du roman australien, Jean-François Vernay has demonstrated with the novel genre that Australian literature cannot and should not be minimised and deserves its rightful place on the international literary scene.

Endnotes

[1] Review of Vernay's *Water from the Moon: Illusion and Reality in the Works of Australian Novelist Christopher Koch*, Cambria Press, 2007, by Paul Genoni, *Australian Literary Studies* 23: 4, October 2008, 493–6.

[2] Simon Caterson, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/books/french-take-on-the-australian-novel/2009/02/13/1234028266764.html>, accessed 21.6.2009.

[3] Sylviane Soulard, 'Parution de *Panorama du roman australien des origines à nos jours* de Jean-François Vernay', *Episodes Nouvelle Calédonie*, p.57.

Tony Simoes da Silva

BORDER CROSSING

Kim Cheng Boey. *Between Stations.* Sydney: Giramondo, 2009. ISBN 9781920882501. RRP $27.99. pp.313 + Glossary and Sources.

Kim Cheng Boey is a Singapore-born poet, essayist, and academic currently teaching at the University of Newcastle and *Between Stations* brings into play all these facets of his self. A collection of eleven essays united by a focus on travel, dislocation, and identity, *Between Stations* offers a complex meditation on family and memory, place and placelessness. At its core is a year-long journey that will clarify for Boey whether the decision to leave his homeland, Singapore, for a new life in Australia is the right one. As he writes, coincidentally halfway through the book, "[t]hree months into this yearlong trip, I am waiting for signs to tell me if my decision to emigrate is right" (159). Echoing concerns explored in another well-known work focused on the Chinese diaspora, Clara Law's *A Floating Life* (1996), Boey is torn between the desire to leave Singapore for personal reasons and "the Confucian values ... [that] argue against leaving" behind parents and siblings and failing to discharge correct cultural and familial duties. For the past he leaves behind is more than a place or a culture; it is above all a self formed in densely textured and often painful relationships with family, friends, and even complete strangers.

Between Stations is dominated by the parallel realities of loss and possibility, a life already lived and one yet to unravel. These constitute the central themes of a book that is otherwise a series of fragments of more or less focused memories that account in large part also for the

making of Boey as an artist. Writing as an adult, he recalls the world of his childhood and the problematic relationship with a charismatic father who disappeared often and for long periods, a loving and patient mother, and a formidable grandmother. In different ways, all played important roles in his childhood and all in some way retain their hold over Boey's adult self. However, it is to the figure of the father that most of the essays are devoted, directly or otherwise. Time and again Boey writes of a father whom he remembers for his good looks, the unconventional nature of his love for his family, and random acts of kindness and violence.

For the reader familiar with the genre of life writing, increasingly associated with the graphic and often exaggerated portrayal of familial trauma and personal loss, Boey's memoir-travelogue will impress for its understated treatment of these issues. If trauma there is, and the looping narrative of nostalgia, loneliness, fear and unrequited love show how deep the impact of the past remains in Boey's adult self, there is throughout *Between Stations* a real sense of the trepidation and sensitivity with which the author addresses the unknowability of an Other, especially poignant when in the case of one's own father. Looking back, Boey grows increasingly aware of his father's fraught personality but simultaneously of how little he will ever know him. Photographs trigger the evocation of smells, sounds, and sights they shared and bring Boey closer to an idea of his father whom he recalls warts and all.

But Boey's quest for his father serves another important function in the book, for it parallels the author's act of farewell to a Singapore he now prepares to leave for good. In "Father, Son and the Holy Ghost," he speaks of "that lost Singapore which was starting to disappear at the same time that [my father] did." Preparing to immigrate to Australia, the Singapore he will leave behind is a faint and almost repulsive copy of the Singapore of his childhood, a place and time made all the more real for the close association with family and friends. In his words: "Perhaps all my wanderings and amblings abroad are attempts to recapture the intensity of the first walks with my father.... In the walks abroad, I have come to realise that is there is a centre to all my walking, it is the grid of vanished places of childhood and youth" (55).

Boey does not mask his disdain for modern, contemporary Singapore, for its bland uniformity bears little resemblance to a city of real people, real lives, real memories. The fetish-like Calcutta depicted in the collection's opening essay sets the scene for this moment, later in the book, of an unreal Singapore, a simulacrum that resonates with T.S. Eliot's own nostalgic paean to the dying city, overwhelmed by modernity and change. Not

uncommonly in the kind of childhood narrative Boey writes in some of the essays that constitute *Between Stations*, contemporary Singapore entombs a childhood lived in another time, another place. It is almost the same but not quite: "I point to a laminated reproduction of the Collyer Quay in the window and say wistfully, 'Old Singapore. Very beautiful.'" And then, a few pages on, he offers the kind of coda that resonates throughout the book, the ghostly voice of famous writers echoing his own: "Then, to quote Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.'"

As autobiography, the essays speak of a postcolonial personal and artistic sensibility that is a product of East and West, and Boey's erudite disquisition about exile and longing draws as easily on Chinese classic poetry as he does on the English Romantics or on famous names in travel writing, Bruce Chatwin in particular. In a telling moment, Boey recalls reading Keats as a child and then searching frantically through Singapore bookshops for his personal copy of a poetry that would mark him for life, as a person and as a writer. There are echoes here too of Michael Ondatjie's zany *Running in the Family*, the story of the dying glory of colonial Sri Lanka entwined with Ondatjie's family's own experiences. Reading Boey I thought also of V.S. Naipaul and Jamaica Kincaid. Like the former he oscillates between equally intense affection and contempt for one's own birthplace. From Kincaid Boey borrows an angry melancholia of dislocation that borders on over-indulgent ennui; to emigrate is always to experience profound loss but it is also to benefit immeasurably from the encounter with other places and other peoples. As a would-be-migrant, in *Between Stations*, Kim Cheng Boey adopts the viewpoint and persona of a wandering Chinese to rehearse old ways of being for the insight they might offer into the world of the present and the life he anticipates in Australia. In the collection's concluding essay, the eponymous "Between Stations," Boey travels back from Australia to Singapore, now no longer alone but with his young family, himself a father.

Eileen Spencer

EMERGING WRITING FROM UNDER THE RAINSHADOW

The Tropical Writers of Far North Queensland, *Raining on the Sun: An Anthology of Writing.* ISBN 9780980420715. RRP: $24.95. pp.154