"[T]he most underrated genre": Malaysian Poetry in English in the 21st Century

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Abstract
The point of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, it will survey all the important volumes of poetry by Malaysian poets writing in English in the new millennium and try to infer the current trends of Malaysian poetic writing in English. Secondly, I will show how the online social media has been wholly responsible in keeping the poetic word alive, especially in terms of the number of young writers who have espoused the form of the Spoken Word sub-genre of poetry. In fact, the spoken word poets seem to have discovered a new poetic “nerve” of the nation that is both exciting and challenging to read.

Keywords
21st century Malaysian poetry, Malaysian literature, spoken word, poetic trends, postcolonial poetry, world literature

The final decade of the twentieth century as well as the few years leading up to it proved to be the most fertile period in terms of the number of poetry publications that appeared from Malaysian poets writing in English. As soon as Wong Phui Nam ended his literary silence with the publication of Remembering Grandma and Other Rumours (1989) in Singapore and his first volume of collected verse Ways of Exile: Poems from the First Decade (1993) published by the now-defunct Skoob Books in London, the Malaysian poetry scene in English underwent a new surge in interest. This was evident, in spite of Grace Chin calling the local poetry scene of this period “the most underrated genre” (273), in the various national poetry writing competitions as well as the outpouring of published verse in creative writing anthologies and full-fledged volumes (the appearance of chapbooks in Malaysia was only evident in the following decade). With the arrival of the new millennium, English poetry in Malaysia continued to be bravely at the forefront, constantly trying to discover new and rich textures in terms of style and subject

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