Editorial

When the inaugural issue of SARE appeared in December, 1980, the Editors declared it would be "a specialist journal" covering "Malaysian and Singaporean Literature in English through Commonwealth Literature to Third World Literature in English" as well as "varieties of non-native English" in the Commonwealth. In the ensuing decades (and quite evidently in this issue), "Commonwealth" and "Third World" became "Postcolonial" Literature, itself now under question; new critical theories and approaches have developed symbiotically with other offspring genres or sub-genres such as feminist, gay, and diasporic writing (this last the creature of dislocating globalisation) disconnected from, even inimical to the old post-independence preoccupation with the creation of "national" literatures. Meanwhile, "varieties of non-native English" are now deemed native "New Englishes", "Manglish" and "Singlish" being just two among proliferating "World Englishes". Furthermore, since becoming a peer-reviewed journal in the 1990s, SARE has sometimes broadened its scope to include, for instance, a special issue on Asian American Literature, while the last issue featured essays on Orwell, Raymond Chandler, Somerset Maugham, Joseph Conrad, an interview with Norman Holland and a review of a book concerned with "reading the Bible as literature". But Malaysian and Singaporean creative writing in English remain at the core of the journal and SARE has played an important role in the steady growth of interest in the field for thirty years now.

In this special 30th anniversary issue of SARE a large majority of the papers was received after an open call for papers, and it is heartening to see so many emerging scholars, beside more established scholars, enter into the complex discourse that constitutes Malaysian and Singaporean literary studies today. (Indeed, we received more submissions, especially on diasporic writing, than could be published.) Although the essays in this issue are, of course, autonomous critical works, and employ a broad range of critical frames, some recurring themes and intellectual patterns are evident.

Lim Lee Ching and Joanne Leow revisit the work of two of Singapore's major poets, Arthur Yap and Boey Kim Cheng, in their respective attempts to deal with issues that transcend a national focus. Lim Lee Ching conceives of a larger aesthetic purpose to Yap's work and convincingly draws our attention to what he

names Yap's "auditory architecture", arguing that the poet's voice ensures that the heard complex soundscapes of the world are more profoundly felt than through the immediacies of visual perception. Alternatively, but driven by the same desire to expand her critical lens, Joanne Leow considers the significance of water and images of fluidity for Boey Kim Cheng's literary imagination, and the impact of what she terms the "confabulations of memory and history" on the liminal spaces of sea and coast. She notes, too that "while it can never avoid Singapore, Boey's poetry conveys a new conception of the country and its significance in his personal biography and in the larger histories of transnational crossings." That terrain, perhaps less autobiographically – her short stories being about the Singaporean and Chinese diaspora – is what Wena Poon explores as well. Thus Stewart Chang considers, via his evaluation of her short stories, the "multi-layered complexities of transient transnational identity," in an effort to affirm the multifaceted nature of both home and the consciousness of the migrant. Wern Mei Yong Ade, too, considers the significance of the pluralist focus of Lee Tzu Pheng's feminist poetics, particularly in terms of how Lee's poetry includes the voices of both "daughters and sons" in an effort to accommodate understood differences. For Yong Ade it is crucial that reading practices reflect an awareness of such differences.

Interpretive strategies also emerge as implicit and explicit concerns in the essays that deal with novels by Ming Cher and Goh Poh Seng. In a rare critical consideration of Ming Cher's generally underestimated novel *Spider Boys* (1995) Angela Frattarola poses the question, how does one read this novel? Her essay in effect offers a reading strategy which considers the influence of folklore on characterization, its moral force and the novel's own use of "spider fighting" and supernatural experiences to create a folkloric fictive space. Alternatively, Wai Chew Sim contextualises Goh Poh Seng's *A Dance of Moths* against a complex socio-political backdrop and argues that the novel offers valuable insights into "the processes of social class formation as well as tension, antinomy, and contradiction". Jeremy Fernando also focuses on Goh Poh Seng, but in his essay, *If We Dream Too Long* (1972) forms the basis of an extended cultural critique of Singapore which argues that the principles of movement and change define the fluidity of the concept of the nation state, that "significance is more important than signification—the importance of something (even identity) is only due to its relationship to everything else, rather than it's intrinsic meaning", and hence "meaning is at best a dream" and "elliptical."

Moving beyond Singapore, Reed Dasenbrock's assessment of two Southeast Asian novels, the Hong Kong-born Timothy Mo's *The Redundancy of Courage* (1991) and the Malaysian, Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain* (2007), forms the basis for his questioning of a fundamental theoretical implication of postcolonial studies that "the domination of one people by another" has been "essentially European" and that "resistance to imperialism" entails the celebration of pre-colonial indigenous local culture and people, and his conclusion that the "relationship between power and culture . . . a theme in both books", is far more nuanced and complex.

Less directly focused on the work of individual authors, Eddie Tay adopts an auto-ethnographic approach – subjective, documentary and anecdotal – to provide an overview and interpretation of what he sees as "the motivations, activities and subject positions of English language literary authors [mostly poets] in Singapore in relation to the cultural policy of the state as it pertains to literary production." Similarly, but deploying a "sociological-based" approach, Chuah Guat Eng analyses the impact of state policy on Malaysian literature in English (MLE) with regard to "how the Malays and the Malay world are portrayed" in both "home-based" and "diasporic" novels, and discovers that Malaysian "novelists today experience a reality and hold views of social integration radically different from the concepts of reality and national unity favoured by national literature policy makers in the past." Tan Siew Imm offers a detailed linguistic analysis of Malaysian English (ME) as a "new English" and finds that widely used nativised prepositional verbs (PrVs) are not deviant errors or ungrammatical, but are rather creative and innovative, indexing the "ethnic and national identities of the speakers."

The poetry section is also a mix of work by established, emerging and hitherto unpublished young writers. Leonard Jeyam fittingly leads with a poem for Lloyd Fernando who, with the late Lim Chee Seng, had strenuously pushed for the continued survival and, indeed, development of this journal. They and their efforts are to be celebrated, not only in relation to the journal, but also because of their understanding of the fact that new, emerging voices must be actively encouraged. Indeed, the first two issues of SARE featured a two-part review of "Singapore/ Malaysian Poetry" which saw "promise" in the poems of Arthur Yap and Lee Tzu Pheng, among others. In this special issue, the poems of then "new" voices emerging from the 1960s, Muhammad Haji Salleh and Lee Tzu Pheng, suggest why they are among the leading poets of their generation, the bilingual Malaysian National Laureate with poems originally in Malay, uniquely self-translated into English. Agnes Lam, previously long resident in Singapore, began writing in the 1980s and her poem testifies to her continuing creativity; the poems of Cyril Wong, an award-winning younger generation writer remind us that he is, given the circumstances (as he has elsewhere put it) "not just a gay poet"; Eric Tinsay Valles, an emerging poet, has recently published his first collection, while Zhang Jieqiang's poem is his first to appear in print.

The short stories reflect the strength of Malaysian fiction in English with stories from established writers Che Husna Azhari and Chuah Guat Eng, while P. Lim Pui Huen like Singaporean Stephanie Ye, are comparatively new writers yet to bring out a first collection.

It is worth noting the preponderance of articles in this issue featuring work by Singaporean authors – a symptom, perhaps, of the active encouragement in Singapore of literatures in all the four official languages and the fact that English is the working language and medium of education nationally. Malaysia's situation, with the politicisation of the position of *Bahasa Malaysia* as the national language

and the consequent marginalisation of literatures written in other languages, can be sensitive and difficult to negotiate. Lacking institutional support, publication of Malaysian works in English as well as Chinese and the Indian languages lags far behind. Malaysian novels in these languages tend to be produced by writers who are, largely, resident abroad: Tash Aw, Tan Twan Eng, Beth Yahp, Hsu Ming Teo, Siew Siang Tay, Preeta Samarasan, Rani Manicka, Zhang Gui Xing, among others. New poets (as the poetry contributions – or lack thereof in this issue – testify) are few and far between. The theatre, however, which primarily requires performance rather than publication, provides perhaps the most vibrant and energetic area of literary and cultural development, with several independent theatre companies (the Five Arts Centre, the Actors Studio, Dramalab, Instant Café Theatre Company) nurturing and supporting new playwrights by producing their works. However, lack of publication opportunities does mean that it becomes difficult to study these works in a sustained, scholarly way. Here again, SARE has played a part in providing .an outlet for some of these works, such as Leow Puay Tin's *Ang Tau Mui* (Vol 48, 2008) and Charlene Rajendran's *My Grandmother's Chicken Curry &...* (Vol 49, 2009).

Finally and unusually, we include an excerpt from a forthcoming memoir by Kagan Goh partly because it is about one of Singapore's nationally recognised "literary pioneers" Goh Poh Seng – playwright, poet, novelist, short story writer, cultural activist, publisher and editor of an albeit short-lived literary journal – who passed away in 2010, and partly because it is a moving account by his son of the last days of the poet. While he did not die exactly "a driveler and a show" like Samuel Johnson's Swift, it was as sad, Goh being ravaged by dementia caused by Parkinson's disease and aggravated by age, his death ending some twenty five years of self-exile and a journey from being major Singaporean literary figure to a diasporic writer forging a new identity as an Asian Canadian poet, his life being in some ways, a story of our times. Born and educated in Malaysia, but a naturalised Singaporean, his passing leaves Edwin Thumboo in Singapore and Wong Phui Nam in Malaysia as the sole survivors of that remarkable first generation of "Malayan" literary pioneers among whom was Lloyd Fernando who, notably, published Thumboo's first volume of poems *Rib of Earth* (1956). The elegaic note is reinforced by the thought that this, too, might be the last of a line of publications dedicated to Singapore and Malaysian literature which includes anthologies, books and special issues of journals here and abroad: memories fade, shared experiences become infrequent, paths diverge and connections end as when Singapore ceased on 30 June, 2011 to be the southern terminus of KTM (Keratapi Tanah Melayu, formerly Malayan Railway) and the trains which first crossed the Causeway in 1923 now no longer run on Singapore soil. Perhaps what can sustain instead our more intangible intersections is the literature, the arts and cultural exchange. In these vital areas we may find links that run deep and may be more enduring.

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