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Love at the Gallery



Editors

Ow Yeong Wai Kit &
Genevieve Wong

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POETRY
FESTIVAL SG

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Foreword

Whether it is *agápē* or more directly sexual—and the variations and permutations between these two poles are infinitely complex—love has been at the centre of human life. This is stating the obvious. But what is less so is the way these manifestations of love are expressed in different cultures, especially in terms of openness and tact to ensure its appropriate expression. This is of importance in a multiracial, multicultural society. Some readers may detect this even when reading the modest number of love poems in this anthology. And that sense would be more obvious if we were to compare the poems of Sappho, Ovid, the Provençal troubadours, Shakespeare, Petrarch, Donne, the Kuruntokai, Li Po, Rumi, Mirabai, and Tagore.

Sacred and secular love have found equally powerful expressions in other art forms, especially in paintings. It is fitting, therefore, that many of the love poems here engage with the artworks of the National Gallery Singapore—a true jewel in the crown of the nation's art landscape. The Gallery is a distinguished and growing repository of our country's artistic heritage, in addition to its other function of shaping the future of art in both Singapore and Southeast Asia. That the Gallery has been so hospitable to our poets is an encouraging sign, for poetry and the visual arts have always inspired each other and are mutually supportive. It is worth noting that Michelangelo was also a poet of distinction. Moreover, poets are painters in the images they use to invoke. The encounters in this anthology breathe life into the respective mediums, allowing for poems to be

讨海人家

题陈文希《俩》

陈志锐

戴上斗笠

大海已经迫不及待退潮了

你的眼神还靠在家的柱子上

而我

早已定神远方

澎湃的是命运

沉静的是告别

我要把话

都留给

安全的

返家

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Collage

(inspired by *Trophy Landscape - Paradise* painting by Milenko Prvacki)

Genevieve Wong

Perhaps, we will say our time was a collage of early
commiserations over overpriced coffee,
snatched time in blackened zi char alleyways,
singed bee hoon lingering on our tongues, melded with white
pepper sauce.

A cacophony of text messages,

scattered throughout the day.

(electronic fragments I would later try to piece in a hole)

The ignored dreams.

Yours, not mine.

Our lives a piecemeal of paychecks and responsibilities.

Love: a mesh of half-chewed sentences and mumbled
words,

A reticulation of tincture in fitful youth

And then, lines that had not yet grown heavy with time: I do

Love: Corrected photos uploaded.

Or perhaps we will say that our time was a wonderful mess of
humanity striving to be the best in the situation it was in,
that despite the jumble of mismatched semantics, it was the
girl's practice papers, the boy's dog-eared worksheets and
the shouting at the Meet the Parents sessions,
that contained our inexorable implosion.

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Questions

(translated from Tamil by Harini V.)

Harini V.

I turned to one side
the other side's unhappiness
and other the other directions' smells
are forgotten
At least once in the half hour
dreams of you overwhelm and surround me
in every direction
Do I get to stay in your palms
do your hands have the strength to hold my banes and
my boons
Am I a passerby
or am I a guided path that you take to other doorsteps

These questions are things you will never hear
My hands hold poems as solace, as medicine

I cannot make sense of anything but poetry
for today
and for tomorrow
Till these questions are turned from riddles to
possibilities
I will continue finding answers in poetry!

50

கேள்விகள்

ஹரினி வி

ஒரு பக்கம் திரும்பினேன்
மறுப்பக்கத்தின் முருவலும்
மற்ற திசைகளின் மணங்களும்
மறந்துபோய்விடுகின்றன

முப்பது நிமிடத்திற்கு ஒரு முறையாவது
உன் பற்றிய ஆழ்ந்த கனவுகள்
நடுமாடுகின்றன
பாய்ந்து படர்கின்றன
எத்திசையிலும்

உன் கனவுகளில் எனக்கு இடம் உண்டா?
உன் கரங்களில் என் பாரங்கள் வரங்கள் சூடிட வழி உண்டா?
நான் வழிப்போக்கரா?
பல வாசல்களுக்கு பாதைகள் செதுக்கிவிடும்
வழிக்காட்டியா?

கேள்விகள் காதில் படாமல் இருக்க
கைகள் பற்றிக்கொள்கின்றன
கவிதைகளை மருந்தாக.

கவிதையை தவிர மற்ற ஏதும் புரிந்த வண்ணம்
இன்று இல்லை
நாளை இல்லை

இக்கேள்விகள் புதிரிலிருந்து
புது கவிதையாய் சாத்தியம் ஆகும் வரை
பதில்களை கவிதைகளில் தேடுவேன்

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Eyes

Edwin Thumboo

Heading north after
the day's ordinariness,
overtaking x to the power of 3
timber lorries, buses, wheezing
Morris Minors, and sitting out
the Muar ferry's blown gasket,
I turn the last corner.

The gate unlocks,
the door opens,
to your eyes.

About the contributors

Aaron Lee: a pilgrim poet, mentor to artists and community organizer, and the author of three books of poetry (including *Coastlands*, launched at the Singapore Writers Festival in 2014). He is the co-editor of the best-selling anthology *No Other City: the Ethos Anthology of Urban Poetry*. He was also a featured reader at last year's National Poetry Festival.

Amanah Binti Mustafi: She won several awards for television drama scripts in *Pesta Perdana* and *Anugerah Persuratan*. Her winning manuscript, *Anak Ayam Bermain Dalam Hujan*, was published into a children picture book in 2016. Lyrics *Titik Merah* received a First Prize in *Lirik Baik SG 50* by BH/BM. She was selected to participate in the International Writing Program (Iowa) in 2016.

Aqmal N.: Winning *Projek Rentak* in 2009 paved a new direction in Aqmal's music career. Besides singing, Aqmal has also become known as a composer and producer. He garnered nominations for Best Song and Best Songwriter at *Mediacorp Suria Hits.SG* in 2010. He is the only youth musician in the Malay music industry to have won prizes in most of the major competitions organized by mainstream media organizations in Singapore. His awards include *Anugerah* (2004), runner-up in *Army Icon* (2005) and *Ria Remix* (2008).

Ashwinii Selvaraj has currently finished her A-levels at Raffles Institution. She studied Tamil Language and Literature and has a keen interest in writing short stories, poems and screenplays in Tamil. She has won a prize at the National Poetry Festival held in 2015 and the Prime Minister's Book Prize Award for 2015.

Crispin Rodrigues is an educator and sometimes writers and editor. He graduated with his Masters of Arts (English Literature) and Bachelor of Arts (English Literature) with a Minor in Drama and Performance from Nanyang Technological University, where he specialises in American fiction and culture, as well as Singapore fiction. Crispin's poems have been published in a number of anthologies, including *Kepulauan* (Ethos Books, 2014), *SingPoWriMo 2015* (Math Paper Press, 2015) and *From Walden to*

Woodlands (Ethos Books, 2015). His upcoming poems will be featured in *Asingbol* (Squireline Press, 2017). He is currently working on a short story manuscript as well as his own collection of poetry.

Dennis Yeo began his teaching career in 1988 and has taught in primary, secondary and JC levels. He was Subject Head (Literature), HOD (Pastoral Care & Career Guidance) and Vice-Principal at Pioneer Junior College before being seconded to NIE in Jan 2009. His PhD dissertation discusses the Postmodern Gothic Film.

Edwin Thumboo: Emeritus Professor/Professorial Fellow, NUS, has held visiting professorships at universities in USA, UK, Australia, Austria, Hong Kong and Malaysia, including Fulbright-Hayes (Pennsylvania State University, 1979-1980), Ida Beam (University of Iowa, 1986) and George A Miller (Centre for Advanced Study, University of Illinois, 1998). He was Chairman of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, VII Triennium (1983-1986). Professor Thumboo has published five collections of poems, the most recent being *Word-Gate* in 2013. Studies of his work include Ee Tiang Hong's *Responsibility and Commitment: The Poetry of Edwin Thumboo* (1997), Peter Nazareth's *Creating a Nation through Poetry* (2007), *Essays on Edwin Thumboo* (Jonathan Webster, editor, 2008) and *Understanding Verbal Art* (2015).

Eric Tinsay Valles has published the poetry collections *A World in Transit* and *After the Fall: dirges among ruins* (shortlisted for the 2016 Singapore Literature Prize) as well as co-edited *Get Lucky: An Anthology of Philippine and Singapore Writings* and *SG Poems 2015-2016*. His poetry has been featured in *Southeast Asian Review of English*, *Routledge's New Writing* and other journals. He has won a Goh Sin Tub Creative Writing prize. He has been invited to read poetry or commentaries at Baylor, Melbourne and Oxford Universities as well as the Kistrech Poetry Festival. He is a director of the National Poetry Festival.

Genevieve Wong is a teacher, writer, editor, and museum docent. She has an MFA in Creative Writing (with distinction) from the City University of Hong Kong and an M(Ed) (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) from the National Institute of Education, Singapore. She co-edited *50 Years, 50 Voices: 50 Years of English in Singapore Schools* (MOE) and poetry anthology *Sound of Mind* (Ethos Books). Her works have appeared in various journals and anthologies.

Harini V. is currently a third year university student pursuing her liberal arts degree at Yale-NUS College. She's majoring in global affairs and has an interest in English and Tamil poetry and theatre. Eight of her Tamil poems were published in a women's poetry anthology called *Nithimisai Nagarum Kuzhangkarkal* in 2015. She is also into exploring Tamil spoken word poetry and has a youtube channel called *Yen ManaVaani*. She recently created a spoken word piece for a Tamil foundation in Canada called ANBU. She has won one of the top three prizes at the National Poetry Festival held in 2015.

Iain Lim Jun Rui is an aspiring writer of scripts, prose and poetry. He is currently published in *SingPoWriMo 2016* and has other work featured in an upcoming *ASINGBOL* anthology. Besides amassing a collection of strange artifacts, he is still having difficulty ideating a dreamscape sequence for a screenplay.

Lily Teo: A secondary school Chinese teacher who publishes poetry and essays at *Lianhe Zaobao* and has three collections of Chinese essays and column writings to her name. She was also a performer at *Reflections on Nature Multicultural Evening of Poetry* at Gardens by the Bay.

Ow Yeong Wai Kit is an educator, editor, and writer. He co-edited the nature poetry anthology *From Walden to Woodlands* (Ethos Books). As a teacher of English and Literature, he has an M.A. (with distinction) in English Literature from University College London. He is also an interfaith harmony advocate in the Holland-Bukit Timah Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle (IRCC).

Tan Chee Lay: Associate Professor at National Institute of Education and the Executive Director (R&D) of the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language. A founding member of the Singapore National Poetry Festival, he received the Young Artist Award and Singapore Youth Award, and has published 20 creative writing and scholarly books. His recent creative publications include a poetry collection, *Original Poetics* (2012), a collection of short stories, *Hiccups in the Family* (2013), a children's picture book, *Sleepless* (2013), and a collection of letters, *Sidgwick Writings* (2014).

Writing about love is a challenge. How does one verbalise an intimate and inexpressible feeling? How does one top the Bard and a steady flood of poets and songwriters? But still we persist in writing love poems.

Art becomes a muse for most of the 26 love poems in this collection. Those poems are *ekphrastic*—that is, they engage in the imaginative act of describing, narrating, or reflecting on situations limned in paintings or sculptures, expanding and amplifying on the meaning that they evoke. The artworks that inspire these poems belong to the National Gallery Singapore, which offers an unparalleled vantage point for representations of love in the country's rich history and cultural heritage.

The 26 love poems are arranged according to common threads based on the four different kinds of love as first outlined by the ancient Greeks: *éros*, *storgē*, *philia*, and *agápē*. We hope that readers will be continually led back to the poems and their respective artworks.

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About PFS

The Poetry Festival Singapore (PFS) celebrates the island's poetry in all its four official languages through lectures, readings and workshops by both established and emerging poets.

Love is a complex emotion that has fascinated artists and poets alike. Can art inspire poets to look at love's various aspects in new ways? *Love at the Gallery* attempts to answer that question with 26 love poems, most of which are based on artworks at the National Gallery Singapore. The featured poets belong to the island's various linguistic poetic traditions, namely English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Art may be the poet's point of departure, but each poet harnesses the imagination to reach a destination that is his or her own. The relationship between art and poet in this collection provides patterns for the reader to create his or her own art.