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## Why I Write

Shirley Geok-Lin Lim

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# Why I Write

## **Abstract**

'Work' is a word freighted with sacrifice and honour. My 'work' includes poetry, fiction, criticism, pedagogy, and more recently, a kind of non-specific-genre that begins with the autobiographical subject to span all these. My early readings were formed by a colonialist education; I love(d) the English of English geniuses, including Shakespeare, Keats, Wordsworth, Austen, Dickens, and Yeats. Exposed to a United States Ph.D. requirement, I learned to counterweight these with American voices: Creely, Roethke, Adrienne Rich. Returning to Southeast Asia, I found all of the above weightlessness, learned instead to read against the Western grain, within the particular locus of the post-colonial Anglophonic Asian, prey to multiple misplacements and dislocations, but also a predator of sorts of cultures set free-floating on the currents of global capital, media, war, and human exchanges. I would like time for the work of concentration - the poems and short stories. In the meantime, I teach and write criticism.



Shirley Geok-lin Lim was born in Malacca, Malaysia, to a Nonya (Malaysian assimilated) family. She received a Ph.D. in English and American Literature from Brandeis University in 1973. Her first book of poems, *Crossing the Peninsula*, won the 1980 Commonwealth Poetry Prize. She has published two other poetry collections and a book of short stories, *Another Country*. Her critical volume, *Nationalism and Literature: English-Language Writing from the Philippines and Singapore* is forthcoming. She is co-editor of *The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology*, which received the Before Columbus American Book Award in 1990; co-editor of *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* and *One World of Literature*, and editor of *Asian America: Journal of Culture and the Arts*. She has published in numerous critical volumes and journals, including *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *New Literary History*, *Feminist Studies*, and *Poetry Review*. She is currently Professor of Asian American Studies and English at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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### THE REBEL

Tonight I will think of my trunks  
 for once I will walk in their spirit  
 for manjunga lives in great walls  
 and crash them down with two big fists  
 I will be reckless and most optimum  
 baffle over spirit jumps. I will close  
 my eyes to fox women harem  
 and wake to make children, this one  
 with my halberd nose, these  
 with staggered pointed teeth