

Editorial

It gives me immense pleasure to publish the inaugural online issue of *SARE*. As most of our readers know, and may even remember, *SARE* began almost 37 years ago as a print journal committed to creating a space for the critical and creative elaborations of Malaysia and Singapore and those of the *many other worlds* in our environs and beyond. Since then, it has continued to carve out a distinctive space for literary criticism and new writing, including from what are now several generations of critics and writers, many of whom have achieved prominence in their fields.

Not all of those years in that long and exciting journey have been easy ones for *SARE*, in terms of not only financial support but also continuity of vision. It is also worth pointing out that the journal's history has closely shadowed urgent political and cultural debates in an assertively post-colonising region. *SARE* was founded in a period when the English language and the study of its literature was made to sit uneasily, even antagonistically, with questions of national identity and culture in Malaysia. Sixty years after the exultant cry of *Merdeka!* (Freedom!) by the nation's first prime minister, that debate still continues, albeit in more muted tones and tempered now by the state's need to accede pragmatically to the global power of English while turning a blind eye to its local force and cultural legitimacy. But it is a sign of the tenacity of the imagination of its founding father, Lloyd Fernando, and the journal's own resilience, that *SARE* not only weathered those storms, but has been able to maintain its distinctive character as well as presence, especially in this era of "instant journals". Through the turbulence of the nationalistic eighties to the Janus-faced liberalization of the nineties to the infinity of possibilities opened up by the new technologies of the twenty-first century, not all of them convivial or reassuring, *SARE* has survived.

So the publication of Vol. 53 is a cause for celebration. We thank our contributors José Manuel Estévez-Saá, Ludmila Volná and Andrea Yew, whose critical expositions on the difficulties of representation inevitably foreground, through their various approaches and methodologies, the power of stories to connect with others, or make reparations for the wrongdoings of the past and bring healing to present identities. We are also fortunate – and very proud – to carry original poems by John Thieme, one of our advisors. His poems are poised on the idea of imagined difference that brings worlds, both mythical and real, together. This issue also includes a poem in six parts – meditations on death and unbearable loss, by turns weary and defiant – by Malachi Edwin Vethamani. The poems perfectly illumine and complement the human predicament explored in the critical essays. While stereotype and silence, cultural collision and disillusionment resonate strongly through this collection, there are reverberations that also point to dialogue and empathetic engagement across borders.

I wish to warmly thank Susan Philip (who has also contributed a book review), Renukha Devi Anandan, Carol Leon, Nicholas Pagan, Leonard Jeyam and *SARE*'s advisory board for their invaluable help in putting this issue together. I am especially grateful to our specialist readers for giving so generously of their time to us.

I am delighted to announce that plans are afoot for *SARE*'s continued development. Vol. 54 (2017), out later this year, will mark its launch as an open access web journal. Although its contributors have always been transnational, the reinvention of *SARE* as an exclusively online journal with this current issue and its much-anticipated publication as an open access journal from the next volume onwards will undoubtedly benefit its core readership while it also expands its audience base. Indeed, *SARE* is set to keep its place as a premier as well as pioneer journal in the region. In this spirit of affirmation and optimism, I look forward to your continued support in the form of your critical essays, short stories, poems, reviews or review essays, interviews or illustrations.

I hope that our readers agree that the selection of articles and poems assembled here will attest to the rich conversations that were always *SARE*'s past and will remain its future.

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel