ABSTRACTS

SOHAIMI ABDUL AZIZ

‘The Development of the Popular Malay Cult Novel’

The cult novel has attracted a large following of loyal and fanatical fans and supporters. Malay authors of the cult novel write in a variety of popular sub-genres such as action-venture, crime, detective, fantasy, horror, mystery, romance and science fiction. A shift towards popular culture in Malaysian society and increased digital literacy among young readers has had a tremendous impact on the growth of the Malay cult novel. The new media is an important contributing factor in this growth. This article discusses the development and impact of this phenomenon in Malaysia, taking the popular writer, Ramlee Awang Mursyid, as a case study.

MERLINDA BOBIS & DOLORES HERRERO

‘Sensing and Sensibility: The Late Ripple of Colonisation?’

The Philippines was colonised by Spain for nearly four hundred years (1521–1898), then by America for forty years (1901–1945). As a writer primarily in English, Merlinda Bobis has always ‘sensed’ that her sensibility has greater affinity with literatures of Hispanic/Latin-American rather than of English/American origins. Is this literary affinity a late ripple of colonisation? On reading Bobis’s short stories for the first time, Herrero sensed them as ‘so familiar’, evoking Spanish writers. This recognition may well reinforce that late ripple, now a liminal space for productive-subversive cultural production, where the creative arc is both disruptive and expansive. Bobis and Herrero explore this liminal space by collaboratively examining and translating (from English to Spanish) Bobis’s short story ‘Fish-Hair Woman’, while referencing its writing as, in fact, the earlier process of ‘translation’ of a Philippine story of militarism into an English text. They argue that these processes not only employ decolonising strategies, but also extend beyond the postcolonial into a transnational enterprise.

DOLORES HERRERO

‘Merlinda Bobis’s Banana Heart Summer: Recipes to Work Through Trauma and Appease the Human Heart’s Everlasting Hunger’

Banana Heart Summer (2005) is a truly original novel. What at first seems to be a collection of exotic recipes turns out to be a touching, funny and elegiac story. The myth of the banana heart inspires twelve-year-old Nenita, who will try to find the perfect balance between love and anger, to appease her family’s hunger and, which is even more important, to win her violent mother’s love. As she cooks and eats, or dreams of cooking and eating, other love stories unravel in Remedios Street, the street she lives in, significantly placed between an active volcano and
a Catholic church. In this paper I analyse the way in which the different symbols that the novel uses, food being one of the most important, contribute to giving it a most original and coherent structure, and also to draw the reader’s attention towards some of the most outstanding messages that the novel seems to put forward, namely, the need for love and dialogue between different individuals and cultures, and for a multicultural and rather more cohesive model to be advocated in contemporary societies.

RUZY SULIZA HASHIM AND SHAHIZAH ISMAIL HAMDAN
‘Facets of Women in Malay Romance Fiction’

In this essay, we compare two kinds of Malay fiction to show facets of women in selected Malay romance fiction. On the one hand, we analyse ‘serious’ Malay novels and their depictions of gender and sexuality. On the other hand, we also scrutinise popular Malay novels which seem to enjoy a wide reading audience. These works, however, share a common feature. They portray Malaysian women juggling the demands of their careers with personal relationships. While the closure is almost always the successful union of the heroine with the man of her choice, the events leading to this happy state are often tortuous, providing some insights into issues related to gender stereotypes. Malaysian women have been shown to outperform men in tertiary education generally, and they have also benefited from access to a wide range of professions, even those which have been perceived as dominated by men. Yet, women in these novels are still caught between the competing demands to be strong and independent while retaining their femininity. To what extent they negotiate these demands and whether or not they are shown to be successful in balancing the professional domain and the home front will be highlighted in the course of this article.

BOITRAN HUYNH-BEATTIE
‘Less Seen Art, Made by Vietnamese-Australian Artists’

The fall of Saigon in 1975 witnessed an exodus that scattered Vietnamese refugees throughout the globe. Australia has a thriving Vietnamese community that contributes diversely to the national social fabric. However, on the subject of art (and other cultural forms), the community’s leadership tends to adopt a political perspective of polarity and in some cases with emotional fascism. This article sheds some light onto art made by five Vietnamese Australian artists, whose visions are democratic, humanitarian, socially responsible and often satirical. These characteristics can be defined as shared Australian values as observed and portrayed by: My Le Thi, Mai Nguyen-Long, Hoang Tran Nguyen, Garry Trinh and Khue Nguyen. Vietnamese-Australian artists do not have a supportive network of commercial and national galleries promoting their cause, as seen in some other Asian Australian communities. One is left to ponder whether the sensitive politics within the Vietnamese-Australian community curb progress in this area.
MICHAEL JACKLIN

‘Southeast Asian Writing in Australia: The Case of Vietnamese Writing’

In recent years, Vietnamese-Australian experiences and stories have had greater opportunity to reach Australian readers and viewers, with a growing number of works in English now circulating, including autobiographies, films, anthologies and exhibitions. Literary work in Vietnamese produced by writers in Australia, however, rarely has the chance to move beyond the Vietnamese-reading community. As the most populous of all the Southeast Asian diasporic or migrant groups in Australia, it is not surprising that novels, short stories, essays, poetry and autobiographies are written in Vietnamese and circulate amongst readers of Vietnamese across Australia. Yet this literary activity has gone almost unrecognised by Australian literary scholars writing in English. In this article, I draw on research for the AustLit database conducted by myself and Boitran Huynh-Beattie to bring a part of Australia’s Vietnamese writing into focus. In particular, the poetry of Uyên Nguyên and Trần Đình Lương provide a basis for commentary upon experiences of displacement and loss experienced by Vietnamese-Australians, as well as raising questions regarding the relationship between diasporic writing and the literature of the host nation.

RODNEY C. JUBILADO

‘On Cultural Fluidity: The Sama-Bajau of the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas’

The Sama-Bajau is an indigenous group of Austronesians residing in the stretches of Sulu-Sulawesi Seas and beyond. Their community is comprised of a diverse group of people connected by the sea and the myths, rituals and dances which they carry beyond their ancestral homeland. For the Sama-Bajau, their point of reference is the sea, the sea current, and the other seas beyond the horizon. Although scholars have argued that these groups of people are basically one from an historical perspective, a growing consciousness of political and economic boundaries is giving rise to a sense of separateness among the groups themselves that belies the evidence of a shared culture. This essay presents some aspects of the cultural fabric that binds and unifies these diverse peoples, focussing on those who reside in the Sulu Archipelago, The Philippines and in Sabah, Malaysia.

SHAKILA ABDUL MANAN

‘Going against the Grain: Postcolonial Writings and Creative Performance in Malaysia’

In Malaysia, freedom of expression is curtailed by a number of draconian and repressive laws. However, this does not deter some of Malaysia’s foremost postcolonial writers from boldly utilising whatever limited space is given to them to dismantle accepted notions of gender, ethnicity and nation in order to articulate
abstracts

alternative views and visions through their creative writings. These are also the
efforts of particular local Arts groups such as Ombak-Ombak ARTStudio
that have explored the hybrid identities, linguistic and cultural syncretism — a
legacy of colonialism — through staging children’s street performances. With
this in mind, it is the aim of this article to show how postcolonial literature and
the creative arts have attempted to question the above-mentioned notions in order
to reveal the complexities assailing a postcolonial multicultural country such
as Malaysia and its attempts to achieve its own sense of national and cultural
identity. To realise this objective, this article examines Che Husna Azhari’s
‘Ustazah Inayah’, Lloyd Fernando’s *Green is the Colour* and two children’s street
performances titled *Hen or Rooster* and *Ronggeng Merdeka*.

**ROBYN MORRIS**

‘Relations of Difference: Asianness, Indigeneity and Whiteness in
Simone Lazaroo’s Fiction’

Simone Lazaroo’s fiction is important in discussions of Australian identity
formation for its exploration of acculturated representations of both Asianness
and Indigeneity. Her body of work brings to visibility issues of representation,
especially the way race and gender are intertwined as artificial constructions of
difference within Australian cultural and historical discourse. This article examines
how Lazaroo’s novels engage in a triangulated contemporary representational
politics through an articulation of ‘relations of difference’ in which characters
of Asian, Indigenous and Anglo ancestry interact and react to racialised and
gendered inscriptions of otherness. This article explores how Lazaroo critiques
the hyper-visuality and sexualising of the Asian female body by the dominant
white, Anglo Australian society and the concomitant erasure of the Indigenous
body and culture in stories of nation in *The World Waiting to Be Made* (1994),
*The Australian Fiancé* (2000), and *The Travel Writer* (2006). These works signal
Lazaroo’s ongoing interrogation of the politics of both relations of difference and
looking relations.

**PAUL SHARRAD**

‘Sang Kanchil Meets Sime Darby: Drawing New Postcolonial
Boundaries in the Asia-Pacific’

This article sketches shifts from postcolonial to diaspora/transnational
frameworks and then considers some interactions with ecocriticism. Postcolonial
analysis inspects relations between Asia and the Pacific hidden in labels such as
‘the Asia Pacific region’. Malaysia’s investment in oil palm and logging is one key
component, and colonial attitudes to nature and natives in Hugh Clifford’s writing
are compared to the environmentalist theme in Sharmini Flint’s detective fiction.
CHI VU

‘The 1.5 Generation Vietnamese-American Writer as Post-Colonial Translator’

This article explores contemporary transnationalism through the creative texts written by Vietnamese-American 1.5 Generation authors, in order to define the generational impact on this emerging literature. Using post-colonial translation theory, this article examines how these authors’ literary production occurs across a cultural and linguistic gap, which increases the risk of invisibility, stereotyping and linguistic colonisation. In-between two cultures, cognitive systems and languages, authors of the 1.5 Generation are required to perform as ‘translators’ between the mainstream and minority reading cultures. In this role, 1.5 Generation authors such as Lan Cao and Linh Dinh employ creative strategies of resistance; their creative texts engage with the question of ‘who is translating whom and for what purpose’? This essay examines how these authors’ creative texts perform their interstitial identity in the content as well as the poetics of their works.

MD. SALLEH YAAPAR

‘The Empire Strikes Back: Re-writing Malay History and Identity in Faisal Tehrani’s Novel 1515’

1515 by Faisal Tehrani is a unique text within contemporary Malay literature. Among recent novels in Malaysia it is one of the most multifaceted narratives, with elements of romance, postcolonial discourse, postmodernism, socio-political criticism, feminism, history, legend, and even fantasy. This essay will discuss 1515 by combining several approaches, namely the postcolonial, postmodern and feminist approaches, with an emphasis on revisionism and alter-native perspectives. The focus is on the discourse of power within the text and the author’s reinterpretation of Malay identity and history. The novel is examined within the context of the author’s utilisation of history, legend, ideology and fantasy, and comparison is made to texts from the traditional Malay literary corpus.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

SOHAIMI ABDUL AZIZ is an Associate Professor at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. Currently Deputy Dean of Post-graduate Studies and Research in the School of Humanities, he joined the Literature Section of the School of Humanities in 1995 after completing his PhD in Literature from Universiti Sains Malaysia and Temple University of Philadelphia in the US. Sohaimi is an authority on Malaysian literature and culture, specialising in comparative literature, literary theory and criticism, children’s literature and cultural studies. He has published nine books on literary criticism and comparative literature and has edited seven books on cultural studies published by Universiti Sains Malaysia.

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CHANDRAN NAIR (b. 1945) was educated at the Raffles Institution, Singapore and the University of Singapore in science but went into publishing on graduation and later worked as a book development expert with UNESCO, first in Karachi (1981–1985) and then in Paris (1985–2004). His first two books of poems, Once the Horsemen and Other poems (1972) and after the hard hours, this rain (1975) were well received and he has co-translated with Malcolm Koh Ho Ping the Poems and Lyrics of the Last Lord Lee (the last Emperor of the Southern Tang Dynasty). Chandran won The New Nation Singapore Short Story Writing contest in 1973 with Leta and has published his stories in a number of anthologies. His collected poems were published under the title, reaching for stones, by Ethos Books Singapore in September 2010. Chandran was founder President of the Society of Singapore Writers, and continued as its president from 1976 to 1981.

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HOÀNG NGỌC-TUẤN is a writer, essayist, poet and translator. He founded and edited the literary journal Tập Họp (1987–1989) and, with Nguyen Hung Quoc, was the co-editor of Việt, an important journal that existed from 1998 to 2001. Since 2002, he has been the co-editor of the groundbreaking webzine Tiền Vệ, the only Vietnamese literary journal that updates its contents daily. His critical essays, poems and stories have appeared in most overseas Vietnamese literary journals. He has published many books in Vietnamese and English. Besides literature, Hoang Ngoc-Tuan is actively involved in music and theatre as composer, guitarist, playwright and performer.

CHI VU was born in Vietnam and arrived in Australia in 1979 and completed her Master of Arts at the University of Melbourne. In 2000, Chi was awarded an Asialink writer’s residency to Vietnam where she wrote Vietnam: a Psychic Guide. Her plays have been performed in Melbourne at the North Melbourne Arts House and Footscray Community Arts Centre, and in Sydney at the Sidetrack Theatre and the Sydney Opera House’s Studio program. Chi’s prose has appeared in anthologies by Random House, Picador, Black Inc as well as Meanjin, The Age and the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature.

CYRIL WONG is the author of eight poetry collections, including Unmarked Treasure (Firstfruits 2004) and Oneiros (Firstfruits 2010). He has also published a volume of short stories, Let Me Tell You Something About That Night (Transit Lounge 2009). Cyril edits the online poetry journal, Softblow, and his most recent poetry-publication is Satori Blues (Softblow Press 2011).
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