

## **EDITORIAL: Food for the Body, Food for the Soul**

When I read from my favourite genre – murder mysteries – I am struck by how central food is to so many of these narratives. In novels set in Italy, particularly, for example those by Donna Leon and Andrea Camilleri, the authors linger lovingly over descriptions of the meals and snacks consumed by Commissario Brunetti or Inspector Montalbano. In the midst of murder and corruption, taking time over a well-prepared meal is a necessary balm, a moment to reset. In real life, meanwhile, the pandemic has caused us to focus on food in so many unexpected ways; stuck at home, we experimented with new recipes which united a locked-down globe (dalgona coffee, anyone?). Or we obsessed over the choices available via delivery apps. Or we wondered how we were going to keep putting food on the table. Now, as conflict continues in Eastern Europe, the world faces food shortages and rising prices. On a lighter note, in Malaysia and Singapore, bitter arguments are enjoined across the causeway, over who owns *nasi lemak* or chicken rice or any of the other foods the two nations hold in common. But despite these divisions, we are drawn together by our horror when a judge on a cooking show suggests that a competitor's chicken rendang should have been crispy. And in most parts of the world, food can function as a love language, its familiar aromas, colours, and textures speaking of care, concern, and comfort.

All this points, of course, to the obvious centrality of food to all levels of experience – whether in terms of artistry, fashion, or simple survival – as well as its power to deeply affect us emotionally and psychologically. This special issue on food takes us on a gastronomic journey through Asia, with articles covering food-related ideas from East, South, and Southeast Asia – and even England. The range of subjects discussed – novels, films, diaries, blogs, murder, poison, cannibalism – demonstrates SARE's commitment to remain on the cutting edge of literary and cultural discourse.

Apart from the academic articles, Pillai has also curated a selection of book reviews, two short stories, and several poems. The stories and poems speak to a sense of nostalgia, focusing on powerful memories of food, as well as showing how our relationship with food must change and evolve with time and place.

We at SARE would like to thank our guest editor, Dr Anitha Devi Pillai of the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. Despite her own busy schedule as an academic and a creative writer, she has solicited and selected a challenging and interesting set of articles, reviews and creative work.

As always, SARE also runs a general section alongside the special issue. For this issue, we have two articles which take us to lands outside our usual ambit within these pages. Our name includes the words ‘Southeast Asia’, but it is our ambition to represent new and exciting work from all across Asia. The two articles we carry in the general section this time showcase this aim. Li-Ru Lu’s article “Multispecies Ethnography: Life Writing of Marine Animals in Cuthbert Collingwood” focuses on Collingwood’s work on sea creatures in Taiwan (formerly Formosa). Lu’s study decentres the human and the idea of human ownership of territory, by positing the possibility of ethnographies which require the researcher to immerse themselves (almost literally, in the case of Collingwood) in non-human environments. Grace VS Chin’s article “Masculinities and the Brunei Chinese ‘Problem’: The Ambivalence of Race, Gender, and Class in Norsiah Haji Abd Gapar’s *Pengabdian*” expands our borders by discussing a Malay-language novel from the relatively understudied (in comparison with work from Malaysia and Singapore) nation of Brunei. Through her analysis of this novel, Chin examines the position of non-Malay (specifically Chinese) people within the Bruneian social framework – a controversial topic, as she herself points out.

In “April is the Cruellest Month”, which she dedicates to the victims of the Rambukkana shooting during the People's Uprising in Sri Lanka in 2022, Vivimarie VanderPoorten offers

us a visceral response to the horrors of the incident, contrasting pain and anger with privilege and ‘civilised’ protest, in a poem which refuses to dance politely around ideas of death, suffering, and violence.

The issue is rounded out with reviews of books on a variety of topics. Shivani Sivagurunathan reviews *Love and Loss*, a collection from popular and prolific poet Malachi Edwin Vethamani. As the reviewer points out, “Vethamani is interested in revealing not the successes of love but where it fails to take off so that when it does, the fruits of what could be dazzle brighter”. According to Fiona Lee’s review, a somewhat similar focus is apparent in Norman Erikson Pasaribu’s *Happy Stories, Mostly* (translated by Tiffany Tsao). Lee tells us that “Contemplating grief, heartbreak, anger, abandonment, and loneliness, the stories invite readers to see how paying attention to and staying with such heavy, unpleasant feelings can also yield beauty and life-affirming insights.” Abhijit Maity reviews Anthony J Langlois’ book *Sexuality and Gender Diversity Rights in Southeast Asia*, which ties with the other two books mentioned above by taking a more legal-based approach to the position of LGBTQI individuals in Southeast Asia; in most cases, for these individuals, expressing love is an enterprise fraught with danger. The last review, by Regina Yoong, looks at *The Call to Poetry: Poems from Pre-Independence Singapore*, edited by Rosaly Puthucheary. Where the other three works mentioned above tend to focus on instances of love between individuals, or the conditions under which they can or cannot express this love, Puthucheary has selected works which look at love from a more abstract level, bringing “together the joys and sorrows encountered in a multiracial culture while drawing out the unspeakable pain of loss and longing in a nation”.

And speaking of loss - this has been the first issue which I have helmed as Editor-in-Chief, since the retirement of Professor Sharmani Patricia Gabriel. I would like to pay tribute to the sterling leadership Sharmani provided during her time as Editor-in-Chief. It was her energy, drive, and focus which not only saw SARE transition to being a purely online,

completely open-access journal, which is published twice a year, but also got us indexed with Scopus. We certainly miss her presence, and wish her nothing but the best on her onward journey. Now, it is up to me, our Deputy Editor Fiona Lee, and Journal Manager Regina Yoong, to ensure that SARE maintains its high standards while remaining an open and welcoming space to academics from all over the world, writing on a range of topics from literature, to media, to popular culture – and other fields which continue to emerge as society and technology change and develop.

Fiona, Regina and I would like to thank all those who have been a part of this issue – the contributors, the reviewers, and our colleagues in the English Department who helped in the last push towards publication, even though it was so close to Christmas!

*Susan Philip*