accelerating rates of extinctions of plant, bird, mammal and insect species – must be added the elimination of diversity amongst our own species, the focus of this special issue. For in parallel with the loss of so many other species of flora and fauna, human beings seem intent on destroying the rich diversity of cultures and languages in a headlong and deluded pursuit of a chimera named ‘modernisation’ (Sutherland 2003: 276).

The threats to cultural and linguistic diversity have been recognized by the United Nations, which has designated 2019 as the Year of Indigenous Languages, which we celebrate with this special issue. We are also obliged to our publisher, Intellect Books, who after a year have committed to making this issue free for all to read and download through the *Book 2.0* portal on their website with the goal of widening access to the important scholarship contained in this volume. Our greatest debt of gratitude is to the fine selection of contributors to this issue.

1. For a convenient and well-argued one-volume summary of the history of the Anthropocene epoch, see Lewis and Maslin (2018).

We are delighted to be publishing a number of writers, academics and activists who are themselves members of Indigenous communities and language groups, alongside non-Indigenous scholars who have demonstrated a sincere commitment to supporting the work of Indigenous communities engaged in the preservation – and, more importantly, the revitalization – of Indigenous and endangered languages and cultures.

Tibetan anthropologist Bendi Tso writes engagingly about the efforts currently underway to not only preserve but revitalize *Shépa*, a collection of traditional and until recently exclusively oral wisdom in the Chone Tibetan language. And this is a theme that runs throughout many of the articles and creative contributions in this issue: preservation is not sufficient; the aim must be the revitalization and reclamation of languages and cultures that are increasingly endangered.

This is a particular challenge when so many speakers of Indigenous languages and bearers of endangered cultures find themselves in diaspora communities, living in cities in the United States, Canada, France or the United Kingdom. Anthropologist Pasang Yangjee Sherpa writes about the efforts to maintain Sherpa languages and cultural traditions by and for the Sherpa community in New York, and points to the importance of *Kyidugs* – cultural and educational centres – for both preserving languages and cultures and helping to ensure that they remain vibrant and current.

Victoria Bouvier is a proud Michif writer and scholar, and gives a moving personal account of how she has reconnected – partly through her academic work – with her Michif-Metis language and holistic way of life. As a child, Bouvier grew up away from her Michif relatives, and emphasizes, as several of our contributors do, the great importance of teaching children their languages and providing opportunities for cultural engagement and connectivity.

Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw writer Lucy Hemphill is currently creating a dual-language story for young children that is at once powerful and gentle, in which a child, helped by her mother, gathers berries and language – a twofold nourishment. Together with linguist Daisy Rosenblum, Hemphill reflects on the book and its potential to contribute to the revitalization of a language, underscoring the vital importance of language and culture in developing individual identity and modelling alternative ways of finding a place in the world to a growing child.

All publishing projects involve collaboration and compromise. Anthropologist Patrick Dowd offers an insightful account of the challenges involved in creating and publishing a collaborative story book for children in the Ladakhi language, and in a fascinating interview, the successful publisher Bidur Dangol tells editor Mark Turin about his long career as a publisher and bookseller in Nepal, and the changes – some welcome, others less so – that he has witnessed and on occasion has been instrumental in effecting.

Libraries, museums and archives represent an invaluable resource for the preservation and revitalization of languages and cultures through collections of artefacts and belongings, texts, audio recordings and increasingly digital resources. Māori information technology scholar Spencer Lilley looks at the important contribution that libraries can make in the shared work of language revitalization, especially for younger speakers.

The Internet is the most powerful, the largest and most accessible collection of digital data that the world has yet seen. Many commentators have expressed dismay at the perceived danger that 'mass media languages' like English, Spanish, French and Mandarin pose to minority and endangered

languages that they threaten to swamp. However, as Daniel Bögge Udell and Kristen Tcherneshoff argue, the Internet may also offer a unique means for both documenting and helping to revive Indigenous and endangered languages and cultures.

While we will have to wait and see, surely history gives us some reasons to be hopeful. Since the Romantic Movement, scholars and collectors from Brentano and von Arnim and the Grimms, through Francis Child and Cecil Sharp to Alan Lomax, have helped revive interest in communities whose cultures are primarily oral – communities who have pursued their political rights as they have grown in self-confidence, resulting in the revival of languages such as Cornish, Gallic and Welsh. Michael Wilson's illuminating assessment of the work of Luzel, the Breton speaker, collector of stories and scholar, encourages us to believe that the rich diversity of languages and cultures will not, in the words of a great Welsh (but sadly anglophone) poet 'go gently into that good night'.

Scholar and poet Sienna Craig addresses complex questions of loss, ageing, friendship and responsibility in her anthropologically informed contribution, *Letters for Mother*. By exploring the interconnections between ethnography and fiction – and blurring those very boundaries – Craig's essay opens our imaginations to the deep humanism of respectful and responsible anthropological inquiry.

Writing from the inside out, Khasi scholar and poet Janet Hujon investigates the decolonizing potential of translation and storytelling. In this intimate and personal narrative, Hujon shares her growing awareness of the richness of her native language, a process requiring both relearning and unlearning to overcome the ruptures of cultural dislocation.

This special issue concludes with a short article and two book reviews. Our regular reviewer, Tom Ue, writes about the latest volume of Louis Cha's monumental multi-volume, chivalric martial arts masterwork *Legends of the Condor Heroes*. Scholar, storyteller and regular contributor Vayu Naidu reviews Rita Chowdhury's shocking and prescient novel about the plight of Assamese Chinese indentured workers – treated with, at best, suspicion, at worst as traitors, in both India and China. In a brief survey, Julia Schillo and Mark Turin explore a selection of recent children's books created by Indigenous writers and illustrators that make use of the Cree language in creative and innovative ways.

In editing a special issue of a journal that, like this one, has a specific subject or focus, it still comes as a welcome surprise when a common concern or theme begins to emerge unbidden from a number of contributions. In editing this issue, it became evident how many contributors chose to highlight the vital importance of children's literature – oral and written – in preserving and revitalizing endangered languages and cultures.<sup>2</sup> Also evident is the distinctive quality of much of this new writing for children, in terms of its literary and artistic excellence, and also in its ethical orientation. This will surely prove a fruitful and key area for further scholarship and book production, and we look forward to publishing further reviews and articles on Indigenous and multi-lingual children's literature in future issues.

## REFERENCES

- Auden, W. H. (1979), 'September 1939', in E. Mendelson (ed.), *Selected Poems*, London: Faber & Faber, pp. 86–89.

2. See Volume 8, Numbers 1&2 of this journal for Jacqueline Reid-Walsh's review of *When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson and Julie Flett.

- Lewis, Simon L. and Maslin, Mark A. (2018), *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*, London: Pelican.
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- Thomas, Dylan (2018), 'Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night', in J. Goodby (ed.), *Collected Poems*, London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, p. 193.

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### **ERRATA: BOOK 2.0 8.1&2**

Trudi Tate (2018), 'Living afterwards: Vietnamese refugee writers Thuy Le and Viet Nguyen', *Book 2.0*, 8:1&2, pp. 109–24, doi: 10.1386/btwo.8.1-2.109\_1.

Due to editorial error, some references need correction.

p. 110, note 3:

'Anon 2017, 2018' should read 'Levin 2017, Holpuch 2018'

pp. 116–122:

All references to 'Le 2008' should read 'Le 2004'

We apologise to readers for the inconvenience.

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