



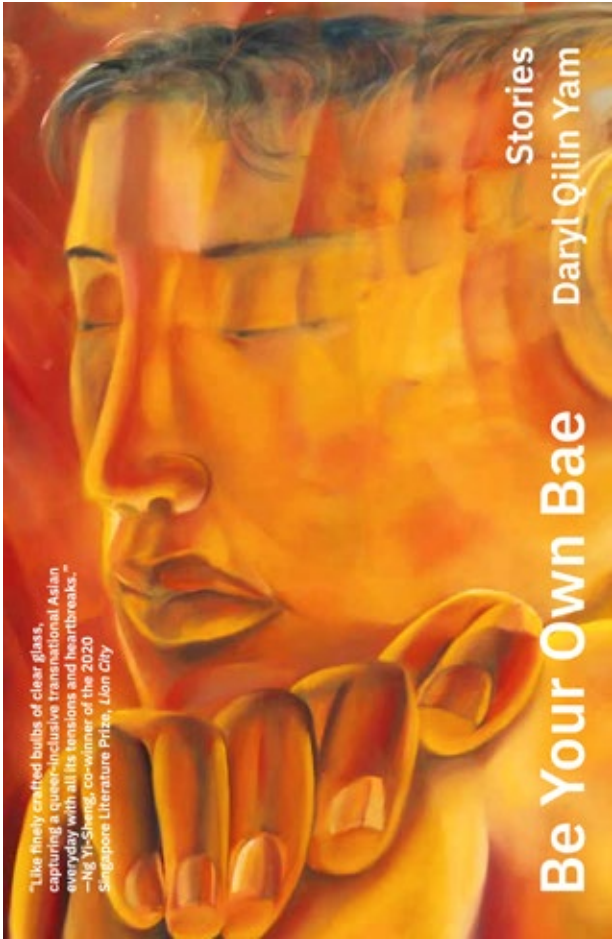
LITERARY ARTS SPECIALIST PANEL CITATION

As a writer, Daryl Qilin Yam blends intimate observation with explorations of longing and isolation, using magical realism to map spaces where mythology, memory, and desire intersect. Recognised internationally and raising the visibility of Singaporean literature, his compelling storytelling captures evolving aspects of the Singapore experience while revealing deeper emotional truths.

Daryl has also been instrumental in shaping the landscape as co-founder of Sing Lit Station, a literary charity in charge of programmes such as Singapore Poetry Writing Month (better known as SingPoWriMo) and newer endeavours such as its publishing arm, Afterimage. His contributions affirm his potential for continued artistic excellence and his central role in strengthening the literary ecosystem.

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2025

DARYL QILIN YAM



‘Be Your Own Bae’ (Epigram Books, 2024). An Alvin Ong painting is featured on the cover.

DARYL QILIN YAM (b. 1991) is the author of four books of fiction, and an arts organiser, advocate and publisher in the literary arts.

Hallmarks of Daryl’s stories include elements of ekphrasis and intertextuality; a realism with shades of the fantastic or the uncanny; wayward approaches to plot and story structure; and an unwavering commitment to portraying Singaporean lives. His debut novel, ‘Kappa Quartet’ (2016), described by ‘Quarterly Literary Review Singapore’ (QLRS) as “[breaking] new ground in Singaporean writing,” was longlisted for the inaugural Epigram Books Fiction Prize. He has since published a second novel, ‘Lovelier, Lonelier’ (2021), nominated by the National Library Board for the 2023 International Dublin Literary Award; a novella, ‘Shantih Shantih Shantih’ (2021), shortlisted for the 2022 Singapore Literature Prize; and a short story collection, ‘Be Your Own Bae’ (2025), a Best Literary Work finalist at the 2025 Singapore Book Awards.

Daryl is also the co-founder of the literary charity Sing Lit Station, presently serving as the managing editor of its publishing arm Afterimage, following previous positions as the non-profit’s first general manager (2016–2019) and the treasurer and executive committee member on its Board of Directors (2016–2023). The organisation, whose mission is to serve the local literary community, is an Institute of Public Character and NAC Major Company Funding Recipient. Through leadership roles at Sing Lit Station, he has developed programmes that provide professional and economic opportunities to writers while promoting Singaporean literature locally and internationally.

Daryl has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in English Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Warwick (2012–2016), where he spent an intercalated year at the University of Tokyo’s Abroad in Komaba programme (2014–2015). He also has a Master of Arts in English (Specialisation in Creative Writing) from Nanyang Technological University (2020–2022). In recognition of his activities and accomplishments in the literary arts, NTU bestowed upon him the School of Humanities (SoH) Patron of Heritage and the Arts Award in 2024, followed by the Nanyang Outstanding Young Alumni Award in 2025.





# A CONVERSATION WITH DARYL QILIN YAM

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

I was a very precocious, voracious child. Although my parents came from working-class backgrounds, they did what they could to satiate my appetite for a cultural education. Whenever my family shopped for groceries at Thomson Plaza, for example, I’d ask to go to the Popular so I could sit by the comics aisle and read. When I was 15, I took myself to Kinokuniya, where I devoured every book by Margaret Atwood, Michael Cunningham, David Mitchell and Haruki Murakami in the bookstore.

I’m a reader first, writer second, and I exemplify this in the way I cite my influences: reading Stephanie Ye’s ‘The Billion Shop’ and Atwood’s ‘The Blind Assassin’ gave me the blueprint for writing my first and second novels respectively, while David Hare’s ‘The Blue Room’ instructed how I might construct the daisy-chained chapters in ‘Shantih Shantih Shantih.’



The artist on a panel at the 2023 Ubud Writers & Readers Festival, speaking alongside Chris Tse, New Zealand Poet Laureate (2022–2025).

Photo courtesy of Daryl Qilin Yam.

Reading and befriending Cyril Wong has also been one of life’s greatest gifts: not only has he imparted so much care and wisdom, I also credit ‘Ten Things My Father Never Taught Me’ for being the direct antecedent to my short-story collection ‘Be Your Own Bae.’

**Please share what a typical day in your life as a writer is like.**

I work as the managing editor at Afterimage, where I take our books through every stage of production – it enriches my life as a lover of literature. I make sure to read for pleasure whenever I’m in transit.

Days devoted to writing go somewhat monastically: I wake up, feed myself, and then find a café in the vicinity, where I’ll write on my laptop for a good 4-5 hours over the afternoon. After that I run my errands, exercise, and have my dinner, before going to bed.

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

I’m constantly wrecked by self-doubt; I am my harshest critic. This, I think, is a hangover from being bullied at school. Thankfully I’ve remained tenacious and determined to live a long and fulfilling life – it is something I feel I deserve – and I am able to hold on to my curiosity; an innate optimism I consider my superpower; and the values of hard work and resourcefulness my parents have instilled within me.

I’ve always advocated for a more connected literary life in Singapore – there’s a reason why Sing Lit Station’s vision is to be a platform where readers and writers can meet, because it is also mine.

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

Finding the perfect reader is like forming an act of kinship with a stranger; it involves great sympathy and recognition. I only hope my readers can see themselves in the loneliness, the restlessness and the struggle for goodness my characters carry within them. I also hope my imagination is also sufficient for local readers to feel like their country is a site of great magic, wonder and soulfulness.

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

You have to love it. You have to crave for it, constantly. You have to want to be an expert in it, and to realise that may never be possible, but to therefore be committed to being a disciple for, and of life. People will constantly teach you many infinite ways to be a person, so do not ever cut yourself off from human connection. And it helps to remember that life is a chain of choices and consequences, and that goodness begets goodness – but not always.





The artist receiving the Readers' Favourite award for his novella 'Shantih Shantih Shantih' at the 2022 Singapore Literature Prize.

Photo courtesy of Singapore Book Council.

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

That it survives; that it continues to dream very, very big; that it lives on in the niches of readers' brains and hearts.

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

The act of writing requires focus over long stretches of time, long enough for the heart and the mind to expand and become elastic enough to escape into without break or interruption. While I've been fortunate to find work in the literary arts, the Young Artist Award will allow me to extricate myself from the obligations of everyday life in order to write my next book. The grant money will also allow my work to flourish, and adopt new shapes and iterations.

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

My goal as a writer has never changed: to produce a body of work that is ambitious, beguiling and clear-sighted about the strangeness of contemporary life and the imaginative possibilities our island can hold. It is my hope that my writing can be a testament to the beauty of syntax and the mystery that lies at the centre of the human condition.

Being a publisher is a new challenge, and the work at Afterimage has been invigorating. The year 2025 has been rewarding enough, and the years ahead promise a bounty of new voices. Having a hand in any of that is the honour of a lifetime.



**WORDS OF APPRECIATION**

Writers are nothing without their publishers. To the tireless teams at Epigram Books, Math Paper Press circa 2020–2021, and the Gaudy Boy volunteers led by Jee: thank you giving me a place on the shelves. And thank you, Jason, for your stewardship over all four books.

To Joshua: I don't know what we did in a past life, but I'm glad you dreamt up Sing Lit Station in this one and included me in it. To Azira: you astound me with your Herculean spirit. And to Pooja and Judith, my Afterimage pioneers: I appreciate every e-mail, every WhatsApp, every minute spent on Google Meets.

To Sophia: thank you for the mark you've made on my life. To the other kind folk who wrote me letters of support – Amanda, Andrew, Annaliza, Balli, Cheng Him, Ching Yee, Cyril, Daryl Lim, Ian, Jonathan, Kate, Chia Meng, Nicole, Roger, Suchen, Thanis, Hao, William and Xu Xi – thank you for being part of life's many glimmers.

Finally, I dedicated my debut title to four important people: my Dad John, my Mum Christine, Derek and Davyn. I'm grateful to find that the heart is fuller and richer now with Sherilyn, Wanrou and Desmond in it.