

EDITORIAL: “Light”

2020 is a landmark year for *SARE*. It marks the fortieth year of our founding. The events that exploded this year, upending, if not ending, millions of lives across the globe, meant that we did not release a milestone fortieth anniversary issue. Celebration seemed fatuous in the face of the darkness, and divisiveness, enveloping us. Despite these disorientations, *SARE* went about its work of assembling materials—critical as well as creative—and platforming new and emerging scholars and creative writers, and placing them on the page with esteemed and established scholars. That we are here, *now*, is a testament to *SARE*'s resilience.

We are privileged in this issue to carry two watercolours by Jackie Hinkson, the first of which is featured on our cover page and the other in our creative writing segment. In celebration of Hinkson's technique, fellow Caribbean Derek Walcott observes: “A painter is known for his devotion to light [...] Getting the light right has been the hope of saints as well as of painters, of poets, from Augustine to Turner, to Wordsworth and Dante, and Hinkson could want no better epitaph [...] than ‘he got the light right’” (413, 418). Walcott's words in honour of the precision of Hinkson's light-infused art are indeed significant. Without light there can be no representation of life.

This general issue contains a range of work and ideas and a mix of regional voices that readers familiar with *SARE* have come to expect. It carries research articles on Singaporean filmmaker Gladys Ng, Indian poet Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, the beginnings of Malay-language crime fiction in Malaysia, and J.G. Farrell's historical novel, *The Siege of Krishnapur*, and short fiction and poetry set in or invoking Trinidad, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia. Carissa Foo examines how cinematic modes of representation in *The Pursuit of a Happy Human Life* capture the non-hierarchical and mobile space of performativity in which adolescent female friendship acts out its lived, corporeal realities. Neeraj Sankhyan and Suman Sigroha consider the insurgency of the Khasi people of North-East India through the environmental poetry of

Nongkynrih, one of their number. Evgeniya Kukushkina's article brings to *SARE*'s English-language readership the idea that while Malaysian crime fiction may now be a burgeoning genre, practically nothing is known of its European-influenced, pre-World War II Malay-language antecedents. Prashant Maurya and Nagendra Kumar contextualize an event from the epidemiological history of cholera to foreground discourses on colonial medicine as represented in fiction set in the British Raj.

Our creative writing section emphasizes, again, the power of words and the imagination. We feel several caveats are in order. *SARE* believes that all writing, including the academic, is creative. It also rejects the assumption that short stories and poetry are to be devalued because they are “only fictional”. The persistence of such damaging stereotypes about writing and creativity and the value of the fictional is to be railed, and rallied, against. *SARE*'s separately-titled creative writing section attests to the power of fiction to not so much record as create new experience. Several of the writers in this issue belong to or have been deeply formed by multiple places and inhabit palimpsestic identities. Keith Jardim's excerpt from his novel-in-the-making, much like the Hinkson brushstrokes he also pays homage to, calls up depths of mood, ambience, and a certain tension. Like Hinkson, Jardim is also from, and of, Port of Spain, Trinidad, and the Caribbean coast, delineated in shimmering, atmospheric prose, is poised delicately between land and water, light and darkness, menace and redemption. Ngoi Hui Chien's deft control of voice in “Fallen”, as it modulates from angry denunciation to woeful exhortation, is framed around the massacre by British troops of 24 unarmed villagers as part of their counter-insurgency operations against Chinese Malayan communists. Esther Vincent's poems move from personal to national to colonial and neocolonial traumas. “Family Tree” invokes the dislocations, but also accretions, of diaspora while “Albatross” mourns the havoc wreaked by territorial exploitation and environmental degradation. P. Lim Pui Huen's “Mak Wok, Spice Mistress” is fiction's attempt, and resolve, to use historical fact—the archaeological discovery in 2009 of three cooking pots—to challenge the omissions of recorded history. Johor Lama, the old capital of the Johor Sultanate, was the site of prolonged warfare between the Sultanate and its rivals. Yet, as the author, Founding

Librarian of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, made it known to me, official records of the period rarely document women as anything other than victims of war. Lim's piece is an attempt, then, to chronicle women's ingenuity, resourcefulness, and survival.

As usual, *SARE* also features interviews with authors pushing the boundaries of their literary form, and in this issue Carol Leon speaks to Bernice Chauly about her latest works and creative praxis. Our reviews section devotes pages to new publications, some of which would not always receive the review attention they deserve in journals of this kind. We open this section with David Neo's appraisal of Kenneth Chan's *Chrita-Chrita Baba*, a collection of short fiction in both Baba Malay and English that draws from, and appropriates as *Peranakan*, folklore from the Nusantara region. Shaila Koshy assesses Anitha Devi Pillai and Pura Arumugam's ambitious compendium, *From Kerala to Singapore*, which, in combining historical research, oral testimonies, portrait photography, and personal memorabilia, encapsulates the quest to trace the genealogy of "Singapore Malayalee" as an identity construction. Christian Benitez offers a lyrical overview of two works of historical fiction from the Philippines, Gina Apostol's *Insurrecto* and Dominic Sy's *A Natural History of Empire*, as texts that intervene in Philippine historiography by questioning the role played in the country's past, and its present, by imperialist narratives. We end with Ho Sok Fong's *Lake Like a Mirror*, the first of Ho's collection of short stories to be translated into English from the original Chinese. Keith Jardim's review is itself a sublime meditation on the wistful, dreamlike worlds and landscapes that Ho conjures for her women characters.

SARE wishes to record the loss to Malaysian literature, society, and culture with the death in October this year of poet and essayist Salleh Ben Joned, who is remembered here for us by Edwin Vethamani. Salleh was my own teacher of English literature at Universiti Malaya and Vethamani's obituary pays tribute to those audacious, and ultimately heroic, attributes of both the man and the poet, which while they inspired and moved his students and Malaysia's wider literary community into new thinking, also irked the mindless-status-quo-upholding (a collocation Salleh would have approved of) elements within it.

As always, I most warmly thank our contributors to this issue. I am also immensely grateful to the support of my colleagues on the editorial board, and particularly to Susan Philip for her sharing with me from the outset the responsibilities of running this journal. My thanks and appreciation are also due to Renukha Devi for her technical assistance in getting this issue off the ground. We remain profoundly indebted, as ever, to our peer reviewers, some of whom are long-time friends and advocates of *SARE*. Without their willingness to give of their time, and critical acumen, none of our work can be done.

To keep *SARE* ahead of emerging topics and to keep us reaching new audiences, I am delighted to announce that we have scheduled for July 2021 a Special Issue on Worldbuilding guest edited by Gabriela Lee of the University of the Philippines-Diliman. We have received an extremely encouraging response to our call for papers and feel gratified at being able to offer a platform to showcase new developments within the field.

As we approach the end of this year and take stock of our archive to assess how the literary culture at *SARE* can keep growing and learning, our hope is that literature and the arts will continue to provide a powerful counterpoint to the darkness of the divisive culture wars, which the pandemic has greatly exacerbated, and, through historical awareness, empathy, and creativity, open the door to light.

Works Cited

Walcott, Derek. "Jackie Hinkson", *The Massachusetts Review*, Autumn 1994, Vol. 35, No. 3/4, pp. 413-418.

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel