

# EDITORIAL

## A Beginning

It has certainly been a year full of unprecedented changes around the world. We have been transformed and traumatised by the COVID-19 pandemic. We now speak of a “new” normal, trying to comprehend and cope with everything that has been thrust upon us. Yet, this old normal still holds true:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die...

(The Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)

Even while being all too aware of the many different forms of death occurring in these trying times, we should note that there are many births as well. One such birth is the beginning of *Men Matters Online Journal (MMOJ)*. The seeds for this journal were sown a few years ago. They went through a period of dormancy until further discussions with my fellow editor, Danton Remoto. A germination took place, and we announced the launch of a new online journal in April this year — when the pandemic was ravaging the world. But I believe this pandemic will eventually pass. As with many other things, this journal also represents the season of birth and growth.

Over the last few decades, men’s issues have generally been overshadowed by a backlash against “the patriarchy.” Issues such as toxic masculinity, the policing of women’s bodies, and the phenomenon of sexual harassment of women by men (especially powerful men) have received global mainstream attention. *MMOJ* seeks to participate in longstanding and ongoing debates about men, maleness, and masculinity by providing a platform for writers to address these matters in a manner that is non-confrontational or oppositional towards women's issues, rights, and perspectives.

A tiger’s gaze meets the viewer of the cover of this inaugural issue. We express our gratitude to Ratanjot Singh for the free use of his photograph. Malaysian readers will undoubtedly recognise the national significance of this charismatic animal. In “Haunting the Tiger”, KS Maniam’s best-known short story, an ageing second-generation Malaysian Indian man is haunted by the failure of his youthful quest to “see” and “possess” the tiger that “roamed this land before man’s mind learned to remember” (p. 9). Both Wong Phui Nam and I refer to this iconic short story in our joint tribute to the late author at the end of the issue. Wong’s speech and my interview with KS Maniam come from the celebratory event that was organised on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019, about a year before his death.

The tiger reappears in Paul GnanaSelvam's poem "Maelstrom," which presents a diachronic vision of Tamil/Indian identity on the soil that has come to be racially demarcated as *Tanah Melayu* — from the Chola invasion of Srivijaya in 1025 to the proliferation of anti-Indian slurs in modern day Malaysia. The potent symbolism of the quest to hunt the tiger re-emerges in the extract from Shivani Sivagurunathan's forthcoming novel *Yalpanam* (2021) — which features a time-travelling 185-year-old woman as its central conceit.

This is not to say that *MMOJ* is solely concerned with the question of masculinity within the territorial limits of Malaysia, Malaya, or even Southeast Asia. Our inaugural issue features many contributors from Malaysia, yes, but also from India, Ireland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. We can view their engagements with the question of manhood through two broad themes.

On one hand, we have writers who speak directly to *MMOJ*'s interest in the representation and exploration of masculinity in the 21st century. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim's first poem, "Watching 'Don Giovanni' While Trump Gives His First State of the Union Address," explicitly confronts our present moment. Likewise, John McRae's dramatic monologues, Sharon Bakar's short story "Disgraced," Vernon Daim's poems, and Marc Faoite's essay explore how recent movements (#MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, for example) have challenged our conceptions of gender and identity.

On the other hand, many poets contemplate maleness through a more personal, introspective, and seemingly timeless lens. Luis Ortega, Ismim Putera, Sudeep Sen, Lawrence Pettener, and Leonard Jeyam retreat into the past — autobiographical, historical, mythical, and biblical — to allude to new possibilities in the present and future.

A big thank you to all the contributors to this inaugural issue of *MMOJ*. We hope to see you again in the future issues. I am very grateful to Danton Remoto for sharing the editorial work for this journal and to Susan Philip for supporting us as one of the peer reviewers for this issue. My appreciation to Augustine Chay, the journal Copy Editor, for his assistance in putting together this issue and especially with the sneak previews which appeared on our [Facebook page](#). And finally, I express my gratitude to Kayven Chew Kian Tatt for his technical support for this issue and for the maintenance of the journal website.

We look ahead to the next *MMOJ* issue in June 2021. We have some exciting plans ahead and anticipate your future contributions. Meanwhile, stay safe and stay well.

*Malachi Edwin Vethamani*