them ways of being highly personal and/or highly cultural so that the reader or poet can discover a mixture of ‘who I am’ and ‘who I belong to’. Because it doesn’t have to tell the whole story, poetry can offer pupils the idea that there are ‘moments’ in life as well as ‘sequences’ and ‘consequences’. The lyric tradition, in particular, stands in contrast to the rational-logical process that students are invited to spend a lot of time perfecting elsewhere in the curriculum. It suggests that human experience is more complicated than the rational-logical system offers. It offers a different sense of time. That is there are ‘moments’ AND ‘continuities’ AND ‘repetitions’ co-existing as we exist.

MB: I agree with everything Michael says — especially with ‘big ideas in small spaces’ and ‘making the familiar unfamiliar’ and vice versa. Also, the jumping, dancing magic of rhyme and rhythm is something a young child needs like the vitamins without which they get rickets or beriberi and can’t grow properly. And poetry can have a strong healing effect for a child as well as for an adult; for a teenager, it can become a life-saving pill. It gives a voice and words to what a teenager (anyone, in fact, but teenagers are more ‘accident prone’) sometimes feels inside him or herself but can only moan about wordlessly.

I also like what Michael says about the lyric tradition versus rational-logical progress. It reminds me of a popular discussion in the USSR during the sixties: ‘Who is more important, ‘physicists’ or ‘lyricists’? Today the physicists are outweighing lyricists dangerously, education is growing more and more lopsided and we need a counterweight or antidote urgently!

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CHEN LI

Translated by Elaine Wong

What would your ideal island be like? Taiwanese poet Chen Li shows us his ideal island in ‘Song of the Island’, written for the children of Taiwan. Their home is a subtropical island located off the southeastern coast of China. Taiwanese children would tell you another name of their home — Formosa, and the legend that in the mid-sixteenth century, Portuguese sailors passed by the island and called it ilha formosa (‘beautiful island’). Of course, the Portuguese sailors did not know what the natives called the island. Different native tribes, each speaking its own language, lived on the island before large groups of Chinese people began to move there in the seventeenth century. Today, Taiwan is home to about 540,000 aborigines of over twenty tribes, making up 2.3% of the total population.

Have you ever learned words from friends who speak a different language? How would you describe the sounds of those words? In the poem, Chen Li, who is of Chinese descent, shares with us words he has learned from his friends of the tribes Yami (also known as Tao, 連悟族 in Chinese), Amis (阿美族) and Bunun (布農族). In Chinese, the word for ‘spoken language’, 話, and that for ‘picture’, 畫, have the exact same sound: huà (in a falling tone). So ‘beautiful language’ (美麗的話 méili huà) and ‘beautiful painting’ (美麗的畫 méili huà) are one and the same! Towards the end, the poem paints a picture of Taiwan with the names of different languages, both aboriginal and Chinese. Perhaps the effect would be similar to the Bunun’s multi-part song pasibutbut. We hope you will enjoy the mix of language sounds and the picture of the island you create for yourself.
Song of the Island

For the Children of Taiwan

Taiwan is the name of the island.
It is also a palette:
tongues of different shapes
roll out voices of different hues and
blend to become the colourful Formosa.

In red Yami language you paint:
Orchid Island, on the sea,
fishing, building boats, planting calla.
Cinedkeran —
a carved canoe that seats ten people.
Mihariag —
a song for inaugurating a workhouse.
You see women on the beach
fling their hair like waves.
They dance and sing
the fabulous valacingi a ganam.

In blue Amis language I paint:
capay, ‘earring’,
tatamus, ‘ring’;
‘fruit of bread tree’, facidol.
When we work, we sing;
when we party, we sing,
day into night, we hold hands
and dance at the Harvest Festival.
Your tear is our lusa.

Lipahak singing
makes us widang —
widang means ‘friend’,
lipahak is ‘happy’.

In yellow Bunun language he paints:
buan, ‘moon’,
vall, ‘sun’,
kiing, sui, maza and n-gula —
strung together are ‘gold’, ‘silver’, ‘bronze’ and ‘iron’.
Hamisan is ‘winter’,
minhamisan is ‘autumn’,
talabal is ‘summer’, and
mintalabal, ‘spring’.
You hear them sing pasibutbut over there,
praying for another big millet crop.
The full, harmonious chorus is like a waterfall
and a rainbow —
hanivalval — hanging in the sky.

Beautiful sounds, beautiful island,
beautiful colours, beautiful picture.
Let us loosen our knotted tongues
and let any syllables become
an easel, a bowl’s colourful paints,
speaking in Minnan, Hakka,
in the dialects of Shandong, Shanxi, and Hebei,
in Atayal, Puyuma,
Rukai, Tsou, Thao, Saisiyat, Paiwan,
Papora, Hoanya, Babuza,
Song of the Island

For the Children of Taiwan

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It is also a palette:
tongues of different shapes
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Your tear is our lusa.

Lipahak singing
makes us widang —
widang means 'friend',
lipahak is 'happy'.

In yellow Bunun language he paints:
buan, 'moon',
wall, 'sun',
kiing, sui, maza and n-gula —
strung together are 'gold', 'silver', 'bronze' and 'iron'.
Hamisan is 'winter',
imhamsan is 'autumn',
talabal is 'summer', and
mintalabal, 'spring'.
You hear them sing pasibutbut over there,
praying for another big millet crop.
The full, harmonious chorus is like a waterfall
and a rainbow —
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Beautiful sounds, beautiful island,
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Let us loosen our knotted tongues
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an easel, a bowl's colourful paints,
speaking in Minnan, Hakka,
in the dialects of Shandong, Shanxi, and Hebei,
in Atayal, Puyuma,
Rukai, Tsou, Thao, Saisiyat, Paiwan,
Papora, Hoanya, Babuza,
Bazeh, Taokas, Siraya, Kavalan, Ketagalan...

Beautiful sounds, beautiful island, beautiful Taiwan, beautiful languages.

TOON TELLEGEN & INGRID GODON

Translated by David Colmer

These Toon Tellegen poems and Ingrid Godon portraits come from a beautiful Dutch/Belgian book called IK WOU, which I have translated as I WISH...

The portraits — reproduced here in black and white — are strange, yet incredibly expressive. The characters stare out at you, or just past you, with tiny wide-set eyes that draw you in like two wells. Between them, the nose spreads to join a massive forehead that seems swollen with thoughts and dreams and fears. Nobody really looks like that, yet when we look at them, we can't help but see the emotions of people we have known or met or encountered.

Ingrid Godon did the portraits first and then gave them to Toon Tellegen to write the book. Rather than trying to respond to each of her characters individually, he was inspired by them all to invent his own characters, portraying them through short poems that describe a particular train of thought, usually beginning with 'I wish...'

The thoughts of the characters are sometimes comical, sometimes curious or cute, sometimes sad, but each time they open a door to a whole life, giving us a glimpse of a real person we sense and can imagine.

In the book many of the poems appear opposite a portrait and then you can consider them separately or in combination. Has Toon read the mind of the person Ingrid has drawn? Or is he talking about someone else altogether? Does the picture change the way you read the poem or does the poem change the way you see the picture? And if you changed the order and put that poem next to another picture, what then?