The Singapore Writers Festival: Global Identity, Cultural Policy and the Post-Independence Literary Landscape

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This paper takes as its starting point the motivations, activities and subject positions of English language literary authors in Singapore in relation to the cultural policy of the state as it pertains to literary production. It looks at the Singapore Writers Festival as a microcosm of the field of literary production in Singapore and explores how the identities of Singaporean authors are projected onto a global stage. Hence, the first part which focuses on the author's encounters with prominent Singaporean poet and anthologist[1] Alvin Pang, is anecdotal, to convey a sense of what has been happening in Singapore's contemporary literary landscape and to make the point that one of the ways to understand a national literary landscape – apart from close reading of the literary works – is to pay attention to the personalities, relationships and social networks within the context of literary events (such as readings and festivals), educational initiatives to do with literature[2] in relation to the state's cultural policy pertaining to the promotion of literary works among a local as well as a global audience.

Close readings of literary texts are necessary, but alone do not provide a sufficient understanding of the contemporary literary landscape in Singapore, for a literary landscape is more than the sum of what has been published. For instance, Cyril Wong's "Nationalism and Interiority: Reflections on Singaporean Poetry from 1980s to 1990s" and Gwee Li Sui's "The New Poetry of Singapore" are recent essays that celebrate and examine the poetry of a generation of authors which has emerged in the 1980s and 1990s and are excellent examples of exegesis which is sensitive to the social, cultural and political realities of Singapore. However, it is arguable that a textual analysis of poems conveys only a partial picture of a poet's work. In the case of Pang, his "literary work" also includes activities such as poetry readings; participation in literary festivals; conducting of creative writing workshops; and even bringing foreign writers to independent literary bookstores. Pang's literary work thus includes work in the social sphere, for a literary landscape is at least partly social, consisting of the lived experience of its writers and readers.

This paper therefore has both a documentary and an analytical agenda. It takes both the activities of an individual poet, and the 2009 Singapore Writers Festival (SWF) as starting points, focusing on some of the featured authors and

the showcased works and discussions that took place, in order to come to a fuller understanding of what constitutes the creative writing landscape in Singapore. There is no doubt that Singapore's literary scene is developing rapidly, especially given that the National Arts Council (NAC) of Singapore has expanded the Festival such that since 2011, it is a year-long annual event and has appointed a writer, Paul Tan, author of three poetry collections[3], as the Director of the 2011 and 2012 Singapore Writers Festivals. In light of this, it is hoped that this paper is a timely articulation of some of the debates and issues relevant to Singapore literature today and the concerns of cultural policy makers and administrators.

Methodologically, this paper uses an (auto)ethnographic approach to the understanding of creative writing as a social phenomenon. I use the term "(auto) ethnography" to denote both autoethnography and ethnography, for to some extent, ethnography is autoethnography, it being inevitably constructed out of the assumptions, biases and agenda of the ethnographer. Furthermore, given that the ethnographer (that is, the writer of this paper) is a poet embedded in the social phenomenon that is being observed, there is a certain amount of inevitable subjectivity: that what one observes in other writers might constitute one's own pre-dispositions as a writer. In other words, I fully acknowledge that what is being written here may in part be projections (personal opinion) rather than impartial observation.

The critical advantages and problems associated with (auto)ethnography as a research methodology have been discussed in various quarters. As a recognized methodology, it comprises a heterogeneous set of rival practices. We see this in the reactions to Leon Anderson's landmark paper "Analytic Autoethnography" and her responses to those reactions[4]. Thus Carolyn S. Ellis and Arthur B. Bochner are concerned about the suppression of the personal narratives of both the observer and the observed, when one privileges analysis, cautioning against being too overtly analytical to the extent that one becomes "a detached spectator" such that knowledge becomes "disembodied" (431). On the other hand, Paul Atkinson argues that there might be "the elevation of the autobiographical to such a degree that the ethnographer becomes more memorable than the ethnography, the self more absorbing than other social actors" (402).

It seems to me that the main pitfall of (auto)ethnography is self-indulgence: thus I wish to point out that I am not offering myself as a privileged observer-participant, but that while allowing myself a certain degree of self-reflexivity in writing about the literary landscape as a social rather than as a textual landscape, I am also opening myself up to critique. Working with memory, field notes and impressions, I am interested in weaving together narrative, arguments and analyses in order to understand Singapore's contemporary literary landscape in order to document and examine the activities of its key actors and their responses to

Singapore's cultural policy. At the same time, to the extent that the self is a social configuration, I am offering readers the observations of the ethnographic self of the poet and scholar as a site for critical investigation. To deflect attention from myself is to allow myself to be, as Anderson puts it, "a hidden and yet seemingly omniscient presence", a presence no one can legitimately assume (383). An (auto)ethnographic project such as this, using personal encounters and the 2009 Singapore Writers Festival as starting points, would engage with issues pertaining to the development of post-independence literature in Singapore, cultural policy as well as reframe the study of national or postcolonial literary landscapes.

Literary Social Activism and the Renaissance City Plan

In late February 2011, I read a paper entitled "Encounters, Stereotypes and the Cosmopolitan Imagination: Travel Writing from Singapore" at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore[5] (NUS). Alvin Pang was there to meet Robin Hemley, director of the Nonfiction Writing Program at the University of Iowa, who was one of the conference delegates. I have known Alvin for more than a decade, and throughout these years I have noticed how he has always proved adept at applying for state funding to support his various writing and publication projects. Some of his anthologies are transnational collaborations, involving co-editors and contributors from the Philippines, Australia and Italy[6]. That evening, Alvin brought a few of the conference delegates to Books Actually, an independent bookstore known for stocking and promoting literary works by Singaporean authors. Many aspiring and established writers of Singapore have held readings on its premises. I found out that the store owners, Kenny Leck and Karen Wai, both in their early twenties, also rescue unsold copies of literary works and anthologies from being pulped by their publishers. When I wanted to purchase the previous two issues of *Ceriph*[7], a literary quarterly published in Singapore which focuses on both literary works and visual art, including photography, they were given to me *gratis*.

Alvin then invited us to a prize-giving presentation hosted the following day by the National University of Singapore Literary Society. At the presentation, I met Ivy Goh-Nair, wife of Chandran Nair whose first book of poetry, *Once the Horsemen and Other Poems*, was published in 1972, and who had once set up Woodrose Publications (since defunct), to publish local writing. Daren Shiau[8] and Alvin were among those who read at the event, the latter reading his latest unpublished poems. I was also fascinated to hear the founders of *Ceriph* Lee Wei Fen (who is also the editor), Winnie Goh and Hans Wong-Jensen, talk about their hopes for the literary journal. I noted to Alvin that his poetic craft has improved significantly, to which he replied that I had been away from Singapore for too long and that in general, the quality of Singapore's literary landscape – as seen from the

readings and discussions at public literary events – has improved dramatically.

It is encounters such as the above, undocumented and often elided in research articles which focus on the hermeneutics and exegesis of literary texts, that characterize the social nature of the literary landscape such that one may even argue that a literary festival such as the Singapore Writers Festival, is the social-literary landscape par excellence, enabling further exploration of the issues that animate Singapore's post-independence literary landscape.

The SWF 2009, spearheaded by the NAC, Singapore's state agency for the arts and supported by nearly thirty co-sponsors, took place over a period of nine days in late October. Alongside more than a hundred and ten parallel sessions ranging from readings and book launches by emerging and established local and international authors, were an academic symposium on the literatures of Singapore and Malaysia, a publisher's convention, a national literary competition, as well as a Festival Directors Programme during which international and regional festival directors were invited to network with authors, publishers and literary agents.

The SWF 2009, a major literary event, thus demonstrated that creative writing is a socially-embedded act. While literary creation may take place in solitude, it is also a profoundly social act through its provenance, dissemination and consumption because it is thus embedded within a web of relationships. These relationships, on display in abundance at the festival, vary from mentorships, friendships and (unstated) rivalries amongst writers in Singapore, to international collaborations between anthologists and publishers. The multilingual national literary event, is almost always also an international event, with its cast of globally recognised eminent authors such as Qiu Xiaolong, Da Sijie, Miguel Syjuco and Neil Gaiman.

The international nature of the festival is thereby aligned with a national cultural policy that seeks to place the Singaporean identity on a global stage of arts and culture. SWF 2009 thus functions as part of a deliberate and well-defined "globally oriented national cultural policy" (553) as Terence Chong has argued, pursued by the state in the last two decades, its purpose being to create "a more vibrant arts and cultural scene [which] might help retain highly skilled and globally mobile Singaporeans" (556). As indicated in the *Renaissance City Plan*, the state's arts and cultural policy blueprint initiated in 2000 and updated in 2005 and 2008, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts has embarked on a strategic nation building vision to "help promote a stronger sense of belonging and identity among citizens, including Singaporeans who are overseas" (12). Furthermore, the Plan declares, "there is a need for more unique content and experiences that would both entertain as well as differentiate Singapore from other lifestyle destinations in Asia (*Renaissance City Plan* 13). The state sees itself in competition with various other Asian global cities such as Seoul, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, and Abu Dhabi (*Renaissance City Plan* 14). There are two main imperatives to the plan:

firstly, through a vibrant arts scene, to attract an elite and globally mobile group of international labour and, secondly, to articulate a national identity for Singaporean citizens as part of the state's nation building endeavour.

A sense of Singapore's national, political and historical heritage pervades the Festival such that the SWF 2009 seems both literally and figuratively contained by the nation state, its politics and its history. While the literary festival is a heterogeneous collection of literary events, unified by the umbrella term "Singapore Writers Festival", it has the effect of drawing attention to the nation state. The state-sponsored image of the nation is undeniably on display here: most events were held in The Arts House, a two-hundred-year old colonial building that was formerly Singapore's first Parliament House. Old documents as well as photographs of prominent past figures of Singapore on the walls, foreground the historical and political significance of the building, reminding all present that the readings and talks are being set against a backdrop of historical and national events. In this way, literary endeavours are contained within the ambit of Singapore's national agenda. Among major Festival events was the SPH-NAC Golden Point Award 2009 Ceremony. Sponsored by Singapore's major newspaper and publishing company, SPH (Singapore Publishing House) and organised by the NAC, the Golden Point Award is virtually Singapore's national literary competition for unpublished writers. Entries are accepted in the four official languages English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese. As I have argued elsewhere, Singapore's official policy of multiculturalism and multilingualism is thus reproduced within the domain of creative writing (Tay 6).

Moreover, unsurprisingly, there is a noticeable bias towards entries which take Singapore's culture as their theme, although the literary works are not necessarily mouthpieces reinforcing Singapore's official image as a global Asian city populated by citizens content with their society. One poem, "Sungei Road Market, On a Sunday", a winning entry by Eric Low Soon Liang, invites a tourist to go beyond the circuit of cultural exoticism and ends at a street bazaar where the sentimental objects of the poor are commoditised as second-hand trinkets for tourists:

> Everything, everyone's a bargain.
> You could purchase someone's entire world for the right price.

The poem thus addresses the anxieties of the Singaporean individual about the commodifying and the exoticising of everyday life in Singapore for a global (tourist) audience. Perhaps it is heartening to note that even though the nation state is the discursive environment within which SWF 2009 takes place, there is some scope for the individual poem and writer to express unease with the increasingly globalised national space of Singapore.

I arrived early for one of the SWF 2009 events and had coffee at Earshot Café, with its prominent displays of books, music CDs and film DVDs by Singaporeans. I could not help overhearing three people conversing at a table near mine. It turned out they were arts administrators working out the kinks in the evening's proceedings and outlining the different priorities of their departments. Business-like in their demeanour and attire, laptops open at their table, the efficiency and impersonality of their conversation were those of business executives, reflecting a corporatist tendency to the arts in Singapore. Of course, this is not a phenomenon unique to Singapore; yet I cannot help but conclude that the sort of writer who would be nurtured and who would thrive in such an environment is the kind who understands the language, logistics and priorities of book retail businesses, state funding agencies and educational institutions.

In this regard, one does well to wonder why most of the English language literary works published in the last two decades in Singapore are poetry. Unlike the novel, the production of poetry is a function of varied contingencies – meaning that individual poems are discrete works written during different times for various journals, readings, and even literary competitions. Creating an entire poetry collection, unlike a novel, is less often a work of internal structural continuity than what can fit in with the temperament of individuals whose creative writing functions alongside varied literary activities and responsibilities. In his micro-history of the development of Singapore poetry and the corresponding emergence of a new generation of poets (such as Felix Cheong, Alvin Pang, and Yong Shu Hoong, among others) in the first decade of the new millennium, Gwee argues that "[t]he term 'literary activism' has since emerged as the preferred label to use on all efforts that go well beyond mere writing to sustain the promotion of the arts in vaguely non-politicised ways" (236). In this respect, the romanticised image existing in the minds of the Singaporean lay public of the writer as a marginal figure may need to be revised. In an age of the socially connected and worldly poet, the contemporary Singapore poet is as comfortable writing grant proposals to attract state funding as writing poetry. He (such a poet is usually male) is at ease with social media and the idea of reaching out to his readers in public, and would have his own Wikipedia entry, a homepage on the Internet or, at the very least, a searchable web presence and will have contributed to not only print but also Internet literary journals[9].

Unlike the earlier generation of poets who were mostly teachers or academics, these writers bring to their writing careers a mindset nurtured by a neoliberal ethos. One might think of the vocation of a poet as a parallel to another job that pays the bills. The economics of literary production is such that the beginning writer (or even the established poet) cannot pursue his writing at the expense of a conventional career; and what is notable in Singapore therefore, is a shift in the vocational profiles of poets. Three of the most prominent poets of the earlier

generation, namely Edwin Thumboo, Lee Tzu Pheng and the late Arthur Yap, were academics teaching at the Department of English at the University of Singapore and its successor, The Department of English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore. Collectively, the current crop of writers possesses a far more varied professional, significantly corporate profile, with some of them at different times even having had careers in different sectors ranging from law (Daren Shiau and Aaron Lee), banking (Yong Shu Hoong, Toh Hsien Min), the media (Felix Cheong, Alvin Pang, Paul Tan), the civil service (Alvin Pang and Paul Tan) and education (Felix Cheong, Yong Shu Hoong, Alvin Pang). Hence, it might be argued that these poets are more attuned to neoliberal thinking than the earlier generation of poets who were professionally academics. The term "neoliberalism" more commonly denotes an approach to social and economic policy informed by the demand and supply of a market for goods and services, and I am using it here to denote a circumstance where the logic of the market is brought to bear on the domain of creative writing. Hence, notions such as events management, publicity and networking with the aim of cultivating an audience or creating a local and international market for their writing would not be unfamiliar to these creative writers.

To describe what these writers mainly do as "creative writing" is thus a bit of a misnomer, when they devote a significant part of their time to activities such as leading writing workshops, participating in literary festivals, organising/participating in regular readings and talks, networking with publishers, editing online literary journals – and writing grant proposals to attract state funding to support these activities. Their creative writing as a practice today could be said to be already imbricated with neoliberalism. The fact that many of these poets are on good terms with publishers, bookstore owners, arts administrators, academics and librarians implies that they are immersed in a field of activity that produces not only literary works, but also a myriad of associated endeavours to do with literary publication and marketing.

Furthermore, the field of activities of writers such as Pang extends beyond Singapore. As mentioned earlier, Pang has collaborated as an editor of international poetry anthologies with counterparts from Italy, Australia and the Philippines. It can be said that the identity of Singapore authors is linked to Singapore's status as a global city, with its highly educated and globally mobile workforce. While the international activities of poets in academia such as Kirpal Singh and Edwin Thumboo are often conducted within well-defined academic conference circuits, those of Pang and his counterparts, in addition to their involvement in international literary festivals and events, include publicity of their writing and activities through social media such as FaceBook, YouTube and literary e-journals, thereby accentuating through such accessibility their global identities as poets.

Global Identity and the Singaporean Writer

One of the featured authors of SWF 2009 was Wena Poon, a then recently published author who exemplifies the globally mobile Singaporean writer. Poon is a well-travelled Harvard-trained Singaporean lawyer currently based in Austin, Texas. Her first collection of short stories, *Lions in Winter* (2007), has Singaporean characters. Her second collection, *The Proper Care of Foxes* (2009), launched at the Festival, has a more varied cast of characters, ranging from a retrenched British bank employee to a Scottish photo-journalist based in Bangkok but on assignment in the Philippines. What is notable, however, is that in the table of contents, the title of every story is appended with its respective multiple settings: e.g., "Development" is set in Hong Kong, Singapore and London, and "Siegfried and the Avalanche" in New York, New Hampshire and Hong Kong. Like her first collection, the overall impression is that the work is infused with a cosmopolitan acumen, an acumen fostered by globalisation which is characterised by rapid flows of commodities, labour, information and cultural texts.

Furthermore, we are told in the Endnotes to her second collection that it "was written at airports, on airplanes, on commuter buses and on the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) trains during a point of [her] life when [she] tried to live in three cities all at the same time (the California Bay Area, Austin, and Hong Kong)" (225). Poon, thereby creates an image of the globally mobile transnational subject and author – which coheres with Singapore's desired self-image as a global city, as outlined in the state's *Renaissance City Plan*. Her profile reminds one of the novelist Hwee Hwee Tan's: born in Singapore, lived for a period in the Netherlands, and educated in the United Kingdom and America, while her second novel, *Mammon Inc.* (2001), is about a Singaporean who has lived in Oxford and New York. Hence, to draw from Arjun Appadurai's notion of "the imagination as a social practice", we could say that creative writing as a social practice thereby partakes in the circuit of the global social imaginary (31).

The identities of Poon and Tan, as Chinese female Singaporean authors, are caught up in this global imaginary circuit. We may recall at this point Graham Huggan's argument in "The Postcolonial Exotic" that the term "'postcolonial' … functions not merely as a marker of anti-imperial resistance, but as a sales tag for the international commodity culture of late (twentieth-century) capitalism" (24). Like Huggan with regard to the writers he discusses, I am not accusing Singaporean writers such as Poon of "blatant opportunism" (24); rather, I wish to suggest that writers in Singapore who wish to write for an audience larger than that of their small birth country have no option but to negotiate with global market forces for non-Western literary works. The negotiation occurs on the national level as well, for we have to keep in mind that the *Renaissance City Plan* aims to transform Singapore into "a global city attractive to Singaporeans, foreign talent and high net worth individuals" (18). Given that for pragmatic and economic reasons

Singapore's contemporary national endeavour is to be part of the global arts and cultural scene through the development of an arts industry, it is not surprising that some of its more prominent and successful authors are already heeding the call and going global.

Some of the issues, debates and ironies that accompany the marketing of the national identity of the author may be seen in the discussions at one of the sessions that announced the launch of the Metropoli d'Asia-Catalyst Fiction Prize. According to Andrea Berrini, founder of the publishing house based in Italy, Metropoli d'Asia, there is a "quest in Italy to understand Asia" and that Italian readers are looking for "what is new from a cultural point of view". Instead of waiting to be approached by literary agents, the publishing house will be actively looking for manuscripts by Singaporean citizens living in Singapore. Submissions of novels in English or English translation are accepted, the manuscript to be published in English in Singapore and translated into Italian for publication in Italy, and the winner receiving three thousand Euros in royalties. Not surprisingly, the criteria of citizenship and residency were queried by various members in the audience. A lady mentioned that she was born in Indonesia and lamented that although she has lived in Singapore since she was seven, she will not be considered "Singaporean enough" under the rules. As she put it, such criteria meant there is a "new form of marginality" at work. Another asked whether the criteria were really necessary, since the matter of "authenticity of the writing" could have been assessed by a panel of able judges. This was met by a rejoinder from another audience member, who said that at least the criteria were clearly defined and that there will always be people who would be excluded, no matter how expansive the criteria. He suggested that perhaps, those who were excluded might be motivated to organise the sponsorship of another prize with a different set of criteria. On display here, of course, is the power of organised capital (in the form of a literary prize) in adjudicating the author's identity and hence a work's "cultural authenticity".

Evidently, issues of identity and authenticity are complicated by market forces. In this respect, Huggan's analysis of the Booker Prize and the way its winners are marketed to a global readership are instructive. Huggan points out that "the commercial codes of the international open market" (24) should not be overlooked, and sees the Booker Prize competition, for instance, as representing the sort of compromises writers have to make in order for their books to be commercially viable to readers beyond their immediate national environments. As Huggan argues, such writers would have to emphasise the "exotic appeal [their writing] holds to an unfamiliar metropolitan audience" (24). One could hazard a guess that the future winner(s) of the Metropoli d'Asia-Catalyst Fiction Prize would make the same compromises as those implicitly made by the Booker Prize winners. Huggan cites the example of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* – the book's front cover blurb declares that India has "[a]t last … found its voice", ignoring, of course, as he points out, "several thousand years of Indian literary history" (26). Even though

their works may interrogate "[e]xoticist myths and stereotypes", these myths and stereotypes will "reappear with a vengeance in the commercial packaging of their books" (Huggan 26). Similarly, the marketability of authors such as Wena Poon and Hwee Hwee Tan in the U.S. may be attributed to their gender and ethnic identities which fit easily into the commercial and essentialist codes of the Asian feminine mystique. Indeed, the cover of Tan's *Mammon Inc.* features a model whose eyelids possess epicanthic folds and whose left cheek is juxtaposed with the insignia of a dragon, and the bottom right of the front cover is significantly captioned "Essential Asia"[10]. A Faustian bargain is struck such that the commercial codes involved in publishing and marketing books by Asians for a global audience often, ironically, undermine the critique of such codes embedded in these very same books.

This paper, motivated by a documentary and an analytical agenda has looked at the relationship between Singapore's cultural policy and the responses of its writers, taking SWF 2009 as a site for the exploration of some of the issues that inhere in Singapore's literary landscape pertaining to English-language authors. As we have seen, the author in Singapore is caught at the confluence of the state's neoliberal cultural policy and the international publishing and marketing practices for literary books, the latter being also a function of the neoliberalism of the global market place. Even as we celebrate the global visibility of events such as the Singapore Writers Festival and the literary works of Singaporeans, we need to be mindful of the material conditions of literary writing and publishing and the neoliberalist pressures that are brought to bear on these events and literary works.

Notes

[1] Alvin Pang was named Young Artist of the Year (2005) by the National Arts Council of Singapore. He received the Singapore Youth Award (Arts and Culture) in 2007 and has been invited to literary events and festivals at various international locations, among them Bali, Cape Town, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, Perth and Slovenia. See Nureza Ahmad, "Alvin Pang" [http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_463_2004-12-23.html] For more biographical details, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alvin_Pang] [date accessed: 27 Sept 2011].

[2] An important pedagogical initiative which involves many Singaporean writers is the Mentor Access Project, a twelve-month programme initiated by the National Arts Council and coordinated by The Arts House and the poet Yong Shu Hoong, whereby aspiring writers are assigned to published writers based in Singapore and paid to do so. See [http://www.theartshouse.com.sg/pdfs/mentoraccess_guide.pdf] [date accessed: 27 Sept 2011].

[3] Paul Tan's poetry collection, *Curious Roads* (Singapore: EPB Publishers, 1994) was awarded the Singapore Literature (Commendation) Prize in 1993 and his

Driving into Rain (Singapore: Raffles Editions, 1998), the Singapore Literature (Merit) Prize in 1997. His third collection is *First Meeting of Hands* (Singapore: Firstfruits, 2006). See Marsita Omar, "Paul Tan", [http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1325_2007-11-22.html] for biographical details [date accessed: 28 Sept 2011].

[4] See *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35.4 (2006), an issue devoted to papers pertaining to the critical merits and potential pitfalls of analytic autoethnography as a research methodology.

[5] "Travel Writing: Practice, Pedagogy and Theory". The conference was held at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 24 - 25 February 2011.

[6] The anthologies include Pang, Alvin and Tiziano Fratus, eds. *Double skin: New Poetic Voices from Italy and Singapore*. Singapore: Ethos, 2009; Pang, Alvin and John Kinsella, eds. *Over there: Poems from Australia and Singapore*. Singapore: Ethos, 2008; Pang, Alvin, Aaron Lee, Ramón C. Sunico and Alfred A. Yuson, eds. *Love Gathers All: The Philippines-Singapore Anthology of Love*. Philippines: Anvil Publishing; Singapore: Ethos 2002.

[7] Lee Wei Fen, ed. *Ceriph*. Singapore: Math Paper Press, 2010 – The journal seeks to provide "an informal space for experimental or up-and-coming writers and artists to express themselves" (3). Most contributors to this journal are in their early and mid-twenties. There is a palpable sense that at least some of these contributors could eventually become established writers and artists in their own right.

[8] Daren Shiau received the Singapore Literature (Commendation) Prize in 1998 for his novel *Heartland* (Singapore: SNP Editions, 1999). Other works are a poetry collection, *Peninsular: Archipelagos and Other Islands* (Singapore: Ethos, 2000) and a collection of micro fiction, *Velouria* (Singapore: Firstfruits, 2007). See Gracie Lee, "Daren Shiau" [http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1244_2008-04-27.html] and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daren_Shiau] for biographical details [date accessed: 27 Sept 2011].

[9] Two of the more prominent Asian literary e-journals are *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* [www.qlrs.com] and *Cha:An Asian Literary Journal* [www.asiancha.com]. They are based respectively, in Singapore and Hong Kong. The author is currently the Reviews Editor at *Cha*.

[10] Wena Poon's *Lions in Winter* was first published in Malaysia by MPH and later in the UK by Salt Publishing. The front cover image of the MPH edition, which is available in Singapore and Malaysia, depicts a leaf set against a snowy landscape. The image is faithful to its title, at least more so than that of the UK edition (which is available in the US as well), which depicts the face of an Asian woman reflected in a mirror. While the relevance of the Asian feminine mystique as presented on the front cover of a book of stories about Singaporeans abroad might be queried, one could not fault the marketing logic.

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