

## **EDITORIAL: “In Every Ending is a Beginning”**

**T**his first issue of 2022 arrives to you at a time when COVID-19 appears to be losing its stranglehold on our imagination, especially as we have also begun to think and speak of a post-pandemic age. As we transition from the pandemic phase to endemicity, and as more familiar ways of doing things and living our lives return, what is in danger of being overlooked is that infections are still raging, with a number of countries back in lockdown mode. Now seems an appropriate time to remind ourselves that human survival and wellbeing is not the only thing worthy of attention.

While it does not consider the nexus between the coronavirus and the environment, issue 59.1 puts nature and the environment at the forefront of our imagination. It reminds us that environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, ecological catastrophe, capitalist extractivism, and the rejection of Indigenous ways of knowing and living with nature are not just scientific or economic matters, but also parts of a larger conversation about the issues that interest and problems that concern scholars working in and around the humanities. Implicitly drawing on Gayatri Spivak’s concept of “planetary,” which conjures a relationship between the human and natural worlds that is “in excess” of capitalist globalisation, this issue posits that our future and wellbeing is intimately bound up with the future and wellbeing of our non-human others.

We most warmly thank our guest editor Li-hsin Hsu for the consummate care with which she formulated her call for papers, read through and commented on manuscripts, and curated her contents for this special issue. We also thank our contributors, who approached the main subject of the special issue from varied locations and experiences. As most studies have taken sites of production outside of Asia for ecological revisioning, this *SARE* special issue was formulated as an opportunity to correct that imbalance. Turning to literary and visual representations that point to Asia’s heterogeneous ecological systems through different figurations of time and space, this collection also became, in Li-hsin’s words, “one of the very first scholarly attempts to address the intimate connections between Asian landscapes and ecological consciousness through the dual lens of ecocriticism and the Gothic mode”. Together, its various components—the research articles, poems, interview, and translation commissioned for this special issue, along with the Introduction—reject a singular story of Asia. As importantly, if the capitalist—colonialist,

imperialist, nationalist—vision of the globe projects an Earth that can be known and controlled, “EcoGothic Asia” renders it uncanny or unhomely. Its use also provides a frame for retrieving or calling up human and non-human affinities and forms of (e)co-habitation grounded in alterity.

As has now become a standard practice, we also carry a general section with our special issues. This is in keeping with *SARE*’s aim to be as open and inclusive as possible, especially as we also receive submissions outside of those responding to our special issue call for papers. The general section allows us to bring more original critical and creative content to the attention of our readers and the wider public.

This edition’s general instalment opens with poems by Christian Benitez and Regina Yoong. Benitez’s “Wild Dogs,” with its assured control of sound and diction, is a searing indictment of the human condition. Its eviscerating force gives way to a gentler, yet no less powerful, rendering of the human instinct to love and be loved in Yoong’s “Cold Showers”, which takes us through poignant moments in the lives of the two generations of Malaysian women who move through the poem.

We are also privileged to feature David Lim’s interview with Joshua Kam, author of the 2020 Epigram Books Fiction Prize-winning novel, *How the Man in Green Saved Pahang, and Possibly the World*. Lim’s conversation with Kam is illuminating in terms of its penetrating observations on a range of issues, including the conditions of possibility for the mythopoetic imagination, the salience of works rooted in “consensus reality,” and the queering of historical figures and icons, including those of the Malay world, which speculative fiction as a genre not only makes possible but also allows us to imagine as possible. The interview makes clear that the contemporary writer as interventionist in past and future Malaysias is a precarious and precious role.

As an important service to the scholarly community, *SARE* provides a forum for evaluative commentary on recently published books. We are pleased to report that 59.1 is particularly rich in book reviews. We are indebted to our contributors—Silvia Mayasari-Hoffert, Kwan Ann Tan, Ann Ang, William Tham, Shivani Sivagurunathan, Andrew Ng, Elisabeth Wulandari, Keith Jardim, Su Mei Kok, Gautam Karmakar, and Angus Whitehead—for their sharp insights and competent assessments. All of them are scholars and almost all of them are experienced reviewers who are able to place the book under review in a conversation with other publications in the field and who are also able to detect gaps in the literature. In a lovely concurrence, Ann, William, and Shivani

also have their own works reviewed here for us. *SARE* believes that book reviews, when they are not mere summaries but informed analyses, should be regarded as another avenue of scholarly work, especially if the books being reviewed fall within the reviewers' areas of research interest and expertise. The culture of careful reading and reflection that each of the reviews in this issue exemplifies lies at the heart of all scholarly, and particularly humanities, work.

We conclude this issue with an obituary on playwright, actor, and arts practitioner Jit Murad, who died at the age of 62 earlier this year. Susan Philip pays moving tribute to Jit's generosity as well as acerbic wit, unerring ear for dialogue, and "clear-eyed vision of what Malaysia is."

We hope readers, both new and those who have been with us in our long journey, will appreciate the conjunction of analytical introspection with creative contemplation that, we are proud to say, has always characterised *SARE*. Yet, some things have changed since *SARE*'s inception as a print journal in 1980. Its emergence as a fully online journal in 2016 and as an open access publishing outlet supported by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP)'s non-profit Open Journal System platform in 2017 has been among the more noticeable, if not notable, of those changes. We see *SARE*'s always-available and free dissemination of research and knowledge—*without* a paid subscription, *without* a fee to cover editorial and peer-review related costs, *without* an article processing charge, *without* a post-acceptance fee—as a stay against our neoliberal present conjuncture.

In our pursuit of free and unfettered access, and mindful of the concerns about the perceived quality of open access publications, we have been doubly conscious of the need to determine the quality, originality, and significance of the content we publish. More than merely ensuring that the code of publication ethics is clearly visible on our website, we work hard behind the scenes to find reviewers with the appropriate expertise to assess a submitted article. Our goal is to put every manuscript that has cleared the initial screening by the editorial team under two rounds of rigorous peer review. This is complicated by the reality that it is often difficult to find two willing reviewers working in the field for each manuscript, especially in the early years of our refereeing system when we had yet to create a large enough pool of expert readers. Finding qualified reviewers who are also willing to write to our deadline is without doubt the most challenging and time-consuming task in the editorial process. Yet another setback was the dearth of quality submissions when *SARE* had still not established itself as an open access journal in the era of the impact factor. But the

struggle has to continue, for we believe that a good review is the cornerstone of a good publication. As important as it is to us to identify suitable reviewers and then be guided in our decisions by them, especially when our referees offer elaborations for improvement and engage productively with the material being reviewed, we also strive to support our authors by providing constructive feedback and advice, in a spirit that promotes professionalism, mentoring, and collaboration. A particularly proud and uplifting moment arrived in 2019 when John Willinsky, PKP's founder and an esteemed academic, who, writing to us from Stanford University to personally alert us to software-related issues with our website and how to rectify them, described *SARE* as being a "fine journal".

There are other shifts that have accompanied *SARE*'s evolution into the twenty-first century. Our founding editor's pioneering mission to bring into visibility the literary culture in English of formerly colonised Malaysia and Singapore has gradually been expanded to include diverse constituencies of concern and new communities of affiliation and imagination across Asia and its diasporas. We feel especially privileged to have served as a platform for scholars and/or writings from or of Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Taiwan, China, Japan, Brunei, Indonesia — sites of cultural and knowledge production that have not often been featured in English-language literary journals. We hope this trajectory of connectedness and inclusiveness continues to thrive.

Through it all, *SARE* has been committed and consistent about serving as a twice-yearly forum to engage with the region's cultural complexities, geographies, histories, politics, and poetics, while also informed by the idea that literary studies is itself a site of possibility, opportunity, and disciplinary contestation. As I'd said on this page in 2017, "The goal is for *SARE* not to become set in any particular way of thinking, but to keep itself flexible and alert to the demands of our present."

But, as always, we look back to look forward. This marks the last issue of my editorship. Since assuming the role of editor-in-chief in 2016, I have derived much professional and intellectual pleasure from helping to steer a course for *SARE*. Although responsibility is its own reward, the time has come for passing on the torch. I do so with a heavy heart, for *SARE* has been a labour of love. One of the best parts about editing the journal for me is the communications, the back and forth, between me and our contributors, which not only opened up unexpected solidarities

but also allowed me insights into someone else's writerly process and often the opportunities to connect with someone else's story. I will miss these small intimacies.

I have, however, not worked alone. None of *SARE*'s achievements and current orientation would have been possible without the strong support of my deputy editor, Susan Philip, and journal manager, Regina Yoong. They have my gratitude and affection, as do members of *SARE*'s editorial and advisory boards, many of whom are internationally distinguished academics and critics who have given unstintingly of their time, experience, and enthusiasm — either by assessing manuscripts for us, writing for us, sending congratulatory messages when an issue is published, or by simply dropping a line to inquire how we are faring. I am most grateful to our peer reviewers whose efforts to assess our manuscripts are driven not by monetary or other forms of reward (as we offer none as an incentive) but by more intrinsic motivations of collegiality and ethical commitment.

I am delighted to announce that Fiona Lee will be joining the editorial team. I am confident that with Susan at its editorial helm, and galvanised by Regina and Fiona's energy, *SARE* will be taken ably into a future of ideas generative of new ways of thinking and doing. I have no doubt that Susan and her team will honour the journal's founding vision while embracing newness, and that in doing so they will ensure not only the journal's relevance but also its vitality. May *SARE*'s editors, now and of the future, be unendingly inspired by literature's (and I use "literature" broadly to encompass all forms of textual practice) ethics of care, radical empathy, testimony, dialogic openness, historical awareness, and creativity in their effort to sustain our communities of readers, writers, and scholars through the difficult and important work of knowledge production and dissemination.

And as every ending is also a beginning, I bring this, my final editorial, to a close with the hope I'd expressed in my inaugural editorial of 2016, that every issue published "attests to the rich conversations that were always *SARE*'s past and will remain its future."

*Sharmani Patricia Gabriel*