



## Proverse Hong Kong

### THE PROVERSE AUTUMN RECEPTION 2019

Proverse Hong Kong held their eleventh annual International Proverse Prize Award and book launch on 21 November 2019, at the Helena May, Central Hong Kong.

As well as launching authors, guests included members of the Diplomatic Corps, Proverse friends and editors, friends and family of launching authors, bookshop-managers, and book-lovers. Several authors already published by Proverse were also present and were introduced: Victor Apps (“The Perilous Passage of Princess Petunia Peasant”), James Tam (“Man’s Last Song”), Catherine Zhang (“Mila the Magician”).

Mr Peter Sidorko, Hong Kong University Librarian, one of the panel of Honorary Advisors to the Proverse Prizes was presented with the Proverse Prize books being launched as a gesture of appreciation!”

#### BOOKS LAUNCHED

Hong Kong resident, American poet and teacher, **DJ. HAMILTON**, was awarded the PROVERSE PRIZE 2018. He received a cash award and publication of his winning poetry collection, *The Hummingbird Sometimes Flies Backwards*.

Daniel has been writing poetry for a very long time and is a seasoned performer. This is his first published poetry collection. Comments already received show that it has been worth waiting for.

In Daniel’s collection, *The Hummingbird Sometimes Flies Backwards*, Michael Daley, founder of Empty Bowl, finds, “Craft steeped in compassion, wit, sorrow, mercy and love.”

Michael Ingham, of Lingnan University, describes *Hummingbird* as, “Profound, passionate and knowing...[taking] the reader on a compelling journey of the imagination, transcending time and space.”

Peter Kennedy, University of Hong Kong, finds that, “Hamilton has a powerful descriptive sense – closely observed landscapes and people.”

And Jason Eng Hun Lee, of Hong Kong Baptist University, describes Daniel’s work as, “A life’s work in miniature, taking us from Mexican vistas, Wisconsin farms, ancient ruins and urban jungles in its evocation of the poet’s quest for his own truth. Ranging across spiritual, political and erotic sensibilities, these poems are meditative, richly allusive, with frequent, unexpected turns to the ironic, and with a lyrical voice that envelops, sucking you gradually into the vortex of language, metaphor and lived experience.”

Also launched was PETER HUMPHREYS’, *Hong Kong Rocks*, awarded a 2018 SUPPLEMENTARY PRIZE. When a Hong Kong resident, Peter was, latterly, co-chair of the Hong Kong Writers Circle. He is now back in the UK and sent good wishes from Lancaster, the UK.

Author Maria Roberts describes Peter’s book in a few sentences. “Funny and twisted, in Humphreys’ spirited novel, Nick and a garrulous band of expats are caught

in the shifting societal landscape of Hong Kong. Nights drinking at the Brolly, missing friends, the Occupy movement, fear of deportation and the threat of discovery by Chinese agents, all loom large. As his freedom hangs on the edge of a precipice, Nick seizes on the absurdities, secrets and joys of a life lived with regret.”

Proverse author, James Tam, a Proverse Prize finalist in 2011, writes, “*Hong Kong Rocks* encapsulates the emptiness which grips Hong Kong, with refreshing wit and philosophical resignation. Humphreys has successfully created a forlorn atmosphere. A decaying urban lifestyle slowly eats the protagonists away, while entwining their lives.”

Philip Chatting, a winner of the Proverse Prize in 2014, writes, “*Hong Kong Rocks* is a story set in an **alternative past**; it is in part a whodunnit, with the who and the it constantly in doubt. At the centre is a group of middle-aged, expatriate dissolutes, who are held more or less upright, or let fall, by surer, stronger, women. Dissolution, however, has its consequences, in conflict with either the newly-introduced Deportation Act, or two cross-border goons, or both. As the tale reaches its finale, we cannot help but agree with the narrator that Hong Kong is ‘hotting up’.”

Hong Kong resident and American citizen SHENG-WEI WANG, a 2018 PROVERSE PRIZE FINALIST, was present for the launch of her non-fiction study, *The Last Journey of the San Bao Eunuch, Admiral Zheng He*, a highly controversial topic.

Over half a decade, Dr Wang has engaged in wide-ranging research and careful, detailed analysis, steered by her scientific training, to produce her book, now finally complete. We expect--and indeed hope--that her *magnum opus*, *The Last Journey of the San Bao Eunuch, Admiral Zheng He*, will be enormously controversial!—Dr Wang takes further the hotly contested claim, made by Gavin Menzies in his book, *1421: The Year China Discovered the World* (published in 2002), that the Chinese reached America many years before Europeans did. Menzies’ book has sold over a million copies, and was top of the *New York Times* best-seller list for several weeks. Dr Wang’s book is already available on amazon in paperback. Copies are already at Bookazine Prince’s Building and, in a few days’ time, will also be available at the Hong Kong Museum of Maritime History. Let’s try for it to exceed Gavin Menzies’ success!

Also launched were two books, not entries for the Proverse Prize. They were Philip Chatting’s Hong Kong dark comedy, and second novel, *As Leaves Blow*; and Ahmed Elbeshlawy’s first poetry collection, *Savage Charm*.

**PHILIP CHATTING** is well-known to friends of the Proverse Prize as one of two Proverse Prize Winners in 2014, with his short story collection, *The Snow Bridge and other Stories*, and as a loyal and staunch supporter of Proverse events.

Philip has said that virtue in fiction is boring (perhaps also in life?); and this is why he does not write about it.

Jason Polley, of Hong Kong Baptist University and a Proverse Prize finalist in 2009 and 2010, finds Philip’s book, **AS LEAVES BLOW** “a modern-day Hong Kong problem play.... a critique of tragic socioeconomic inequality.”

Lawrence Gray, himself a winner of the Proverse Prize in 2016 and founder of the Hong Kong Writers’ Circle, wittily adapts the opening of Jane Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, to indicate the basic situation of Philip’s book. “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single Englishman in possession of nothing more

than a Hong Kong work visa, must be in need of a Chinese wife whether he wants one or not. Hong Kong men have long bemoaned the Gong Neui's tendency to shrug off the affections of the ripped, taught, meticulously coiffured, Gong Naahm, in favour of the sloven paunch of a Gweilo! Why oh why, they ask? And as many such Gweilos have come to realise, the answer has little to do with their good looks, sexual prowess, or fascinating character, but a lot to do with the freedom that a hapless husband, ignorant of Chinese family dynamics, gives a Chinese wife. She, as the expert in all things Chinese, can do as she pleases because he can never keep up. // And that is the situation that Jack Latimer, the anti-hero of this story, finds himself in. He has not only married Monica Wu but also married her entire family..."

His Proverse editor told Philip it was a pity *As Leaves Blow* wasn't set in New York, for example; for its success, then, could be phenomenal—it is extraordinarily funny. But Philip's reply was, that there is no other society in the world like Hong Kong; a book like this could not be written about any other place.

**AHMED ELBESHLAWY** is an Egyptian national, who has lived in Hong Kong since 1995. Ahmed is a popular teacher at HKU SPACE, and an influential writer in the area of comparative literature.

Former HKU professor, Jeremy Tambling, now Professor of English at Warsaw University of Social Sciences and Humanities, contributed a Preface to Ahmed's poetry collection, **SAVAGE CHARM**. In his essay, Tambling sees the book as direct as well as indirect discourse on Hong Kong. "How many Hong Kongs are there?" he asks. "How many languages in it? How many modes of expression? This volume of poetry, *Savage Charm*, is a reminder that there are more than you think, despite efforts to homogenise it, whether in terms of a Chinese city, or in terms of making it a dream-city of Western capitalism."

Fellow Egyptian, the poet, translator and editor, *Sayed Gouda*, now living on the Chinese Mainland, writes, "In *Savage Charm*, Elbeshlawy takes us on an exotic trajectory into his own idiosyncratic world. This collection is a collage of the personal intertwined with the impersonal, reality with fantasy and philosophy with eroticism. Almost every poem has something intriguing that provokes the reader's thoughts and mindsets."

Vaughan Rapatahana, Proverse author ("Home, Away, Elsewhere") and winner of the inaugural Proverse Poetry Prize, sees Ahmed, as known through *Savage Charm*, as "essentially a romantic".

### **AVAILABILITY**

All the newly-launched titles are available from the Proverse Hong Kong distributor, the Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, and can also be ordered from bookshops in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

The books are also all available in paperback from regional branches of amazon.

From 1 December, e-book editions will be available, also from regional branches of amazon, and, in due course, from other online book retailers.

### **AUTHORS' PRESENTATIONS**

Four of the five launching authors were present and each gave an interesting brief presentation.

[A video of each presentation is available separately on Youtube.](#)

<https://youtu.be/0JkVDmm24JQ> (Philip Chatting)  
<https://youtu.be/7LRL74cjHzs> (Ahmed Elbeshlawy)  
<https://youtu.be/xtrFmpIKetU> (Sheng-Wei Wang)  
<https://youtu.be/zqHizuLE8E4> (D.J. Hamilton)

**JAN PEARSON** is a long-term Proverse author and three-times Proverse Supplementary Prize winner, who lives in Australia. She flew in to join the event and, like the others who spoke, gave a most interesting talk, revealing some of the relationships between her own life in Hong Kong, as a girl, in the 1960s and her three Hong Kong crime novels set in the now-demolished Kowloon Walled City, *Tiger Autumn* (PP 2011), *Red Bird Summer* (PP 2012) and *Black Tortoise Winter* (PP 2014). *Tiger Autumn* was described by the SCMP reviewer as, “one of the best Hong Kong novels in years, because its author writes simply; gets on with a well-crafted plot; and builds credible dialogue and characters. Pearson has remembered that fiction is entertainment as much as art, and she is certainly a name to watch.” -- William Wadsworth, *Sunday Morning Post*, Hong Kong, 24 May 2015.

[A video of Jan’s presentation also is available on Youtube.](https://youtu.be/7mYYxXXwZAg)  
<https://youtu.be/7mYYxXXwZAg> (Jan Pearson)

The SEMI-FINALISTS FOR THE 2019 PROVERSE PRIZE were announced by Dr Verner Bickley, MBE, co-founder of the Proverse Prizes. They are: John Asome (Australia), Nicholas Binge (Hong Kong), J.P. Lindroth (USA), Jack Mayer (USA), Rony Nair (UAE, India, England) and (for the fourth time) Jan Pearson (Australia).

All entrants were congratulated for their submissions.

Dr Verner Bickley also announced winners in the 2019 Hong Kong Poetry Prize competition.

Third Prize winners of the Proverse Poetry Prize with a place in the 2019 Anthology are: Vincent Casaregola, USA; Anne Casey, Australia (formerly of Ireland); Carol Flake Chapman, USA; Brittany Mishra, USA.

The Second Prize Winner, with a place in the Anthology, is: Aiden Heung (China).

The First Prize Winner, with a place in the Anthology, is: Maria Elena Blanco of Austria (she was 2nd prize winner in 2016, 3rd prize winner in each of 2017 and 2018).

This year, in view of the high standard of entries, for the first time, the judges suggested a new category, “Special mention”. This was for entrants who had more than one entry judged excellent by the panel.

Special mentions: Ian Chambers (Ireland), Melissa Reed (USA), Deepa Vanjani (India), Peter Verbica (USA), George Watt (Australia), Marjorie Woodfield (New Zealand).

The names of all those who have won a place in the Proverse Poetry Prize Anthology 2019 are set out below:

Abbie Taylor, Ahmed Elbeshlawy, Aiden Heung, Allegra Jostad Silberstein, Andy Peyrie, Angelo Rizzi, Anne Casey, Annie Christain, Anson Wang, Aparna Upadhyaya Sanyal, Brittany Mishra, Bruce Arlen Wasserman, C.W. Emerson, Carol Flake Chapman, Carrie Hooper, Dah Helmer, Deepa Vanjani, Edward Tiesse, Fiona Chen, George Watt, Halil Suat Saraç, Harsh Ramchandani, Hayley Solomon, Helen Davis, Helen Oliver, Ian Chambers, Iris Litt, Jennifer Ann Eagleton, Joanna Radwanska-Williams, Joy Al-Sofi, Jun Pan, Kate Hawkins, Keith Nunes, Lawdenmarc Decamora, Liam Blackford, Libby Wong, Luisa Ternau, Lynda Lambert, Maggie Wong, Maria Elena Blanco, Marjory Woodfield, Martin Jon Porter, Matthew Harris, Melissa Reed, Mocco Wollert, Neil Douglas, Paola Caronni, Patience O'Neill, Patrick Reardon, Peter Verbica, Rajalakshmi Sreekrishnan, Raymond Calbay, Rayn Epreman, Reema Baniabbasi, Rena Ong, Robert Keeler, Rony Nair, Simona Rackova, Solomon Au Yeung, Stéphane D'Amour, Sui Ping Au Yeung, Susan Lavender, Suzanne Cottrell, Teresa Ngan-fung Chu, Thea Biesheuvel, Vincent Casaregola, Vinni Relwani, Wayne Mattingly, Zachary Knox.

The Anthology, *Mingled Voices 4*, will be launched on Thursday, 21 April 2020 at the Proverse Spring Reception.

All poets were congratulated.

Some of the poets were present at the Proverse Autumn Reception. They are: Helen Davis, Jenny Eagleton, Ahmed Elbeshlawy, Jun Pan, Luisa Ternau, and C.N. Rajalakshmi.

One of the guests, poet Helen Davis, most kindly took photographs of the event. These will be available, in due course, on the Proverse website, <[proversepublishing.com](http://proversepublishing.com)>.

The next Proverse event will be the Proverse Spring Reception, scheduled for 21 April 2020 in Central Hong Kong.

