

A n a k S a s t r a
Issue 25
On the Back of a Motorbike special edition

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What We've Done...

This is not a typical issue of *Anak Sastra*. But don't worry. The next issue will be back to business as usual. But this--our 25th issue since the journal's inception in 2010--is a self-congratulatory edition intended to highlight some of the work of a number of our previous contributors. In this sense, we set up a closed call for submissions to all previous contributors (sorry issue 24 contributors, bad timing) asking them to contribute short fiction, creative nonfiction, and/or poetry for a themed print and digital anthology on the concept of (or directly using the phrase) "on the back of a motorbike." I mean, if you've ever been to Southeast Asia, you cannot deny that the motorbike is such a prominent part of daily life for hundreds of millions of people. It seemed like a good place to start with this anthology.

This anthology has been a long time in the making, albeit most of that in the planning stages. My intention in founding *Anak Sastra* back in 2010 was to help create an additional space for writing in English on Southeast Asia. For years I had felt that writing on and from that region was far more limited than from other geographic regions in Asia. My belief was that if nobody (or not many) was going to do it and if I really wanted to read more Southeast Asian literature, then I would just have to provide a space for it happen. Since then, there have been a number of other journals and publications on Southeast Asia appear much to my delight.

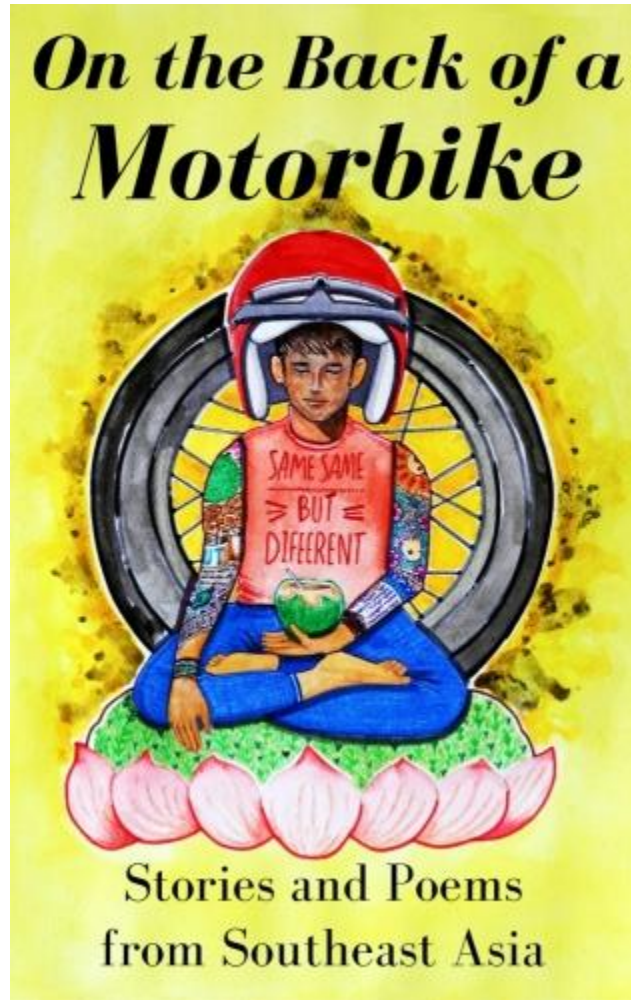
Bringing this journal to its 25th issue is somewhat of a milestone. It started very quietly and was slow to gain in recognition. But time and social media have helped to increase awareness about the journal, and I am pleased to no longer have to worry about not receiving enough good submissions each issue. That really is a relief!

So to do something special for the 25th issue, I decided to turn it into a promotional feature for the anthology published by *Anak Sastra*'s parent company, [Literary Concept](#). *On the Back of a Motorbike: Stories and Poems from Southeast Asia* features 25 of our previous contributors and mixes together their poems, personal essays and short stories on the theme.

Below you will find excerpts from their anthology contributions, short bios and also personal commentary on their own writing in the anthology and in general. I hope you enjoy reading the snippets below and the full anthology as much as I have enjoyed putting it together.

Kris Williamson
Editor

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"This Is My Husband"

by Lindsay Boyd

bio

Originally from Melbourne, Australia, **Lindsay Boyd** is a writer, personal carer and traveler who has rubbed shoulders with marginalized people of all stripes in multiple intentional communities around the world. A globetrotting veteran of more than sixty countries, he has resided and/or worked in many of them for longer periods. Home is wherever he lays his running cap.

from the author

“ I write out of need and because it is a fantastic form of communication, for me the best way to convey ideas and feelings. Growing up, spoken words often struck me as inadequate and could miss the mark completely when it came to elaborating what I really wanted to say. I recall instances from my childhood when I picked up a pen and piece of paper and jotted something down in preference to trying to verbally express the emotion running wild within. In this day and age the written word still seems the surer means and redolent with greater truth.

“ Lac, the hero or anti-hero of my story, is what I would call a ‘quiet rebel’ in a milieu where rebellion or non-conformism is not looked on too kindly. He is a classic example of the sort of character I like to write about and continues a long-lasting interest in so-called ‘outsiders’ or people regarded as different within the wider society.

excerpt

Go to the beach. Four simple words but special to Lac because they were the first in the curious language he committed to memory. To the south of Cua Dai on a quiet stretch of beach front road between there and the developing An Bang, there were many signs bearing the imperative. Strategically positioned at the start of narrow trails that led up and over sandy ridges and down to the clear waters of the South China Sea, the words on them were directional as much as imperative.

Gau taught them to his son, but his English pronunciation was as wayward as Lac's would later become. In his mouth *go to the beach* sounded like *goat bitch*. *Goat bitch* became akin to a password between the man and boy, something to be sniggered at whether a beach visit was on the cards or not.

* * * * *

"The Truth about Mo"

by Paul GnanaSelvam

bio

Ipoh-born **Paul GnanaSelvam** is the author of *Latha's Christmas & Other Stories* (2013). His poems and short stories have been published both locally and internationally in e-magazines *Dusun*, *Anak Sastra*, *CQ Lit Magazine*, *The Blue Lotus*; anthologies *Write Out Loud*, *Urban Odysseys*, *Body 2 Body*, *Lost in Putrajaya*, *KL Noir: Yellow*; literary journals, *ASIATIC*, *Lakeview Journal of Arts and Literature* and *The Earthen Lamp Journal*. He currently lectures at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman in Kampar, Perak, West Malaysia.

from the author

“ The overall theme in my stories is the human experience and emotions, encapsulated by life's journeys. Most of these journeys are a reflection of the Tamil Malaysians' life stories--their aspirations, joys and triumphs as well as their despairs, shortcomings and struggles. I grew up in a municipality flat, the Sungai Pari Towers, known as "Sap M Lau" among the taxi drivers in Ipoh. The flats boasted a mix of many residents from predominantly Chinese and Indians, Punjabis, one Siamese, one Gujarati and some happy-go-lucky Eurasians. Because my mother could read Tamil and English, it was to our house most of the women would converge to gossip, find out about newspaper content, movies, child rearing, husbands and in-laws, recipes, ailments and cures, politics and anything under the sun. Because of the crammed living environment, everyone became a part of everyone else's lives. The neighbors helped each other, quarreled with each other but uplifted each other in times of good and in times of grief that came and went right under everyone's noses. In short everyone became a part of everyone's stories that were 'real' and went unnoticed by the world. To think of them now, it often creates in me a sense

of awe and inspiration, and these certainly have been the point and theme in drawing up plots and creating characters in my stories. I simply believe stories must be told.

“

"The Truth about Mo" is the story about a young Indian boy in the modern metropolitan Kuala Lumpur coming of age. Like all young boys of his age, he couldn't wait to absorb the suave and swift machine--the motorbike--to define his transformation from an obedient, protected school boy into an independent and adventurous young man. Motorbikes have revolutionized the lives of many, especially in the 3rd World and developing countries like Malaysia. In a population where most citizens are middle income earners, a motorbike definitely is an important and practical source of transportation that changes people's lives economically and socially. However, the motorbike is also a bane. Often teenagers fiddle with their new-found freedom for the wrong reasons. In Malaysia motorbike accidents cause the highest number of road deaths. The *mat rempits* often pose a threat to other motorists as road bullies and illegal racers. It is also on motorbikes that many teenagers turn into invincible villains--gangsters, drug-pushers or snatch thieves. In Mo's story, Rukku, his mother, insists that her son is also given a motorbike on his 16th birthday, much against the wishes of her husband. Does Mo live up to her expectations? Does the motorbike bring Rukku joy or pain? There is a story behind every teenager's obsession--on the back of a motorbike.

excerpt

Rukku knew something was amiss. The rumors were not true. There were roadblocks all over town that night. Maybe Mo was not carrying an illegal substance. Maybe he was arrested on suspicion. Was he tipped off by those he trusted? There was no proof he was carrying drugs. And the reports mentioned sudden death caused by an accident. It bewildered Ramesh, their relatives and Mo's friends. Mo's possessions had all gone missing. Nothing was returned except for Mo's motorbike a week later. His gold chain and rings, hand-phones, his leather sling bag and even his bloodied clothes had vanished.

* * * * *

"Just Run and Run"

by William Tham Wai Liang

bio

William Tham Wai Liang grew up in Kuala Lumpur but is now based in Vancouver, Canada, where he is the creative nonfiction editor of the *Ricepaper* magazine. He has written several short stories that have been published in various anthologies, including *KL Noir: Blue* and *Hungry in Ipoh*.

from the author

“ My writing tends to be introspective. There is a heavy focus on characters, how they view themselves, and how they see each other. And sometimes I jump from scene to scene with few words and descriptions. I work better with concepts than fine details, so I try not to say too much. I like to leave it to the reader to fill the spaces in between.

“ 'Just Run and Run' captures the stage that I was in during the year leading up to graduation. An entire world of possibilities loomed up ahead when I started out as an undergrad in Vancouver but they slowly disappeared over the years, leaving me very unsure about what would happen next. So of course the only escape was traveling. I took time off in the summer to make my way through Southeast Asia, and Java, Indonesia, with its tumultuous history and dramatic landscapes provided the setting of this story. My characters, like me, were largely lost, drifting and wandering with some vague goal in mind. I built my story around this central theme, using it as a way of putting my situation into context. And I'm happy to get a good story out of it.

excerpt

On my way back I thought I felt raindrops falling. It was only when I stepped into the light of one of the foyers that I realized it was volcanic ash—a fine dust falling from the sky, borne by the winds from the heart of the earth. For some time I wandered in the darkness.

When I got back to the hostel it was much later at night. In the lobby the jeep drivers who would drive the tourists up to the viewpoints and the slopes of the volcano were chain-smoking and comfortably swaddled in lengths of cloth as I took a seat in front of a panorama of the volcano complex, peering at a paper map and trying to figure out a path down to Bromo. The smell of cloves was strong in the confined space, despite the open doors to let the smoke out.

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"Point of Departure"

by Thomas De Angelo

bio

Thomas De Angelo is an American writer and poet based in New Jersey. He has been in the struggling writer ranks for more years than he cares to remember. He is the author of the novel [*Between the Sword and the Wall: A Novel of World War I.*](#)

from the author

“ As a writer I feel the need to explore what I see to be the truths of the world as well as of myself. Writing is a way of life as necessary as breathing. So, to answer the question "why do I breath?" the answer is: to live and the same answer applies to the question "why do I write?" On a larger scale I would hope to be able to change someone's point of view, but in the final analysis writing is a personal exploration. Anyone who writes knows the arduous task of the creative process as well as the difficulty in getting their work published, the frustration of rejection letters, etc. But for a writer it is impossible to not write, even when money or fame is not forthcoming. It is not a choice. I write to live.

“ In my story, 'Point of Departure', I wanted to take the theme of the motorbike to write a story with a comment on a social issue. The themes in the story of lawlessness, immorality, rebellion against authority all seem to represent the larger issue of the slowly deteriorating condition of society. The only result for this behavior is one of tragedy, both for the character in the story and society in general.

excerpt

Rozmi's *mat rempit* gang sped across town toward an unfinished stretch of land alongside a construction site where they would do their stunts. A grocer poked his head out of one of the shops and yelled at them as they went by.

"Stop with this noise. You should all get jobs and stop this nonsense."

Rozmi slowed down first, followed by Bakri and then the rest. They stopped their bikes and stared at the grocer. One of the gang got off his bike and, within a few seconds, took out a small club and hit the grocer across the face. The man fell with a thud as blood gushed from the open wound. Without a word the gang started up and drove away. The typical night had begun.

* * * * *

"Casta Diva"

by Daniel Emlyn-Jones

bio

Daniel Emlyn-Jones has written a number of short stories with Singaporean themes published in regional journals, such as *Anak Sastra*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Eastlit* and collected in the anthology *Yu Sheng and Other Stories of Singapore* (2015). When not writing, Daniel works as a private tutor to school children in Oxford, UK.

from the author

“ Asking a writer why they write is like asking a bird why they sing. Creation is a part of being human, and some would say that we are only truly human when we are creating. South East Asia, with its swirl of different cultures, languages and religions is a fertile ground for the writer, and my contribution to this anthology, “Casta Diva”, was inspired by a Chinese Singaporean friend of mine who was brought up in Kuching. He described to me how, as a child, he listened for the first time to Joan Sutherland sing the aria “Casta Diva”. It was a conversion moment for him, and set him on a life of music. “Casta Diva” is from Bellini’s opera *Norma*, and is the moment when the high priestess prays to the moon goddess for peace. Check it out on Youtube.

excerpt

It was after Holy Week 1967—when I had turned thirteen—that Brother Columba showed me a clipping from a Singaporean newspaper. Auditions were being held in June for places at the Bidwell Music School in Singapore. Scholarships were available, and if I succeeded, I would study music alongside the other subjects.

"I want to go," I said immediately. I knew it would be difficult to leave my mother and my sisters, but by then my desire for music was stronger than anything else.

"We will need your parents' consent."

"My father won't."

Brother Columba sighed. "We'll see."

* * * * *

"Didith's Boyfriend"

by Raymund P. Reyes

bio

Raymund P. Reyes teaches English in Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Manila. His poetry and short fiction have appeared in *Your Impossible Voice*, *Carbon Culture*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Expanded Horizons*, and *Anak Sastra*, as well as in various literary journals and anthologies in his native Philippines.

from the author

“ Writing, for me, is a compulsion. I write because I have to exorcise the lines of poetry and plots of stories that just seem to pop unbidden in my mind at any time of day and night. If I don't write them down, they don't leave me in peace.

“ In the Philippines, the motorbike is ubiquitous, whether in the major highways of cities or the unpaved streets of the farthest-flung barrios. A common means of public transport is the tricycle, a motorcycle with a side car attached to it. Anyone who has grown up in the Philippines, therefore, would have experienced riding on a motorbike or a tricycle and so it isn't hard to think of a story set in the country where the vehicle would figure as a prop, regardless of its relevance to the plot.

excerpt

Ramon and Didith soon developed a routine aside from the Saturday visits. Every morning, Ramon would fetch Didith from the house. He had brought her a helmet so she could ride with him. He even remembered to get an orange helmet as it was her favorite color. He dropped her off at the college where she taught. Then in the afternoon, he would pick her up so they could ride home together. On Saturdays he would visit in the afternoon, always bringing with him a box of sweet *hopia*. Some weekends, though, they would go out of town on his motorcycle to Tagaytay, Laguna, Antipolo or Bulacan. Dodong had stopped worrying once he learned that Ramon didn't intend to marry his sister. Lorraine could only watch with indignation from her upstairs window as Ramon and Didith drove off for their weekend date.

* * * * *

"Me and Kap Chai"

by Chang Shih Yen

bio

Chang Shih Yen is a writer from East Malaysia. She graduated with first class honors in English and linguistics, and with a master's degree in linguistics from the University of Otago in New Zealand. She writes a [blog](#) about footwear.

from the author

“

I write because I have to. For me, writing is like breathing, and if you stop breathing, you die.

“

Most of my story is set in Malaysia. The setting is significant for me as a Malaysian because this is home. This story was a lot of fun to write, especially the parts about Penang. My grandmother still lives there, and writing about Penang reminded me of my childhood. In this story, I write about real places and real food, which I hope that readers will be able to experience one day.

excerpt

I moped around in my room for a few weeks wondering what to do with my life. My future seemed to be a big, black gaping hole. Logic and reason told me that I needed to get my act together, write a resume and start applying for another job, but my body wasn't listening to reason. That was when that little idea, which had been burning on a low flame somewhere in the back of my mind, came to the fore again.

If Che could ride his unreliable motorcycle across South America, back in the days before computers and cell phones, why couldn't I do the same through South East Asia in this modern day and age? *What was stopping me? Nothing!*

* * * * *

"The Inner Spark"

by Barry Rosenberg

bio

Barry Rosenberg was brought up in England but moved to Australia after completing a PhD. After a few years, he became a 70s dropout, concentrating on tai chi and meditation. He started writing poetry around 1974 then moved into writing stories and plays. He currently lives on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, where he combines writing with woodworking. From around 2008, he became active in sending material out. Since then, he has had over 25 short stories published.

from the author

“Forty years ago, I dropped out of research work to practise meditation. Poetry came to me and wouldn't go away until I'd written it down. Over the years that turned into writing stories and now is a creative constant.

“Texts say that meditation may lead to psychic powers. As a writer, I like to think up novel psychic powers.

excerpt

Spiro brought out a candle carved into the shape of a lotus. Putting it on the table, he concentrated on it for a few moments. The wick began to smolder. With extra concentration on his part, the wick burst into flame. Just as the oil lamps had done when they'd first returned home. Ada watched with delight but said nothing. She was well accustomed to her husband's unusual ability.

* * * * *

"Old Soldier"

by Michael Lund

bio

A native of Rolla, Missouri, **Michael Lund** is the author of numerous scholarly publications on the Victorian novel, two collections of short stories and a number of novels inspired by *The Mother Road*, including *Route 66 to Vietnam: A Draftee's Story* (2004), *Growing up on Route 66* (1999), and *Route 66 Looking-Glass* (2014). At Longwood University in Virginia he conducts writing workshops for Home and Abroad, a free writing instruction program for veterans, active-duty military and families.

from the author



Many programs offered to would-be authors these days celebrate the literary life more than the audience's needs. "Be a writer!" they advertise, as if the role is finer than the product and membership in a community of artists the highest achievement. I say it's not about me. Better to focus on what readers need than what I gain from the process of composition.

A secondary principle of this "Be a writer" approach is often that the process is presented as so excruciating, so completely a sacrifice of any potential for the author's happiness, that to write appears to be the highest endeavor individuals might undertake. This is self-serving: think how hard it is to practice medicine, farm, be a soldier. But, especially when a writer or other artist is at the center of a work, it tends to limit the audience to other writers. When we write for writers, we fail to appreciate the richness of lives unlike our own and keep the joys of literary experience to ourselves.

“

Writing for a themed anthology fits with my perspective that writing is not about the author but about the readers. Too often we fool ourselves that we are autonomous beings, independent geniuses unrestrained in what we do by external considerations. But we are surrounded and shaped by everything we've read, heard, seen. To respond to the confines of a given topic acknowledges the context within which we live and think; and that humbles us and appropriately respects readers.

excerpt

Wilson also kept after him about visiting Madame Kim-Ly's. "You can get anything you want there, Buttoned Man—I mean *anything*." He had a conspicuous gap between his two front teeth, and Manfred felt that alone squeezed his speech into indecencies.

To turn the question away, Manny asked, "What do *you* ask for?"

"Oh, it's different every time, but ... " he leaned into Manny, whose other shoulder was pressed against the guard box. "But what you should try is a shower with two girls. One in front, one behind."

Manny, curious in an intellectual way, couldn't figure what the second girl would be doing. "What if I just wanted to talk? Learn about her, her family, life before the war, her hopes for the future."

Wilson laughed. "That's a good one. I might even try that as a kind of prelude, know what I mean? And we could take it up again later. A long night with before, during and afters."

* * * * *

"The Path of the Ghosts"

by Tilon Sagulu

bio

Tilon Sagulu is a Malaysian Dusun writer. He was born Herlveron bin Sagulu, but goes by the nickname he grew up with, Tilon (derived from a Dusun word, Guntialon, meaning "mischievous"). His works have appeared in *Laurus*, *Anak Sastra*, *Hungry in Ipoh*, *The Little Basket: New Malaysian Writing 2016*, *PJ Confidential*, *Trash*, and won the 2013 Marjorie Stover Short Story Award. He is currently pursuing a M.A in English Literature at University Malaya.

from the author

“ Writing to me is like travelling. I know travelers have wanderlust—I do to, but not as great as my “lust” to explore the realm of art and humanity through language (plus, it’s cheaper!). I write stories to question, to learn, to discover, to wonder, and to understand things that bother me and things that I find interesting and complex, such as human “Being.”

Maya Angelou used to quote Terence, a Roman playwright during the Roman Republic: “Homo sum humani nihil a me alienum puto” (I am human being, nothing human can be alien to me). Ever since I learned this quote, I carry it with me all the time to understand myself and others. For example, it’s easy to think that a murderer is a terrible human being, a monster that deserves to rot in hell—this thinking is alienating the murderer (a human being) from human experiences, which violates Terence’s quote. A question follows: “Are we suppose to embrace such evil action as ‘normal,’ and allow it to happen?” Of course no, but my point is, the murderer is a human being, and this means that it is possible for you and me—if we were under the murderer’s circumstances and life—to

kill another human being, because we are just as human as the murderer. Now, if human can stretch his humanity destructively to the point of murder, imagine what would happen if we stretch our humanity constructively! We will have more people like Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Oprah. So, writing and reading allow me to understand “the murderer,” and I think understanding eliminates fear and alienation—which are the things that bury compassion, acceptance and love. Understanding involves humility and vulnerability, which are the birthplaces of constructive humanity. And “understanding,” for me, occurs when I write and read literature.

When I was writing “The Path of the Ghosts,” there were many things I was thinking about and was trying to understand, such as the reconciliation in the hybridity of opposing values and identities, philanthropy (not in terms of money, but “life”) versus sacrifice—can we give without sacrifice? Can we love without “love” in us? And how “love” can be misunderstood as attachment that could end up caging one in misery. I did not write the story with an intention to find answers to my questions, but I think these questions emerge in the story as I read it again and interpret it for myself.

“

In regards to the theme of the anthology (my interpretation at least), being on the back of a motorbike, one is given a glimpse, an illusion of freedom—the wind blowing in your hair with your hands spread out like an eagle soaring in the open air, and then there’s the scenery you see along the way. What you don’t realize is that it is not you who choose “the way,” the sceneries, the speed of the motorbike, and ultimately, your life is in the hand of the driver—these are not freedom. Interestingly, I find writing to be the same as riding on the back of a motorbike: there’s a sense of freedom in it, of creativity, but at the same time, I’m not the driver—my characters are the drivers of the story.

So, what is freedom? Is it to have control, as in becoming the driver of our lives? Maybe. But is it really possible to control “life”? No. Even in writing, I can’t really feel a full sense of control over my craft. The question, what is freedom? Is a question that can only be answered personally, but to seek the answer, one has to acknowledge the question first,

and I hope that my story sparks, not only the question about freedom, but also other questions, that could eventually lead us to a better understanding of our “Beingness.”

excerpt

"Now, this is climbing," Jesse turned to April. "Ready?"

"Wait, my stomach hurts." April whined.

"What stomach ache!"

"Five minutes, five minutes," she urged and then sat down. Jesse had no choice but to sit down with her. They ate peanuts and raisins quietly, watching other climbers lining up, waiting for their turn to use a rope to climb a mound of giant rocks. After a few minutes of rest, Jesse felt a burn in his thighs and calves—they were too tired, too sore, and were getting soft like noodles. He thought about his bed and asked himself: *What am I doing here?* When the queue got longer, Jesse forced himself to stand up, ignoring the pain in his bones and the sourness of his muscles."Let's go!"

* * * * *

"Down the Rabbit Hole: Snippets of a Saigon Sojourn"

by Don Adams

bio

Several years ago **Don Adams** was a Fulbright scholar in Vietnam, and he has been returning to live there every summer since because he loves the city of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). Nine months out of the year he is a professor of English at Florida Atlantic University in South Florida, where he teaches modern literature.

from the author

“

In my essay writing I try to treat the reader like a friend and to be cordial and considerate, engaging and entertaining.

“

In my essay on saying goodbye to Saigon, I wanted to convey my affection for the city and its people and to record my observations and impressions of a place that was fast changing and certain to be a much different place in the not too distant future, as it indeed already has become. This essay was the last of a series I wrote during my initial two-year stay in Saigon, in which I attempted to explain my experience to an interested reader as ignorant as I when I first arrived. This concluding essay was conceived as a kind of elaborate thank you card for a lovely visit.

excerpt

I like that my preconceived notions of what this world will be like are so entirely wrong and yet so persistent. When we were to take a bus to the countryside, for instance, I could not help imagining an American-style cruiser, whereas we actually rode in a Toyota minivan packed to the gills with passengers. When it became too full to let any more in the door, they passed them in through the windows.

* * * * *

"In Between"

by Pauline Fernandez

bio

Pauline Fernandez is an analyst and photographer from Orange County, California. She has recently decided to return to the world of writing after focusing primarily on photography. Her last nonfiction piece, "Gradual," appeared in *Anak Sastra's* 17th issue. She has also published the nonfiction story "Bittersweet" in *Mosaic Art and Literary Journal*.

excerpt

Lunch lasted for an uncomfortable hour. My siblings and I left the table the instant we had the chance and huddled together in the sprawling living room, leaving behind the four grown-ups and two loud children. On the opposite end of the room sat a huge, square TV on an expansive shelf where a massive collection of cassette tapes, CDs, video games and various VHS movies were stacked neatly side by side.

"Wow! They have a Nintendo and a VCR!" my brother exclaimed. My eyes glazed at their collection of movies—specifically the Disney ones—and marveled at the size of a VHS cassette. It looked just like a Betamax except bigger. We gawked and stared, tempted to turn on the TV, but were afraid of what they would say if our fingers smudged anything. We could only gaze longingly from a distance, looking but not touching.

* * * * *

"You Meet the Nicest People on a Honda"

by John McMahon

bio

John McMahon is a writer, motorcycle tour operator and sometimes antiques exporter who lives on the banks of the River Kwai in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. His writing, both fiction and non-fiction, has appeared online and in print all over the world.

excerpt

The first kayaking run I ever made on one of my favorite rivers high in the hills of Sangkhlaburi was made possible by a local Karen man and his Honda Dream. Modified with stouter shocks and knobby tires, it carried us on the rough trail and up the almost vertical hill climbs. The two of us pushed the bike through thick, red mud at the crests and fishtailed down the back side in a near freewheel. It was a dangerous but often hilarious venture with both of us and my kayak on the 110 cc machine. We arrived at the river covered in filth.

* * * * *

"After Class" and "Road Trip"

by Romalyn Ante

bio

[Romalyn Ante](#) was born in Lipa City, Philippines and moved to the UK at 16 years old. She has recently been commended in the 'Poetry' category at Creative Future Literary Awards. Her works have appeared in different magazines in the UK, USA and South East Asia, including *Under the Radar*, *Southlight* and *Ink, Sweat, & Tears*.

excerpt

He was the kind of uncle who stole fruits
From his own shop, behind his strict,
Chinese wife.
My pocket filled with rambutans.

It's the season of flying lanterns
and candle-lit baskets on the river.
The nocturnal world swirls
with pretty women in silk,
spiced delicacies on the grill.

* * * * *

"Wombs"

by D.R.L. Heywood-Lonsdale

bio

D.R.L. Heywood-Lonsdale lives in England and grew up on the west coast of the U.S. She studied writing and literary cultures at New York University and Pepperdine University, where she received the Douglas Award for Creative Writing. Her fiction has appeared in *Anak Sastra* and her poems have appeared in *Dash*, *The Rectangle* and other journals in the U.S. and U.K.

excerpt

... Years later in Germany or
India or Laos she'll peel herself from other people's
parents and crawl into the backseat with her lover, her
dog or alone of this car shipped thousands of
miles, better than the back of a motorbike or the bars
of a *tuk-tuk* or a chicken bus without a handkerchief ...

* * * * *

"Agitation"

by Perry McDaid

bio

Irish poet and writer **Perry McDaid** lives in Derry under the brooding brows of Donegal hills, which he occasionally hikes in search of druidic inspiration. His diverse creative writing appears internationally in the likes of *Aurora Wolf*; *Anak Sastra*; *Runtzine*; *Subprimal*; *Amsterdam Quarterly*; *Star Tips for Writers*; *Metverse Muse*; *Bunbury* and others. He is the author of the poetry collections [Ruby Silver](#) and [Cardboard City Opera](#).

from the author

“ Creativity in any form is an extension of self: it's more part of the central nervous system than a cerebral determination. It's a sharing with a world to which we need to connect: not so much to be validated as to validate. This is why I stretch myself across the verbal, tonal and visual arts and enjoy ekphrasis.

“ I'm sure there's a wordier answer, but the significance of the setting of my poem boils down to this being a part of the world where nature and natural forces are more vivid, vital ... wilder; and the tragic comedy of our trying to impose ourselves upon these are emphasized because of the overwhelming beauty of it all. The people there recognize that they prevail because, rather than in spite of, that irresistible force ... and are thus more human in many ways than the nations who believe they have domesticated nature.

excerpt

Permit for Inle Lake in pannier,
I hugged Mala to me
and bore the good-natured slap –
plus fond displacement –
when my hand strayed
mischievously.

* * * * *

"The Vendors"

by Khor Hui Min

bio

Khor Hui Min is a Malaysian book editor working in educational publishing. She thinks of life as a continuous learning process and believes in a healthy work-life balance. In her free time, she likes to write, bake, cook, blog about writing, baking and cooking, as well as volunteer with various NGOs. Her most recent publications include poems published by *Eastlit* and *The Hourglass*, and a short story published by *Anak Sastra*. You can read more of her writing at <https://projectprose.wordpress.com> and <https://huiminskitchen.wordpress.com>.

excerpt

For decades, through rain, shine and tears
On the backs of motorbikes, without any fears
Vendors bravely eked out their daily living
Strong and tough, but also kind and forgiving

* * * * *

"Accident"

by Gillian Craig

bio

Gillian Craig is originally from Scotland, and currently lives in Singapore with her family. She has spent the last 16 years living in various parts of Asia, including Vietnam and Thailand. She has had poems published in a range of magazines, journals and anthologies, including *New Writing Scotland*, *New Writing Dundee* and *Orbis*.

excerpt

An entreaty to move along,
not cause more damage,
as if the living were all blameless
and the dead had started this

* * * * *

"Rohan and Jui Lat"

by Ling Tan

bio

Ling Tan was born and raised in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At the age of 21, she left for Hawai'i and later New York before ending up at Lake Atitlan in highland Guatemala, where she has lived for the last three decades. A restaurateur by vocation, she writes, paints, sings in a choir and dances in her spare time. Her piece "Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto my Feet" was published in *Anak Sastra*, while "A Tale of Three Volcanoes" appeared in *Cultural Fusions: Passions and Creativity Converging*, compiled and edited by Aaron A. Vessup. She is currently working on her memoir.

from the author

“

I write as an act of recovery. I write to shine light on the dark places inside. Places that are hurting, that need attention, places embodying conflict.

“

I wrote "Rohan and Jui Liat" from that motivation. Those of us who lived through May 13, 1969 suffered a kind of collective trauma, a loss of innocence. I feel it as a split between spirit and will aching to be made whole. To recover that wholeness, I allow myself, as a writer, the indulgence of a fantasy resolution: Embrace the Other and Celebrate Diversity.

excerpt

Unwilling to trust the polar opposite, each,

It comes to nothing.

She fence-sits. Hems and haws. What good could come of asking for it?

About her, delicately, he smells the pork. It keeps him at bay.

So close, yet so far.

* * * * *

"Tropic of Ennui"

by Subashini Navaratnam

bio

[Subashini Navaratnam](#) lives in Selangor, Malaysia and has published poetry and prose in *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Aesthetix*, *Sein und Werden*, *minor literature[s]*, *Anak Sastra*, *Jaggery*, *Halo Literary Magazine*, *Liminality: A Magazine of Speculative Poetry*, *DATABLEED*, *Deluge*, *Rambutan Literary* and *Dead King*. Her writings on books have appeared in *The Star* (Malaysia), *Pop Matters*, *3:AM Magazine* and *Full Stop*, and she has published nonfiction in MPH's anthology, *Sini Sana* as well as fiction in *KL Noir: Yellow*. She tweets at [@SubaBat](#).

excerpt

All my life, I've been preparing
to take KL with me, to run with
my home on my back, as though
the present has already congealed
at the bottom of the rice pot, a sticky
brown residue that scrubbing doesn't
remove. I've lived through the enervating
heat of a thousand blooming Julys,
waved my clothesline like a flag for peace.
Perspiration is my known foe.

* * * * *

"The Fish Ponds of Laos"

by Reed Venrick

bio

Reed Venrick divides his year between Florida and Northern Thailand and usually writes poems with nature themes.

excerpt

On top of Vang Vieng's morning hills, trying to see through
the foggy nightmare of history's pock-marked valley

and searching further east over blazing fields, I
peer into, while holding up the broken fragments

of, the Plain of Jars, where the great hawks flew
with demonic power and defecated an ocean of bombs

for another generation to swim and pass to memory—
I ride the old motorbike again to the summit

and feel the shock of monsoon lightning that broke
the jars that spilled the water oozing from the Mekong.

* * * * *

"Flexibility Enhances the Ride" and "Zigzagging through Paradise"

by David Andre Davison

bio

David Andre Davison is an American expat living in the Philippines. Some of his poems and children's stories have been published in various periodicals throughout the region. Currently, he is working on his first novel, a story based on current political tensions in SE Asia. His wife, Amy, is a professional chef and expands his waistline with delectable desserts.

excerpt

My passenger has been quiet
On our excursion today.
She climbs off the motorbike
With nothing to say.

I ask her what's wrong,
Why she's been quiet on our trip.
She pulls me close to her
And plants a kiss on my lip.

We drive along the beach where a fisherman casts his net.
I avoid the incoming tide, careful not to get my engine wet.
We stop for an early dinner before we start homeward bound.
Before we can get off our motorbike, there are children all around.

* * * * *

"The Great, All-Night Khaosan Road Bike Race"

by Charlie Baylis

bio

Charlie Baylis was born in Nottingham. His critical writing has been published in *Stride*, *Neon* and *Sabotage Reviews*. His poetry has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes, the Forward Prize and the Queen's Ferry Press's Best Small Fictions. He was (very briefly) a flash fiction editor for *Litro*. He has published two pamphlets: *Elizabeth* (Agave Press) and *Hilda Doolittle's Carl Jung T-shirt* (Erbacce). He spends his spare time completely adrift of reality.

from the author

“

What would I like to convey in my writing? Delirium.

“

My poem is an attempt to describe a bike race that would lead to unavoidable death. I hope that through death we might end up in a 'higher place'. Follow the signs. Transcend. That is all we can hope for.

excerpt

Don't tell me about your lost paradise.

My paradise: found. I chance a right, zoom
round the gold dipped temples, the monks are heading

home to hold their daughters. The petals
of my milk filled frame smash
into concrete walls in an orange boom.

* * * * *

"Rice"

by Scott Reel

bio

Scott Reel studied English and philosophy at the University of Illinois Chicago, while also having served as a combat correspondent in the United States Marine Corps. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in literature and lives in Chicago, Illinois.

excerpt

A white face. Bare arms. A shining chest. Hair
cut with a razor. A smooth chin. Two pieces of metal
dangling beneath his neck. He killed
the motor and stood. They stood together,
in the sultry shadows, draped off the gray stones
stacked high into the cloudless sky.

* * * * *

"Another Night"

by Paige Yeoh

bio

Paige Yeoh has worked in the hospitality industry for most of her life but has yet to become jaded by it. She credits infrequent opportunities to travel and even less frequent bursts of creative writing as a means to stay balanced in life ... mentally and physically. Her writing as appeared in various online journals.

from the author

“ Writing represents an opportunity for me to express my experiences and thoughts in ways that I would never be able to vocalize by any other means. In my daily life, there are so many things I wish I could say but am held back by societal restraints. Writing my thoughts down removes *some* of that.

“ In my poem I wanted to give a voice to the voiceless but also share my own understanding of the situation. My words are just one perspective. That's all anyone can offer.

excerpt

Gritty grimy

I climb

Out from underneath

The hairy pig

Who thinks his money can

Buy me

By the hour.