

## EDITORIAL: “Old Myths and New Realities”

One of the pleasures of *SARE*, for me, is to see the combination of critical introspection, theoretical analysis, and creative contemplation taking shape in every issue. They are all parts, of course, of a larger conversation about the ideas that interest us and the problems that concern us as humanities scholars, writers, teachers, and human beings. This issue of *SARE* contributes richly to that conversation by carrying offerings from a number of differently constituted historical and cultural contexts that pivot variously on the question of myth, history and the present, gender and resistance, nature, nation and reformation.

Opening this issue, C. J. W.-L. Wee provides a complex reflection on the meaning of historicity by probing the idea of the contemporary that emerges from the Malaysia and Singapore of the 1980s–1990s, principally through the responses to their times and interpretations of the past of theatre practitioners Krishen Jit and Kuo Pao Kun, respectively. Wee asks if theatre, and the arts in general, can provide a powerful “multicultural” counterpoint to and beyond that old, colonial-era, “plural society” paradigm upon which nationalist – and global capitalist – myths of Malaysia and Singapore are predicated. Susan Philip deploys the emerging genre of “cosy crime” fiction, as exemplified in the Kelantan-inspired novels of Barbara Ismail, to explore shifting Malaysian realities that derive their resonance from the concept of *adat* and Malayness. Philip’s contribution is especially timely given that Malaysian popular fiction is currently under-represented in scholarly writing. Foong Soon Seng fuses ecofeminism with new materialism in his reading of New Zealand author Janet Frame’s account of madness in *Faces in the Water* to quietly demolish that clinical myth of mental institutions as healing spaces. Neluka Silva explores formulations of resistance in Mahasweta Devi’s short story “Draupadi” from the nexus of gender, class, and caste subordination, and raises the intriguing question if myths might not hold out possibilities for richer and more inventive *real* lives.

The creative writing segment continues to connect and transport us to the engrossing nuances of other locales, landscapes, and registers. John Ryan’s lyrical ode to nature – and its regenerative powers – conjures the deep musicality and sensuousness of everyday provincial life, which is played out against, but never subsumed by, the larger canvas of cyclical time. In Stewart Manley’s consummately crisp and tightly wound universe, native Burmese script is poised against words to unfurl worlds of pain and torment. Paul GnanaSelvam’s equally mesmerising contribution tells us another story of female bondage, and awakening, to wondrously tantalising effect. We are also hugely fortunate to carry an excerpt from a soon-to-be-published novel by Sreedhevi Iyer, whose mastery of her craft plunges us deep in a moment of resistance in Malaysian history and the political process, a juncture which seems particularly apposite for the current mood of exuberant “newness” in a “reforming” post-elections Malaysia.

We are also delighted to feature Andrew Ng’s interview with Ng Kim Chew on the processes of diasporic identification and on how the question of home, belonging, and the literary canon is viewed from an ideological and cultural location on the borders of nations. Unlike other Malaysian authors of Chinese ethnicity such as Tan Twan Eng and Tash Aw, who also (mostly) live abroad but write in English, Ng writes in Chinese and from an academic and literary base in Taiwan. Both the “Sinophone” and “Anglophone” are acts of classification in Malaysia that explicitly signal the relegation of their literatures to the margins of

national culture. We hope that this interview will help to initiate more conversations to bridge the lacuna in literary studies of comparative analyses of Malaysian literatures in English and Chinese.

In the review section, we are thankful to Bernard Wilson, Nicholas Pagan, Agnes Yeow, Luis Ortega, and Looi Siew Teip for sharing their critical insights and for their thoughtful and balanced evaluations of books recently published in their areas of expertise.

We also wish to thank the members of our editorial and advisory boards for their continuing support. We would like to acknowledge in particular the contribution to the journal of our peer reviewers, for we cannot make the right decisions on manuscripts, both scholarly and creative, without their expert assessments. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

As always, we were assisted in putting together this issue by our very able Renukha Devi, and on this occasion also received help from the department's other postgraduate students – Vanessa Ting, Juno Ooi, and Atikah Wahid. To their inexhaustible energy – and its tricks and virtues! – we say, thank you so much.

In closing, we would like to reiterate that our first concern is to the journal, to making it a lively and engaging forum for a diversity of voices to ask questions in the discipline and help extend the boundaries for our conversations. Our December issue will feature scholarship and other writing on Asian children's literature and film, and we are still accepting submissions for this special edition. We are also open to accepting manuscripts on other topics that are in line with *SARE*'s aims and scope; we will consider running a selection of general articles alongside our special issue. To that end, we invite original research articles, poems, short fiction, essays, interviews, and book and performance reviews so as to engage and re-engage with that project that was begun all those years ago.

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