

## EDITORIAL: “Openness”

At its founding in 1980, *SARE* was among the first journals in the region to create a critical and creative space for what was then known as “Commonwealth literature” (and later as “postcolonial literature”), with a focus on the study of Malaysian and Singaporean literature in English. That commitment has expanded over the years to welcome contributions on all of Asia’s literary and cultural productions and also from a diverse range of theoretical and critical perspectives and approaches. Thus, though there is a tendency to view *SARE* as a regional journal in terms of its focus, its current geographical scope – from Southeast Asia to East to North to West to South Asia, and to Asia’s “presence” through its diasporic configurations in various continents – is in fact larger than that of most other journals of its category in the region. This inclusive outlook derives mainly from recent editorial strategies to broaden the journal’s readership and contributor base but was also enabled by the new momentum as *SARE* moved towards open scholarship. Together with a much-needed “Asian-centered” space for critical reflection and dialogue for scholars, wherever they live, of Asian literatures and other cultural texts, *SARE* simultaneously serves as an important forum for writers of poetry and fiction, esteemed and beginning voices, both from Asia and across the world. Creativity respects no boundaries.

We are very pleased that Vol. 56, No.1 is a definite part of that openness and ongoing conversation. The special issue section, guest edited by Chris Mooney-Singh and Scott Grant, brings together a selection of academic and creative pieces presented at the Lit Up Asia-Pacific Festival convened in Singapore in late 2018. The essays collected here re-discover for us aspects of Asian literary heritages and performance traditions that have been undeservedly ignored, forgotten or overlooked — and rarely featured in English-language academic journals. With its rich panoply of views and insights, from the interview, poems, plays, short stories as well as scholarly essays, the special issue affirms various strands of the translational, transnational and “virtual” dissemination – Water, City, Sky – of Asian voices and traditions in openness to and

togetherness with those from other regions, contesting the idea of “Asia” as a unified, closed-off or bounded formation. This is the connective as well as connected “silken road of ideas” the special issue editors point to in their Introduction. Australia, and the “Asia-Pacific” that it signifies, is a valuable partner in this conversation.

The general section opens with a critical essay by Chi P. Pham that uncovers facets about the relationship between Vietnamese literature and nationalism. It does so by exploring representations of the “blood-sucking Indian” who is caught between postcolonial Vietnam’s socialist past and its capitalist present in the writings of Hồ Anh Thái. In a way, Pham’s piece gestures at the larger problematic of representation —how do we convey a sense of our own and others’ place in the world? How do we achieve openness in representation? As for our own endeavours, we hope that *SARE* will play an increasingly important role as an avenue to showcase and promote literary writings and other non-English language cultural forms “from the periphery,” while also complicating such a vocabulary.

This issue also includes five book reviews of such power and clarity that they bring alive to the reader not only the book’s content but also its intent, both avowed and implicit. Broadly, and in terms of genre, the reviews cover the novel (Andrew Hock Soon Ng) and scholarship on the novel (Nicholas O. Pagan), poetry (Marta Dvořák), memoir (Asad Latif), and a collection of feminist short stories (Alicia Izharuddin).

Also featured in this issue are the imaginative – and deeply transformative – ways in which poets engage with the world, and in turn inspire our creativity. Hailing from the UK, Australia, and Singapore, the poets in this issue – John Thieme, Anitha Devi Pillai, John Charles Ryan, and Prabhu Guptara – call on us to more fully inhabit our lives and the world in which we live them. This is also a gesture at openness. We hope you will enjoy the journey, both through inventive time and geography, on which each poem takes us.

Before closing this editorial, we would like to say how grateful we are to our peer reviewers, who by generously accepting our invitations to evaluate submissions, often at unavoidably short notice, have made light of what could otherwise so easily become the most

dispiriting part of the job. Thank you so much for the critical role you play in the life of the journal. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance we have received from the department's postgraduate students, particularly Juno Ooi and Qysha Nagalingam, in getting this issue ready for publication. Our warm thanks are also due to Renukha Devi, without whom we would be left struggling. We must also mention that one of the things we find greatly sustaining about our work are the small intimacies shared between us and our reviewers and contributors as we come together to meet, or beat, our publication deadlines. Thank you all for your continuing support.

Our December edition will feature a special issue on Love, for which we have received an enthusiastic response from scholars across the world. As we work harder to increase *SARE*'s scholarly reach and depth, both in and out of Asia, we hope that openness as a way of thinking will continue to inform our current and future editorial policy.

*Sharmani Patricia Gabriel*