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Literary Journals and the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS)

The diverse languages, literatures and cultures of the regions of the Commonwealth are represented in all their variety by the journals affiliated with the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS). The valuable role they perform in critiquing and commenting on recent writing and exploring critical trends can be seen by the articles, interviews, creative writing (poetry and prose) and reviews that have featured in the *South Pacific Association Newsletter (SPAN)*, *Phoenix: Sri Lanka Journal of English in the Commonwealth*, *Current Writing: Text and Reception from Southern Africa*, the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing (JPW)* and *Asiatic*, a journal dedicated to Asian writings in English. These broadly represent the regional constituencies of ACLALS and range from being local and regional (e.g. *SPAN* and *Asiatic*) to mainstream productions with publishers like Routledge (administered and distributed by Taylor and Francis) (e.g. *Current Writing* and *JPW*) who ensure international distribution. The history of these journals, their profiles, editorials and themed approaches, collectively demonstrate the different regional strengths in the study of languages and literatures in Commonwealth and postcolonial regions across the world, as well as the challenges these disciplines face.

One of the most venerable historically is the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing (JPW)* which upon moving to Routledge in 2005 replaced *World Literature Written in English (WLWE)* first founded in 1978: the name change reflects the transition in the academy and the marketplace from the field known as Commonwealth Studies to that of Postcolonial Studies. *JPW* is affiliated to the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS), is a member of the Canadian Association of Learned Journals, and the Council of Editors of Learned Journals. Its editorial team is based in the UK and since 2001, first as *WLWE* and then as *JPW*, the journal has been associated with the University of Northampton. *JPW* aims to address literary, linguistic and cultural questions arising from decolonization processes, accelerated globalization and the formation of diasporic identities. It embraces the study of literary and cultural texts produced in various postcolonial locations around the world and publishes theoretically-informed articles on a variety of genres and media (poetry, film, drama, performance and other cultural practices). Now producing six issues per year it often features themed or special issues on particular topics, many of which unite its literary and political imperatives. Recent issues include: 'Palestine and the postcolonial: culture, creativity, theory', 'Alternative solidarities: Black diaspora and cultural alliances during the Cold War' and 'Postcolonial thresholds: gateways and borders'.

Also published by Routledge is *Current Writing: Text and Reception from Southern Africa* established in 1989 and, since 2005, the official journal of the Southern African Association of Literature and Languages (SAACLALS). Appearing bi-annually, the journal covers recent and re-published texts on southern African writing and (from a 'South' perspective) Commonwealth and/or postcolonial literature. In addition, works of the past may be assessed and evaluated through the lens of current reception. The first number each year has general scope within the designated field while the second number is devoted to a thematic concern. Themes may extend to comparative or cross-disciplinary considerations, such as literature and translation, or literature and law. A 'coming of age' double number in 2009 offered a series of articles under the title, "Beyond 2000: South African Literature Today".

Of the almost 300 authors who have been published over the last 25 years many have international reputations, including the Nobel laureates Nadine Gordimer, JM Coetzee and Wole Soyinka and, in postcolonial studies, Robert JC Young, David Attwell and Stephen Clingman.

The editors are based at several universities in South Africa. The editor-in-chief, a rotating position, is at present occupied by Michael Chapman, professor emeritus and fellow, University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. *Current Writing* is recognised by the (South African) Department of Higher Education and Training for university-subsidy purposes, and a “Humanities Journal Peer Review Panel” (Academy of Science of South Africa), in 2015, included the following favourable evaluation:

Current Writing is probably the most closely attuned to the evolving and changing literary landscape of southern Africa, featuring over the years a number of superb interventions and analyses. It is undoubtedly one of the most highly regarded journals in the discipline and remains at the cutting edge of literary and cultural criticism in the region.

The traditionally important role of Commonwealth funding becomes apparent when the histories and contemporary circumstances of smaller regional groups are taken into consideration. The *South Pacific Association Newsletter (SPAN)*, the journal of the South Pacific Association of Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies (SPACLALS), has been in existence since 1978 and includes among its readership the SPACLALS member countries of the South Pacific (Australia, Fiji (variously), Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu). SPAN has provided a vehicle in which critical and creative contributions throughout the Pacific Commonwealth can be published, including conference proceedings and creative submissions. Since 2010, SPAN has been particularly mindful of forging critical and creative *ala/ara* (Polynesian cognate of the Proto-Austronesian word ‘*zalan*’) among and between the literatures and languages that call the South Pacific home, whilst constantly ‘spanning’ outwards. The publication of the journal has traditionally been solely dependent on Commonwealth funding. Equally, *Phoenix: Sri Lanka Journal of English in the Commonwealth* will celebrate 25 years of existence next year. This Sri Lanka Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (SLACLALS) journal which was funded by the Commonwealth Foundation via ACLALS until 2013 has indeed fulfilled many of its aims and objectives. Over the years, essays and creative pieces by foreigners and Sri Lankan expatriates from a range of countries such as India, South Africa, the UK, Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia have been accommodated in addition to a host of local contributors both “established and aspiring.”

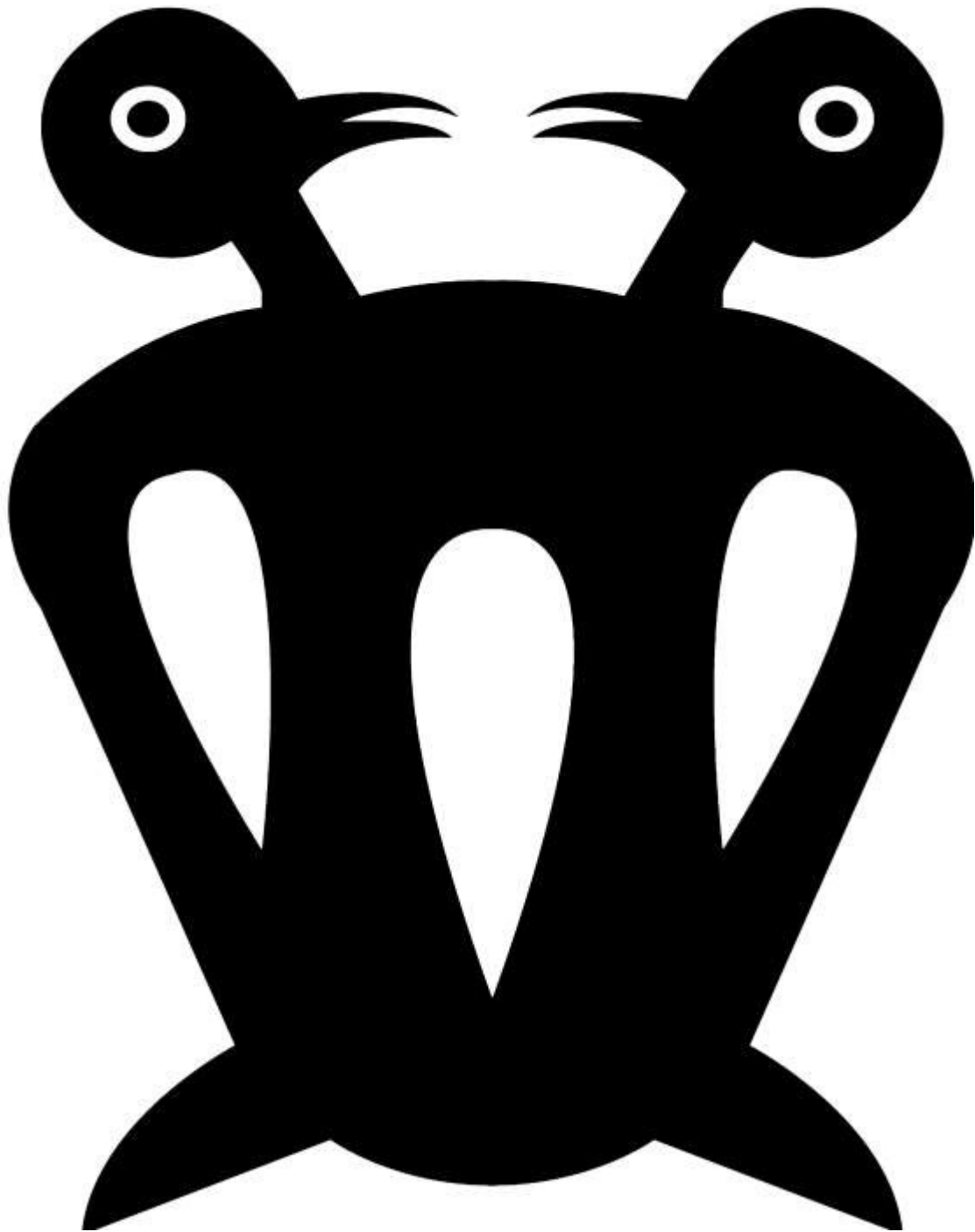
Despite being largely faithful to these original precepts, however, the journal has shifted its emphasis from publishing creative writing to criticism in response to urgent needs. Recent initiatives taken to improve English in the country by the government have increased enrolment but added pressure on all stakeholders. Academics are challenged to find outlets for their research and students forced to scramble for the meagre secondary sources available in libraries. SLACLALS’s decision to devote the last three issues to papers presented at conferences -- ‘Postcolonial or Postmodern?’, ‘The 21st Century Postcolonial: Issues and Challenges in Literature and Language’ and ‘The Postcolonial in Transition’ -- were in part a response to this crisis.

However, creative writing has not been totally neglected. Writers such as Punyakante Wijenaike, Lakshmi de Silva, and Vijitha Fernando who subsequently won the Gratiaen Prize or the HAI Goonetilleke for Translation have contributed to *Phoenix*. The last issue carried the winning entry of the SLACLALS short story competition and the next volume will feature the Sri Lankan writer Shehan Karunatilaka and Sri Lankan-born Michelle de Kretser who have won both prizes offered by the Commonwealth Foundation. Since the Commonwealth Foundation no longer funds journals per se, the future of *Phoenix* is in jeopardy - the next issue is made possible by a grant from the European branch of ACLALS and an anonymous donor. However, the Editor and the SLACLALS committee are optimistic that more benefactors will be found to enable its continuation.

If the current situation of *Phoenix*, suggests many uncertainties, a more recent development has been the founding of *Asiatic* in 2007 to fill the gap in avenues for scholarly discussion on Asian Englishes and Asian writings in English. Although the journal's focus is slightly different from mainstream postcolonial or Commonwealth literature journals, it serves a similar purpose by promoting literature and literary discourse by/on Asian and Asian diasporic writers, many of whom are also part of the postcolonial world and of the Commonwealth. Despite being relatively recent, *Asiatic* has made a significant presence by publishing articles by leading scholars and writers of Asian and postcolonial literatures. It has become a major avenue for dialogue and discussion on mainly South and Southeast Asian literature, although it has published articles on other Asian literatures and cultures and on various language issues and varieties of Asian Englishes as well. The *Journal* has published special/thematic issues or sections, such as Southeast Asian literature, 'Expatriation, immigration and return in recent South Asian fiction' and Hong Kong Literature in English). There have also been issues or sections on major Asian writers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain from South Asia and Edwin Thumboo and Shirley Geok-lin Lim from Southeast Asia. Positive about the future, the Journal has announced a special issue on Asian-American literature for June 2015, and one on Philippine literature in the post-1973 period for December 2015.

As this report indicates there has been unprecedented growth in journal production over the last decade: some have become more prominent due to greater frequency and increased distribution through mainstream publishers, and new journals have been founded like *Asiatic*, Shirley Chew's *Moving Worlds*, based jointly at the University of Leeds and Nanyang University, Singapore, and online newsletters and journals, most notably the transnational journal *Postcolonial Text*, edited by Chantal Zabus (see <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct>), and the e-newsletter of IACLALS (the Indian branch), edited by G.V. Prasad (available at <http://www.iaclals.com/iaclals-e-newsletter>). This is an apt reflection of the current momentum in Commonwealth and postcolonial writing which continues to penetrate the marketplace at all levels, being celebrated in international literary festivals, in winning major book prizes (like the Man Booker) and featuring in book clubs, reading groups and on university curricula. The journals contribute vitally to the robust energy of Commonwealth and postcolonial studies and testify to the continuing strength of the ties that unite all the chapters of ACLALS.

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SPAN 62 (2010) resurrected the original 1978 logo of the mirrored tern which figuratively symbolises important Pacific precepts that shape South Pacific arts, politics, ideologies, epistemologies and principles for living: reciprocity, interdependence, relationship, inter-relatedness, balance, and synchronicity. Its simplicity draws attention not just to the form itself, but the spaces around it. The tern's curvilinear shaping evokes the cyclical, circular nature of indigenous worldviews, grounded in holistic connections with flora, fauna and the wider environment as opposed to conventionally straight and measured lines so aligned with imposed notions of 'progress' and 'development'. The tern also represents a simultaneous rootedness yet also an inherent mobility - much like SPAN and its commitment over

the last four decades to postcolonial voices in the Pacific Commonwealth

