

Singapore Management University

Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University

Research Collection School of Social Sciences

School of Social Sciences

1983

Singapore

Kirpal SINGH

Singapore Management University, kirpals@smu.edu.sg

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research



Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Citation

SINGH, Kirpal.(1983). Singapore. *Kunapipi*, 5(1), 121-122.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research/1480

This Journal Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Sciences at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Collection School of Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email cheryl@smu.edu.sg.

Published in *Kunapipi*, 5(1), 129-130. 1983.

SINGAPORE by Kirpal Singh

After the excitement of the previous two years, 1982 was surprisingly a very quiet year insofar as literary activity is concerned. Indeed, one is left to wonder if the energy burnt itself out?

Only one book needs to be specifically mentioned here: Goh Poh Seng's *Bird With One Wing*. This collection of poems is Goh's third and is handsomely presented. The contents are quite another thing. Goh has a good satirical touch but this he does not exploit to advantage in this collection. Nor does his sharp, incisive commentary show itself in this volume. Rather he has moved on to more personal themes (such as relationships, history, myth) using the narrative as his major mode. On occasion he succeeds, but rarely: he does not, with very few exceptions, have the ability to sustain a long poem. The poetry becomes prosaic (and Goh is certainly a prose writer of strength) and threatens to slide off. The positive thing about *Bird With One Wing* is that it shows Goh coming to grips with a new and, one might add, important, aspect of creative writing - the confessional, especially when this is linked to broader themes. One looks forward to Goh's next book with a certain amount of interest.

The Ministry of Culture's *Singa* magazine continued a struggling existence. Produced two times each year *Singa* can play a vital role in forging a viable literary identity as it publishes translations of Malay, Tamil and Chinese works as well as those written in English. And some quite good new talent is to be discerned within its covers. Furthermore each issue has an essay or an article that deals with one or other of the remaining arts of dance, drama, painting, etc. As always, the two issues which came out this year are very attractive and, for the price (\$2.50), exceedingly cheap.

A regular and popular part of the local literary scene, the Sunday Times' Poetry Corner came to an unfortunate close after nearly three years. Its editor, K. Singh, took up a visiting appointment at the University of Papua New Guinea and Poetry Corner ceased as a result. This is the third time that such a feature has come and gone. The earliest Poetry Corner column was begun by Edwin Thumboo, it was later rekindled by Arthur Yap and, finally, by K. Singh. We do not know if a fourth attempt will be made. The thing that we do know is that through its columns some fine poems emerged and it is hoped that the contributors to Poetry Corner will not be denied other avenues for publication.

The highlight for 1982 as far as the arts are concerned was the Singapore Arts Festival which took place towards the end of the year. It naturally attracted huge crowds and manifested the fact that in spite of its image overseas as essentially a 'shopover' city, Singapore has a soul. But from a literary point of view it is saddening to note that the consultant-director, Anthony Steel (who may be known to some readers as having directed the well-established Adelaide Arts Festival) did not see fit to incorporate some kind of a Writers' Week. There is enough going in this respect to make such an event practical as well as interesting. There were some dramatic works put on - and we might here mention *The Samseng and the Chettiar's Daughter* which was based on *The Beggars Opera* - but more could have been done by way of forums, discussions, workshops. Perhaps the next time round the organisers will bear writers in mind?

Other usual literary activities such as those organised by the University's Literary Society, the Society of Singapore Writers, the National Library, the National Book Development Council, continued as normal, but without any great impact. Maybe what is lacking is a concerted effort to pull resources together to ensure that literature does not suffer the ignominious fate of undue neglect.