

EDITORIAL: “Passages and Palimpsests”

Issue 54 No. 2 marks yet another milestone in SARE’s thirty-seven-year commitment to offering a platform where readers and writers can engage creatively from a diversity of perspectives and contexts on issues of culture, politics, and representation. In a world such as ours, where it is vital to remain alert to the realities of the human stories underlying the production and circulation of theory and “knowledge”, the imaginative visions and critical interventions published in this journal become ever more urgent.

We are privileged to include in this issue a contribution that exemplifies the complexity, nuance, and intimacy associated with the very best of *SARE*. The piece by Makarand Paranjape, an excerpt from a trans-genre project, ruminates as much on the circumstances of its composition as on its ostensible subject. Words originate from other words, and the telling of a story also leads to its unravelling. All this can only mean textual trouble. An implicit call is made to develop reflexivity as a way to instruct ourselves about how to be critically conscious of what we are doing as humanities scholars engaged in the practice of research. More unequivocally, “Why Be Happy When You Could Be in Love?”, itself a startling palimpsest of diverse sources and references, from Wong Kar Wai to Gayatri Spivak to Jeanette Winterson, engages with vigour and imaginative openness with the poetics as well as politics of cultural and linguistic translation.

We are also honoured to carry an interview feature with novelist Tan Twan Eng, a Malaysian who now lives part of the year in Cape Town. Tan, who is arguably the best-known of Malaysia’s “global generation” of writers, shares with readers his views on the art – and necessary artifice – of writing. His responses to David Lim’s discerning conversational probings allude to his vision of Malay(si)a as a layering of historical periods and, like the nature of memory, “a place that exist[s] only in the overlapping of air and water, light and time” (*The Garden of Evening Mists*, 2012). Yet, the delicate, exquisite, and richly palimpsestic worlds of Tan’s novels are set against painful, repressed histories that, once confronted, function as redemptive rites of passage for the nation.

Also featured in this issue are three reviews, by Andrew Ng, Agnes Yeow, and Leonard Jeyam, all of which examine, with clarity and insight, books that explore postcolonial geographies and/or the complex reverberations of cultural collision as well as the ever shifting relationship between representations of the familiar and the foreign.

We are also very pleased that we have returned in this issue to one of *SARE*’s original objectives to publish the voices of new writers. In this vein, we are delighted to showcase a short story by Anthony Cummins that turns wonderfully on its evocative rendition of local sounds and sensibilities.

SARE does not usually carry obituaries, but it would be impossible to close 2017 without marking the loss this year of writers of such stature as Buchi Emecheta and Rehman Rashid. Emecheta was not only a pioneer among Nigeria’s female authors, she also inspired the work of a generation of Black British writers. She mined her extraordinary life to write African women both into literary existence and the British literary tradition. So it only seemed fitting to us that Shalini Nadaswaran, a colleague whose research and teaching trajectory was inspired by Emecheta’s life and writings, be invited to offer a tribute to Emecheta for this issue. Rehman, though perhaps not as widely recognised outside of this region, was a highly respected and celebrated figure in Malaysian literary circles. The obituary by Carol Leon affords us a glimpse of the palimpsestic nation that repeatedly reveals itself in Rehman’s works — a Malaysia that is non-linear, messy, intertwined, and therefore inclusive, not bound to the cultural narrative of any single group but pointing simultaneously to diverse yet converging histories.

As I write this editorial and reflect on the multiple resonances of the idea of “passages”, I am reminded that this issue is also a tribute to that which refuses to die. *SARE* – with its blend of scholarly articles, short fiction, poetry, reviews, and interviews – continues to present itself as a forum through which to consider new critical and creative approaches that directly engage with the region’s cultural complexities, geographies, histories, politics, and poetics. 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. In this spirit, I invite quality and provocative submissions that will enable us to keep pushing at boundaries.

I am most grateful to this issue’s contributors. But every issue published only ever tells part of the story of *SARE*. That *other* part also deserves to be singled out and celebrated. As always, I am greatly indebted to Renukha Devi for giving so readily of her time to take this issue off the ground. I also thank Susan Philip and *SARE*’s editorial and advisory board members, and most especially its expert readers, who must perforce remain unnamed, for their support, collegiality, and boundless generosity. Without them, nothing would be possible.

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel