

# TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

*With a view to increasing cross-cultural interaction and introducing readers to contemporary poetry from different parts of the world, Transnational Literature includes a small guest editor slot in its poetry section, curated by—and partly featuring the work of—an established poet from a country other than Australia. In this issue we're delighted to have as our guest editor prize-winning poet and mover-and-shaker in the Singapore literary scene, Cyril Wong.*

## Singaporean Poetry: An Introduction by Cyril Wong



For all its urban gloss and ostensible multiculturalism, Singapore has not only managed to preserve much of its fundamental draconic conservatism – this aspect of our society seems to be harmonising quite nicely with a general hue of

political conservatism deepening across the globe. Maybe this is the result of feng shui; our late, founding Prime Minister had been rumoured to consult fortune tellers in order to militate against us failing to succeed as a world-class nation state. Since the caning of Michael Fay, an American citizen, for theft and vandalism in 1994, to the vehement prosecution of teenage blogger, Amos Yee, on charges of hate speech (he was later granted asylum in the States in 2017), Singapore has remained more or less the same country – full of repressive bite, but supported by a populace largely pragmatic about maintaining the status quo (while venting online about the minutiae of train-breakdowns, ministerial gaffes and skyrocketing costs of living).

Singaporean poetry, then, becomes a literature of subtle to overt resistance, in spite of attempts to instrumentalise it for nationalistic self-congratulation (this early trend didn't last). Poetry's capacity for strategic ambiguity, as well as aestheticised self-criticism and social critique, allows for alternative records of thoughts, feelings and philosophical what-ifs that many Singaporeans would prefer not to read about (if they even read at all). My small curation of poems here features a preference for works reaching into the self to derive challenging answers to difficult questions. They are deeply personal; the voices come from different cultural contexts; and the poems evince an inevitable back-and-forth movement between the dignity of the particular and the realm of the numinous.

Cyril Wong. Singaporean Poetry: An Introduction  
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