

EDITORIAL: “Space and Spatiality”

The analysis of space and spatial representation is now widely regarded as indispensable to contemporary work in literary studies, cultural studies, postcolonial criticism, environmental humanities, and digital humanities, among others. Spatial literary studies, associated with the “spatial turn” in the humanities and social sciences, has proven to be a most exciting and dynamic area of research in recent years, with its transformative impact reflected across a wide range of disciplines. Through its emphasis on matters of space, place, and spatial relations, and drawing upon diverse critical and theoretical traditions, spatially oriented criticism is increasingly interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in practice, and has made productive connections to “architecture, geography, history, politics, social theory, and urban studies, among other fields” (Tally 2). Likewise, Elizabeth F. Evans notes that such “cross-pollination of fields”, based on foundational work by anthropologists, cultural geographers, philosophers, sociologists, and urbanists has enriched and expanded our understanding and appreciation of how “the production and experience of space is intertwined with the production and circulation of power” (2-4). Within postcolonial studies in particular, the critical attention to space and spatiality has broadened the field from a primary focus on colonial history and national independence to considerations of mobility, transnationalism, environmental belonging, and the politics of place, providing novel and interventional approaches to the interpretation of colonialism, identity, migration, and resistance. Such literary and critical terrain is of course well-known to the readers and contributors of *SARE*, and issue 63.1 reflects the journal’s continued commitment to exploring and deliberating anew upon these topics.

The first issue of 2026 opens with an article that examines how identity is shaped through spatial experience and the movement between places. In “Ambivalent Filiation:

Cultural and Representational Mediation of Imperial Japan in *The Samurai's Garden*", Ludan Hu and Eugene Chua examine Gail Tsukiyama's 1994 novel through its ambivalent portrayal of wartime Japan, staged through the experiences of the young Chinese protagonist, Stephen. In foregrounding Stephen's "affective attachment" and orientalist mediation of a culturally refined and civilian Japan, rendered through the idealised, pastoral space of the Japanese garden as aesthetic refuge, his character serves as a means through which Japan as an imperial nation is approached and viewed. Nonetheless, despite the cross-cultural friendships forged in Tarumi, Stephen's personal and cultural affiliation for Japan proves untenable, compromised as it is by his outsider status and the political realities of the violence of war. As an example of a Japanese American return narrative, the novel demonstrates the complexities involved in navigating such a fraught history.

Kristiawan Indriyanto and Nova Mawar Hutabarat's article, "Econarratology and the Outsider/Insider Dynamic in Jajang Agus Sonjaya's *Manusia Langit*" further explores the mediating gaze of the outsider through the focus on Javanese archaeology lecturer Mahendra and his role in the production and representation of Nias Indigenous epistemology. Their study interrogates the dominance of Javanese-centered frameworks, which are reproduced not only through colonial and state policy but also through processes that "marginalize non-Javanese voices and render outer-island epistemologies peripheral to national discourse" (25). Through econarratological analysis, they argue that *Manusia Langit* uses first-person narration through the liminal figure of Mahendra as a Javanese outsider to reproduce, and then progressively dismantle, the centre-periphery epistemological hierarchy it thematically critiques. Econarratology thus functions as "the formal mechanism through which place attachment is built in fiction", transforming abstract space into affective place. In doing so, their analysis demonstrates how "respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge demands formal self-awareness about the

mediating gaze through which that knowledge reaches readers” (44).

A similar concern with amplifying peripheral voices and experiences is seen in Ishita Mehta and Smita Jha’s article, “Subaltern Ghosts and the Spectral City: Marginalisation and Neoliberalism in Deepa Anappara’s *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*.” Through the focus on nine-year-old Jai who attempts to unravel the mystery of the missing children of his neighbourhood, Mehta and Jha’s analysis of the novel exposes the lived realities of the basti residents as members of the urban precariat in the unnamed South Asian global city, materialised through various forms of spatial apartheid — infrastructural inequalities, alienated workers, and environmental degradation. By emphasizing the role of the basti as a site of “spectropolitics” but also a site of resistance and contestation that opposes the spectrality imposed on the subaltern classes by the neoliberal nation-state, their study highlights the role of space as an active force that shapes identities, social relations, political power, and cultural meaning.

Ritam Sarkar and Somdatta Bhattacharya’s article, “Mapping Urban Informality and Splintering Infrastructure of Bengaluru in Simon Lamouret’s *The Alcazar*” further explores how urban environments can reveal systems of domination through their analysis of a graphic novel that traces the lives of migrant workers at a construction site in Bengaluru. Like Mehta and Jha’s reading of Anappara’s novel, Sarkar and Bhattacharya’s analysis of Lamouret’s visual depiction of the informal and splintering spatial infrastructure of the city foregrounds the tensions between “visibility and invisibility, growth and exclusion” (73) in the everyday experiences of Bengaluru’s migrant workers. Their study not only reveals the impacts of unequal spatial geographies and urban inequalities on marginalised and disenfranchised communities but also demonstrates the power of graphic narratives in critically engaging with and visualising urban realities.

In the final article of this issue, “Archival Anxiety and the Politics of Memory: A Decolonial Reading of Nadeem Aslam’s *Season of the Rainbirds*”, Mubashar Altaf and Huma Batool draw on Mbembe’s theorisation of the archive as a product of power, exclusion, and epistemic violence, and examine how postcolonial state institutions manipulate memory and suppress dissent through archival and bureaucratic practices. In situating the recovered letters (and by implication, Aslam’s novel) as a counter-archive, Altaf and Batool argue for the power of literature in disrupting “the stability, authority and exclusivity of official or dominant systems of memory control or of officially approved histories”, and possessing the capacity to “reactivate suppressed histories and generate alternative forms of knowledge” (122). Like Anappara’s basti and Lamouret’s construction site, the archive itself functions as a contested site of power and resistance with emancipatory potential.

Our interview section highlights two Malaysian voices who have contributed significantly and distinctively to our vibrant literary scene. In the first, Zainor Izat Zainal and Azalea Ahmad Kushairi speak to the author Chua Kok Yee, who deliberates on his twenty-year career as a short story writer and novelist, and more recently, academic and visual storyteller. We are also privileged to include in this issue Adib Faiz’s interview with the late actor and arts practitioner, Mano Maniam, whose passing in May 2025 is a profound loss to the theatre scene in Malaysia. In this interview which also serves as a tribute to his life’s work, Mano shared his insights regarding his experiences with Shakespeare, from his days as a student at the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS), Ipoh to his later work as a seasoned and much-respected theatre actor. I wish to take the opportunity here to express our gratitude to Mano Maniam’s family for reviewing the interview, and for kindly sharing a photograph of the late Mano to be used in this issue.

Our creative writing section features four poems. We are honoured to include in this issue the work of critically acclaimed Malaysian novelist Chuah Guat Eng, whose poem “To my doctor from China” deliberates upon the struggles of illness and aging, but is also a profound and powerful exploration of her identity as Peranakan Chinese, her relationship with her body, and her place in the world. This issue also includes the work of Mumbai-based poet Urna Bose, who has shared with us two reflective pieces: an intellectual tribute to Tagore in “Trying to Understand Tagore on Guru Purnima”, and “My First Tattoo”, which she describes as “a feminist take on adolescent anguish and misogyny”. The last poem in the section, by Malaysian poet Faith Yeo, conveys the tender relationship between a young child and a beloved grandfather in the sweetly nostalgic “Chai Tiam Ma in Taman Betek”. We conclude this issue with a book review by Tan Chwan Shiuh, who reviews *In the Mirror: New and Selected Poems of Wong Phui Nam*, Brandon Liew and Daryl Lim’s 2025 edited collection of one of the most distinctive and enduring voices in Malaysian literature.

In concluding this editorial, I wish to express my deep appreciation to all our peer reviewers, both local and international, who have, as always, supported *SARE* by taking the time and effort to evaluate manuscripts and share their expertise with our contributors. I would also like to thank Malaysian artist, Tajuddin Ismail, for sharing his artwork titled “Earthscape (Terrain II)”, which graces the cover of this issue and which aligns so beautifully and aptly with our focus on space and spatiality. I am also grateful for the diligence and cooperation shown by the members of our editorial team, as they worked tirelessly to put this issue out on time. Finally, I wish to inform all our readers and contributors that *SARE* has recently risen in its ranking as a Scopus-indexed journal, moving up from the second to the first and best quartile, as indicated in the 2026 SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SJCR). We could not have done this without all your hard work

and support. The *SARE* team is humbled by this recognition and will continue to strive to provide our readers with scholarly and creative content at the standard and quality that the journal deserves and has come to be known for. I hope you enjoy this issue, and I look forward to receiving your submissions for our next issue in December.

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Works cited

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Tally, Robert T., Jr., ed. *Spatial Literary Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Space, Geography, and the Imagination*. Routledge, 2021.