



YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2023

DARYL LIM WEI JIE

DARYL LIM WEI JIE 林伟杰 (b. 1990) is a poet, editor, translator and literary critic. He is the author of two collections of poetry, 'Anything but Human' (2021) and 'A Book of Changes' (2016), with the former shortlisted for the Singapore Literature Prize. He won the Golden Point Award for English Poetry in 2015. Daryl has been part of literary festivals and residencies in the US, Singapore, China, the UK and Italy.



Virtual launch of 'Food Republic: A Singapore Literary Banquet', with co-editors Ann Ang (top left), Tse Hao Guang (bottom right) and publisher Goh Eck Kheng (top right), 2020.

Photo courtesy of Daryl Lim Wei Jie

Daryl has found great purpose and joy in curating work to showcase interesting voices from Singapore and the region. He conceptualised and co-edited 'Food Republic: A Singapore Literary Banquet' (2020), the first anthology of literary food writing from Singapore. 'Food Republic' won a Special Award at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards 2023. 'The Second Link' (2023), which he also conceptualised and co-edited, brings together writers from Malaysia and Singapore to ruminate creatively on the historic relationship between the two countries.

Daryl believes in the importance of literary criticism. He was one of the founding members of poetry.sg, an online encyclopaedia of Singapore poetry. He has contributed criticism on writers such as Aaron Maniam, Eddie Tay, Wong May and Wong Phui Nam. He has played a particular role in the revival of the work by the pioneering Malaysian poet Wong Phui Nam, a key figure in the Singapore literary scene of the 1950s and 1960s. Daryl was the editor of the revised edition of Wong's collection, 'The Hidden Papyrus of Hen-tai' (2019).

Daryl is also deeply interested in translation and exchanges between cultures and languages. He translated 'Short Tongue' (2023), a collection by the Singaporean Chinese poet Wang Mun Kiat. In addition to these contributions, Daryl has also been a mentor for the Creative Arts Programme, organised by the Ministry of Education, since 2017.



A CONVERSATION WITH DARYL LIM WEI JIE

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences in literary arts?

My mother brought my brother and me to the library regularly, where I read voraciously and indiscriminately, which perhaps accounts for my eclectic and accommodating literary tastes. (Shoutout: our librarians do a fantastic job!) My reading seems to have progressed gradually: starting off from Asterix & Obelix and Tintin comics, Enid Blyton, then a marked interest in fantasy and science fiction ('The Lord of the Rings', 'Dune' were early favourites), subsequently a shift to literary fiction in my Junior College days. As I became more serious in writing poetry, some poets became important early touchstones: Milton, Keats, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Arthur Yap, Wong Phui Nam, Geoffrey Hill, Hoa Nguyen, Wang Xiaoni, Wong May.



Launch of the bilingual edition and translation of 《短舌》 (Short Tongue) by the Singaporean Chinese poet Wang Mun Kiat, with editors Ang Jin Yong and Andy Ang, Singapore Book Council, 2023.

Photo courtesy of Daryl Lim Wei Jie

Please share what a typical day in your life as a poet, editor and critic is like.

I have a full-time job that isn't in the arts, so that takes up most of my day and week. Whatever time and energy I can squeeze out, apart from other commitments (like family, friends and mindlessly watching videos), I try to dedicate to writing and the arts. I find this creative work has its seasons. When I was preparing to publish my second collection, 'Anything but Human', I focused on writing and shaping my own work and then talking about it. This year, 2023, has been a change of pace. I call it the year of other people's work, where the focus has shifted to the work of others, and my role is that of an editor and translator.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your artistic journey and what motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

Poetry requires an extraordinary level of belief. It is an art form with a limited audience. It is ultimately built on sheer belief in the power of words, often without the guiding force of narrative, to move and affect us as humans. Other art forms, one can argue, do this much more effectively and powerfully. Even now, as I write this, I question the relevance of poetry as an art form. I will perhaps always question it. Yet it is that doubt that gives me energy, because if poets do not make the case for poetry, it is unlikely that anyone else will. Cults have the most fervent believers.

What do you want the audience to experience through your works?

That even in this age of media oversaturation, dead language overgrown with clichés, generative AI and all manner of excessive stimuli, words still have the power to intoxicate and alter us. That when you, dear reader, are alone with a copy of my work, lying down after a deadening day's work, a cup of tea or stronger beverage by your side, you will find yourself drawn into the beguiling strangeness of the worlds I have made and which I inhabit. That you will leave the book believing that the world can be made new each day, to cite Ezra Pound, who was quoting an ancient Chinese slogan: 苟日新, 日日新, 又日新.

What advice would you give the younger generation who would like to pursue a career in the arts?

Do it because you love literature, and not for any other reason. Do it because you first loved reading good work, not because you love the idea of being a writer. Write when you feel you have something to say, not because you feel you have to. When you're not writing, read, or help others write.



Lunch with Singapore literary pioneers and other writers: (clockwise, from bottom left) Eric Valles, Edwin Thumboo, Rosemary Khoo, Oliver Seet, Daryl Lim Wei Jie, Wong Phui Nam, Robert Yeo; Raffles Town Club; 2019.

Photo courtesy of Daryl Lim Wei Jie

What are your hopes and vision for Singapore's literary arts scene?

I hope we become self-confident enough to believe in our own stories, poems and plays. To write without anxiously looking at the American and British markets, which still continue to exert an overweening influence, but think about what we have here in Singapore and South-east Asia: an intriguing and exciting *mélange*, with deep and wonderful histories.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you?

I am very glad for the recognition, but it will change nothing about the way I write or practise. But I do think it has given me more courage and confidence to continue writing on. I hope to use the grant to create beautiful things, and to help other poets in Singapore reach audiences and readers.

Tell us more about how you would like to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

There are a few strands of my practice that I want to further, and I hope that the Award will help drive. One is fostering links and conversations with other South-east Asian writers, such as I have done in the anthology 'The Second Link', which brings together writers from Singapore and Malaysia. Another is supporting writing in areas that have been overlooked, such as literary food writing and creative non-fiction. I'm also keen to continue translating works from Singapore Chinese poets, and to more generally encourage exchange between the different language literatures in Singapore – something that I feel has been left by the wayside as Singapore literature in English has become more dominant.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

I would like to dedicate this Award to my late grandfather, Lee Yuen Kow and the late Wong Phui Nam, my spiritual and literary grandfather.

I would also like to thank:

My parents, my brother, Dave, and the extended family, for love, understanding and support.

My teachers, past and present.

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My publishers over the years: Kenny Leck of Math Paper Press; Goh Eck Kheng of Landmark Books; Melvin Neo, Mindy Pang and Justin Lau of Marshall Cavendish; Andy Ang and Ang Jin Yong of TrendLit Publishing.

My collaborators over the years: Ann Ang, Melizarani T. Selva, Hamid Roslan, William Tham, Sarah & Schooling, SuperBroadcast, Sing Lit Station, too many Singapore schools and schoolteachers to name, and contributors to the anthologies 'Food Republic' and 'The Second Link'.

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My Creative Arts programme mentees and other students I've taught, for your energy and enthusiasm.

All my readers.

Desmond. *Amor vincit omnia*.