

EDITORIAL

Men Matters Online Journal (MMOJ) was launched at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and one year on – while we celebrate our first anniversary with this third issue of *MMOJ* – there seems few signs of the demise of the virus. Most people have come to terms with the “new normal” through various ways of coping with the uncertainties inflicted upon us. Yes, we must go on, and we will.

In Issue #3 of *MMOJ* we have a full array of the genres that appear in this journal, with ten poets, two dramatists, two novelists, three short story writers, two non-fiction writers and two reviewers. Our contributors are from Malaysia, Singapore, India, Maldives, Cuba, Sri Lanka, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Nigeria. We are glad to showcase the work of several new contributors and some returning contributors.

We chose masculine fragilities as the theme for this issue of *MMOJ* to provide poets, writers, and scholars from all disciplines with the opportunity to move beyond the now-familiar critiques of “the patriarchy” and “toxic masculinity”. We were pleasantly surprised by the number of submissions that dealt with this relatively elusive concept with nuance and subtlety.

We are pleased to see the poetry section continue to grow, both in terms of the number poets and the number of poems. Wong Phui Nam’s poem “At Eighty-Six” – written in 2021 on his birthday – opens the section with an autofictional persona pondering on aging and his impending death. The elegant lines in Chuah Guat Eng’s “The Meeting of East and West” belie all that has lain between the ‘he’ and ‘she’ in this two-stanza poem. The presence of fathers and their impact on the personae is evident in the poems by Kiriti Sengupta, Ismim Putera and Lawrence Pettener. Poems by Paul GnanaSelvam and Guna Moran dwell on loneliness while Aneek Chatterjee presents individuals caught in circumstances beyond the personae’s control. Meanwhile, Osahon Oka’s poems examine the male body and the personae’s complex relationship with it. Víctor Rodríguez Núñez’s “the muskrat’s notebook” closes this section with visions of life – in all its beauty and bleakness – as seen through a muskrat’s eyes.

The drama section features two plays of wildly different lengths. First, a short dramatic monologue by Leon Salam – inspired by a viral blog post by none other than former Singaporean teacher Otto Fong (a writer who coincidentally appears in this issue). The second work is Wong Phui Nam’s full-length play *Anike*. Its plot draws from the famed *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and Sophocles’ *Antigone*. The confrontation between Anike, the fictional sister of the murdered Hang Jebat, and Maniaka, the Raja of Merang, becomes the basis for dramatizing the perennial conflict between an established authoritarian power and its valiant dissidents. It also examines the tragic flaw of a ruler’s arrogance within the context of a deeply patriarchal society.

The author-chosen extracts from the two novels, Viji Krishnamoorthy’s *912 Batu Road* and William Tham’s *The Last Days* flesh out the theme of masculine fragilities against a dramatic historical backdrop. In the former, two male characters confront their demons during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1941-1945). In the latter, a Malaysian nephew and his uncle come to loggerheads during the second phase of the communist insurgency (1968–1989).

The short story section presents three different portrayals of men and how they come to terms with their fragilities. Bissme S’s “Pink” is a story of husband with a weakness for beautiful things and how his first wife copes with his volatile ego. On the other hand, David Lightfoot’s “Get Him to the Reunion” revolves around a character coming to terms with a tragic past and how it has affected his life and his relationships with his college mates. Finally, Umar Timol’s “The Disbelieving Believer” presents the internal conflict experienced by an unnamed 60-year-old man. The tension between religious teachings and the contradictions in his life leave him oscillating between guilt and desire.

In the first non-fiction piece, Otto Fong’s “How I Lost My Mother and Found Myself” uses the genre of creative nonfiction to explore how he came to terms with his mother’s suicide. In doing so, he provides poignant insights on the grieving process – as a personal, familial, and communal experience. In her academic essay, Enakshi Samarawickrama examines the masking of masculine crisis in Paula Hawkins’ bestselling psychological thriller *The Girl on the Train* (2015). She explores how male protagonists in the increasingly popular genre of domestic noir struggle with their fragile masculinity due to the pressures of having to conform to patriarchal ideals of masculinity.

The special section in this issue focuses on the eminent Malaysian poet Wong Phui Nam. He holds a very special place not only in Malaysian literature in English but also for our journal. He has been a contributor since the first issue. In this issue, we are happy to publish three new poems and the revised version of his play *Anike* (which was first published by Maya Press in 2006). In the first part of this special section, we republish articles written by KS Maniam and Alan Durant on Wong's oeuvre. We also republish Wong's Introduction to his first collection of poems, *how the hills are distant* and an essay which presents his thoughts on the state of Malaysian poetry in English. Many of these publications are no longer accessible to readers as the books they were published in are now out of print. These republications are followed by an extended essay by Daryl Lim Wei Jie, who edited Wong's latest anthology of poems, *The Hidden Papyrus of Hen-Tau* (2019). The second part of the special section consist of personal tributes to Wong – in light of his 86th birthday – from his peers Shirley Lim and Edwin Thumboo.

A big thank you to all the contributors to Issue #3 of *MMOJ*. We hope to see you again in the future issues. My appreciation to Augustine Chay, the journal Copy Editor, for his assistance in putting together this issue and for the sneak previews which appeared on our Facebook page. And finally, I express my gratitude to our Web Editor, Kayven Chew Kian Tatt, for his technical support for this issue and for the maintenance of the journal website.

Our cover image comes from the photography journal *theblowup* (@theblowup on Unsplash; @theblowupphoto on Instagram).

We look ahead to the next *MMOJ* issue in June 2022. We have some exciting plans and anticipate your future contributions. All good wishes for 2022. Stay safe and stay well.

Happy reading!

Malachi Edwin Vethamani