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Writing a “Director's Message” for this issue of The Hawker is something of an awkward exercise for me. As the new Director of the Writers’ Centre, I find myself writing an introduction to a magazine that I only started reading a few weeks ago. I don’t know that I have any special wisdom to share with you about the Writers’ Center or about Yale-NUS; I only just got a bank account and a phone number. My office is disarmingly empty and my inbox dismayingly full.

Furthermore, I’ve never seen anything quite like the Yale-NUS Writers’ Centre. This is not to say that I’m new to this kind of work. I’ve spent much of my academic career working and conducting research at “writing centers” in the US. If you are unfamiliar with the idea, the Centre’s purpose is to support all writers on campus in all the writing that they do, at any stage in that writing. For a sense of what that means, consider the range of services and events the Centre has to offer you. You could come in the early morning to take part in Larry’s creative writing space, then meet a tutor in the afternoon to get help with a befuddling PPT paper, and then attend a talk that evening by a foreign correspondent about breaking into professional journalism. Later that night, as you get started on a CSI assignment, you could download writing guides from the Resources section of our website before you drift off into the restless slumber of the overcommitted undergraduate. Many American writing centers promise a broad range of programming and support. The complex linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary diversity that characterizes this Centre, and Yale-NUS in general, delivers on that promise in ways that are probably just not possible in other settings.

This work is a group effort and I am not the only new face around here. We have seven tutors who are also new this semester, bringing our total number to an all-time high of seventeen. They bring with them a greater diversity of disciplinary writing experience and expertise than the Centre has ever enjoyed. These tutors are supported in their work by writing lecturers, Carissa, Ila, and Larry, and by programme manager and Centre mastermind, Jenika. Finally, a new Dean’s Fellow, Sankar Ananthanarayanan, joins us as the editor of this issue, the theme of which is decolonizing environmentalism.

I cannot say that I have much expertise in all the issues involved in this topic. I will leave that to the writers within these pages, whose work runs from poetry to academic writing and many points in between. One element of this theme that is familiar to me is that of resisting dominant narratives and practices that may be inappropriate or harmful if applied whole cloth in settings that have had little say in their adoption. My short time at the Writers’ Centre has been enough to convince me that it would be impossible to simply import a program of ‘best writing center practices’ from the US and expect them to work here. Writing is always situated, a complex system that can’t be broken down into a simple, universal formula. The qualities that make ours a world-class Writers’ Centre have arisen out of the conversations about writing that could only occur among you here in this place. We look forward to continuing these conversations with you in the year to come.

And now, please enjoy this issue of The Hawker!

“Writing is always situated, a complex system that can’t be broken down into a simple, universal formula.”

The Director’s son contemplates environmentalism and the nature of writing as a complex system.

– Asst Prof. Tait Bergstrom, Director
"To unblock my flow, I hop around campus. If I start writing in the library after breakfast, I may then move to foodclique and then the common lounge and then to my room and then back to the library. Perhaps the movement from place to place helps me think."

"I look up to the writings of Paul Kalanithi (When Breath Becomes Air) and Victoria Sweet (God’s Hotel). I admire the way their prose weaves the historical past and present into one cogent whole."

"I love to write at the Elm buttery patio. Especially in the morning when no one is there. The soft chirping and the slight scent of dew is so comforting."

"I have a particular fondness for the aphorism. I took a class on German Romanticism on my semester abroad. I really grew to see how aphorisms could be tremendously productive in terms of idea generation, literary confidence, as well as a willingness to take risks."
"When I feel like I need to overcome writer's block, coffee usually does the trick. But a little bit of whiskey never hurt either."

Cai Lize, Class of 2022

"My favourite place on campus to write is my room. Sorry that's not very interesting HAHAHA!"

Esther Koh, Class of 2022

"I think I really enjoyed taking Permeable Boundaries: Music and Cultural Encounter by Sarah Weiss. It was an amazing primer to ethnomusicology!"

Dianne Araral, Class of 2020

"When I'm stuck on writing, I walk to Cheers and get instant noodles. Not sure if it's the food or the walk that does it, but I'm not complaining."

Steven Sy, Class of 2022

"Tom King writes poetry that happens to be in the form of comic books. His work on Mister Miracle and Batman are beautiful!"

Scott Lee Chua, Class of 2020

"I love singing, red lipstick, and cooking."

Anthea Chua, Class of 2020
"My favorite class at YNC was... Philosophy and Political Thought 1 with Bryan van Norden."

Prayog Bhattarai, Class of 2022

"When I'm trying to beat writer's block, I don't really have a specific food I eat but I do binge watch cooking videos to help me get over it."

Chrystal Ho, Class of 2019 (+0.5)

"Is it a cop-out answer to say that I look up to all writers by virtue of the sheer difficulty of their craft?! It’s true, though!"

Shani Samtani, Class of 2021

I enjoy (as much as one can enjoy) writing academic papers, but I've become interested recently in writing about short stories and films!

Farheem Asim, Class of 2020

"Unfortunately, I find that I have to disappear to my room to write, like a hermit crab, but I find joy in cups of kopi o kosong peng from foodclique!"

Kan Ren Jie, Class of 2020

"I deep dive into Spotify or Youtube to find new music to listen to. Otherwise, if I get into a show or a book, I'll spend all my free time on that until I finish it!"

Morgane Ropion (Dasha), Class of 2022
‘So you know I saved up for a menstrual cup and finally ordered it for $35—’

‘Oh ya I have that too, and not bad, I bought mine with a business that sends one to some rural village for every cup you purchase. Have you used it yet?’

‘Ya, I wish la. It came in the mail and my mother picked it up and threw it out. I cannot take it already.’

‘Huh, what happened?!’

‘When I came home the day it got delivered she asked me what the hell it was, and I tried to explain how using pads and tampons weren’t the best option for the environment or the most convenient.’

‘Ya it’s true what, menstrual cups are like so useful and can last for like what, 15 years?’

‘My mum just didn’t get it lor. She just freaked out when I said that the cup was supposed to go inside me, and she said it is so inappropriate and unbecoming for a girl to have something inside our bodies like that, what if it causes medical complications, and even insinuated that boys would think it unnatural or makes you... less than a good girl.’

‘Oh my goodness I hate it when that happens. Like what the hell. Then what happened?’

‘Then I tried explaining it to her very calmly— about how it doesn’t mean any of those things and that it's medical grade silicone... And she just shouted at me even more and threw it down the rubbish chute.’

‘Holy shit.’

‘Ya. I spent a while saving up for it, and now I can only afford pads and tampons, you know? And it just makes me feel really shitty about myself, knowing that the money and waste adds up over time.’

‘Yeah, like saving up $35 is alright for us, but if someone else somewhere had to pay $5 for pads and tampons every month and that was stretching the money they had already, it just means they probably can’t make that one-time purchase that could last 15 years.’

‘But also I don’t know how to talk to my mum about these things anymore lor. You know? Like all her life she has been doing things a certain way and every time I try to explain something unfamiliar to her she just says she's lived longer than me and just refuses to listen. But I also don’t want to hide things from her, you know?’
‘Except the fact that you are on like contraception? Hahaha.’

‘Oi don’t you dare mention it in front of her ok. That one also very expensive hor.’

‘I thought you can just be on the pill continuously and not get your period? Then you don’t even have to worry about any sanitary product. I saw some article saying that it has no like, bad effects on your body, even though people in the past just wanted it to dunno what, make women feel safer about themselves.’

‘Aiya, I don’t know lah. I get scared when I don’t get a break, and I know I sound like my mother but I think there are too many chemicals going into my body. I know that it should be ok lah... But, just to be safe, I listen to doctor lor.’

‘Hahaha I guess it adds up too, if you continuously take the pill without that one week pill break— it becomes like... An extra pack of pills to pay for every 4 months. So many things to worry about, hor?’

‘Aiya, how to solve everything at once? I think I go save up for another menstrual cup first lah. Then try to think about other things. No bubble tea later ok? Must save up.’

‘LOL, ok lor, I buy for you la.’

‘Why not you buy menstrual cup for me instead?’

‘Eh $35 a bit steep la.’
It’s no secret that anthropogenic climate change is real – we have been expediting global warming and altering stable ecological systems through human action, and we are going to suffer for it. Climate change will threaten all aspects of our lives: food security, public health, housing, transportation – the list could go on. Our lives will inevitably be coloured by the unpredictability and instability caused by it.

Yet, how much each individual is personally affected by the effects of the climate crisis is unique. Studies have shown that women, particularly of lower socioeconomic classes, are more vulnerable to natural disasters and their aftermaths [1]. In April 2019, UNICEF declared that floods, cyclones and other climate change-linked environmental disasters threatened “the lives and futures of more than 19 million children in Bangladesh.” [2] These children, born into a world degenerated by destructive human activity, will struggle to remain fed, clothed and sheltered because of activities propagated by the generations that preceded them. The mass deforestation of the Amazon forest, which sits on reserved indigenous land, is just one example showing how climate change is tied to the violation and exploitation of indigenous people and their land [3]. Minorities and marginalised communities are disproportionately affected by the effects of the climate crisis, with their development “set back by decades” [4] due to climate change.

Meanwhile, those in higher socioeconomic classes are able to pay, literally and metaphorically, to shield themselves from the effects of climate change. This comes in the form of complacency, inaction and ineffective mitigative action. Large corporations evade adopting environmentally-conscious policies. They cite cost as a factor, and often wait for better, cheaper technologies and more convenient systems to come by before taking action. This is a privilege enjoyed by a sheltered few. Actions taken to mitigate climate change in developed countries are also at times, just acts of self-preservation. They don’t seek to improve the situation equitably for the world, but rather protect themselves from their own impacts. For instance, the dumping of Canadian garbage in the Philippines reflects the willingness of developed nations to push their problems (and their trash), to less developed nations.

The world contains finite resources that are shared by all who inhabit it. Thus, we fall victim to the tragedy of the commons – where a shared resource tends to be rapidly depleted because no single actor considers how their actions affect other users [5]. In other words, we continue our destructive actions against the climate, for we will never feel the full consequences of this destruction. This unchecked exploitation of our resources also takes place at different rates depending on the wealth that countries are endowed with. Studies have shown that climate change has already exacerbated global economic inequality [6]. Less developed nations are more affected by climate change as opposed to developed nations, though they contribute less to global carbon emissions.

Closer to home, Singapore faces the consequences of climate change. Frequent dry spells, rising sea levels, higher temperatures and flash floods are just some of the effects that we confront. Even so, it is nothing as disastrous as the droughts in India which deprive countless people of potable water [7], or Hurricanes Florence and Michael, which caused billions of dollars of damage [8] for the United States, the Caribbean and parts of central America. No matter where we live, we are reminded of our warming earth and have been told that we must brace ourselves for the struggles ahead.

Singapore’s contribution to global carbon emissions, though deemed to be minuscule [9], does not exempt us from being a culprit of destruction. We cannot ignore Singapore’s role as the enabling friend. As “one of the world’s top five oil trading and refining hubs” [10] and a key financial hub in Asia, we empower other countries
and corporations to engage in destructive activities and contribute to global carbon emissions. We hide behind our small size to shirk responsibility, allowing ourselves to be content in our inaction.

The narratives Singaporeans construct around climate action are guided by privilege. The Singaporean government wants to tackle climate change by constructing better infrastructure, funding research for technologies that reverse climate change, giving energy efficiency awards to corporations, building elevation and employing smart design to protect Singapore’s buildings from rising sea levels. The technocrat in us values innovation and production to solve problems, while the Asian in us craves validation and awards to incentivise action. These solutions, however, are time and labour intensive – time and labour that this world cannot afford. Our climate action is insufficient, given the scale and urgency of the problem.

Furthermore, we must reflect upon how much development takes place on this island. We build drains and building elevations on the backs of foreign labour – people whose communities are the most affected by climate change. In particular, Bangladeshi communities face extensive destruction of their homes due to the disruption of normal rain patterns. As such they are experiencing climate-driven displacement [11]. The cruel irony is that it is predominantly individuals from these communities that leave their homes to drive our development and protection from climate change, only for us to twist the knife in their wounds. Our actions and contributions to greenhouse gases and pollution will affect them and their families much more than they will affect us and yet, they "help" us Singaporeans comfortably remain in our bubble and ignore the debilitating effects of climate change on other communities. We remain under the illusion that we are able to spend time solely on mitigative action and research, for we remain sheltered as a nation – a shelter that we have created for ourselves in the shape of air-conditioned malls, stable buildings and efficient public transportation. Singapore still operates business-as-usual regardless of climate conditions.

Ultimately, mitigative “solutions” drive growth rather than climate action, for they do not truly address the root cause of climate change – over-consumption. The constant preparation and development these actions employ adds to our GDP and keeps us tied to the satisfaction that we derive from the growth we create. They are merely steps towards climate destruction, masquerading as less insidious forms of self-preservationist climate action. In this way, we fortify and trap ourselves within the very system that has broken the Earth that we are trying to save.

We need to take a good look at the impact of our climate actions with a more holistic lens, instead of the individualistic one we’ve been viewing it through. Only then will we be able to see the urgency of climate change and come up with dynamic, equitable solutions, rather than one-dimensional self-preservationist ones. We need to reexamine what values our society holds dear and why. Money? Power? Comfort? Convenience? Where does that leave compassion, progress and justice? Can we holistically consider the situation the world is in and how we got here?

Having considered these issues, how do we as Singaporean residents, fortunate enough to be endowed with substantial wealth and resilient systems, take responsibility for our impact? A combination of individual action and pushing for collective change is imperative. Many belittle the power of small actions like using your own bag or straw, but these individual actions help turn the tide on the norms of our community. Show up for or contribute to conversations about the climate and be vocal about its effects on those of marginalised communities. Organisations like Climate Conversations allow us to create spaces to have discussions about systemic change so that you too can advocate for climate justice. When we hold space for inclusive conversation and voice stories that matter, we are able to use our privilege to develop meaningful solutions for all.

REFERENCES

MANAGING VS CARING
CASE-STUDIES OF THE SINGAPORE BOTANICAL GARDENS AND EDIBLE GARDEN CITY

– Andreia Ko, Class of 2020
From a “Garden City” to a “City in a Garden” [1], Singapore’s urban landscape teems with greenery: a key feature of this city. The irony that Singaporeans fail to realize is that the constructed garden city we take pride in is a heritage created by colonial powers. As an act of resistance and agency, urban farmers like those at Edible Garden City (EGC) are challenging the idea of colonial gardens such as the infamous Singapore Botanical Gardens (SBG).

The term ‘garden’ as it is used today in Singapore can trace its roots to a western culture of power: British colonial ideologies inculcated into the Singaporean psyche since pre-independence. The SBG was established in 1859, intended to be repurposed as an ornamental garden after being used for growing experimental cash crops. The visual aesthetic behind the SBG was inspired by an “English landscape” [2], an idealized form of nature that represented “productivity and progress” [2]. This romanticized a cultivated landscape, a version of the natural environment that was tamed and visually pretty. The SBG was also intended to be an educational garden for botanical and zoological research. These understandings of botany and zoology were “metaphors of control and power” [2] from the west, linked to the imperial rule of science. Under this network of scientific intervention, the SBG was a fertile business enterprise for rubber and oil palm – sources of revenue. Hence, the SBG was also a garden that reaped economic benefits. Shaping Nature to human standards revolved around objectifying it as a commodity to be exploited. In short, the SBG reflected the traditional British mindset - a colonial legacy that sought to exert its unwarranted power over the natural environment in Southeast Asia and Singapore.

THE PHYSICAL ACT OF PLANTING EDIBLES
Today, social enterprise gardens such as Edible Garden City, exert their agency by challenging Singaporean governmental and British colonial ideas of ornamental gardens. EGC nurtures plants through the physical act of gardening to serve a functional purpose – to feed people. The garden is not solely for aesthetic purposes. The idea of growing edible plants for human consumption may still seem anthropocentric. However, it reminds us that humans are a part of Nature, and are reliant on plants for food. Gardens and humans are seen to be in an interdependent...
relationship [3], instead of humans being the dominant power. Encouraging people to adopt a hands-on approach to gardening also creates an attachment between humans and plants; it takes time and painstaking energy to water and nurture the garden regularly - "a labour of love" [4]. This is in contrast with non-edible plants and trees that are planted around the city, to avoid dirtying the clean pavements with fallen fruits [5].

COMMUNITY GARDENING

Unlike the SBG, EGC invites people to partake in their gardening efforts to create a self-sustainable [6] social garden. EGC makes use of under-utilized places, and hires people with special needs to work with them in their "collaborative space" [6]. This act of bringing the garden to the community and the community into the garden, contrasts with the norm of the Singaporean government having total power and control over managing the natural landscape. The fact that EGC grows their own edibles highlights their independence and agency in food-sourcing, being unreliant on other countries for food imports. As such, their ability to grow and harvest their own food is an exertion of their autonomy against the government’s standards of depending on imported food. This movement of citizens into gardens is reminiscent of a time before Singapore was developed, when “kampung spirit” [7] was commonplace. Kampung spirit refers to a strong sense of community and social cohesion. This may have been lost when the government moved people from tight-knit kampungs into isolated units in HDB blocks. As such, EGC also asserts their independence by resisting the idea of colonialism, instilling a sense of heritage and promoting that long-lost kampung spirit. Maintaining the mere land obtained to grow and harvest food is an act of agency, since the government’s strict control over the land and greenery prevents people from engaging with it in the first place.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE VS SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

The urban farmers who work at EGC have a local knowledge that they spread, along with the values of environmental stewardship to Singaporean citizens. As the founder of EGC, Bjorn Low states, “With nature, you fall into the cycle of life. It takes time to grow something. You feel connected to it.” [8] These gardens require close interactions grounded in respect [9] and grow with increasing sensitivity as people spend more time with the plants. This perpetual reminder of the “cycle of life” is reinforced in these social enterprise gardens, as people keep in touch with the realities of life (including death). At the SBG, the quick eradication of fruit-rots or wilting petals removes the evidence of death from that environment, painting a false picture of the reality of life [10]. In contrast, EGC adopts a closed-loop agriculture system [6], minimizing food waste and reusing dead plant parts. This is done by composting the dead plants to use as fertilizer for other growing plants. This creates an “ecological intimacy” [8] and a holistic understanding of the natural environment that does not hinge on a scientific appreciation of botany. This knowledge is an “expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their lands” [11], an all-encompassing epistemology that increases interactive awareness and sensitivity towards the natural environment. This knowledge, unlike scientific knowledge (a mark of enlightenment and scientific curiosity), is one that allows people to “learn to be affected” [3] by the natural environment. This act of returning agency to the natural environment presents an encouraging outlook for Singapore, as it subverts conventional norms of the power hierarchy and discourse, where humans tower over the natural environment.

How do Singaporeans relate to the vast greenery around them? Does it leave its residents welling up with pride, or feeling unsure if the land is truly theirs to own? From the Kew Gardens, to Singapore’s very own curated floral setup, traces of British colonialism linger on throughout the world. But as this City in a Garden emerges from its golden jubilee into new decades of redefinition and identity-building, the onus is on all strata of Singaporean society to decide for themselves how they make a space for their own, of their own.

This essay was written as part of Andrea’s Capstone Project.

REFERENCES

I stepped into Prof Stuart Strange’s office to have a chat with him. I was immediately struck by how interesting it looked. There were pictures of crocodiles and monkeys and books with intriguing titles. I also spied a picture of him photoshopped as Dr Strange stuck to the doorframe. It was exciting! Without wasting any time, we sat down and began the interview.

Thanks for meeting with me. Let’s get this interview started. Could you tell me a bit more about yourself and your interests.

Sure! I’m a socio-cultural anthropologist. I was originally from Virginia, right outside of Washington DC. I did my PhD at the University of Michigan. My previous work was a book manuscript about race, spirit possession and self-knowledge in a small country in Northern South America called Suriname. Since the beginning of the year I’ve been working very actively on a new project about ideas of environmental control in Singapore. More specifically, I’m examining people’s relations with monkeys and their ritual interactions with them in a spiritual sense. I want to use that to understand the limits of environmental impact, control and policy making in this context.

I got interested in the environment in a very roundabout way. I started as an anthropologist of communication and race – classical anthropological themes. But when I worked in Suriname, I found myself constantly thinking of the mass genocide of native people and their replacement by enslaved workers from Africa. I was also thinking of the origins of this global plantation system which started with radical ecological simplification. You know, you go to a landscape, chop everything down and replace it with a crop. All this was done with workers who were denied any rights. And so I’m interested in the connection between environmental and social exploitation.

What’s interesting to you about Singapore?

Singapore is the regional financial hub of Southeast Asia. Getting here involved a history of ecological exploitation. When it was ceded to the British in 1819, Singapore became a free port. It was also a trading hub for predominantly Teochew planters. They introduced these gambier-pepper plantation complexes. Malay rulers gave grants to use the land for these plantations. When the free port was opened, Singapore had already been almost totally cleared for these gambier-pepper plantations. It became a site of regional trade that allowed Chinese bosses, Kongsi Chinese trading companies and Malay rulers to take advantage of the trans-national reach of British colonial powers. So, Singapore’s forests were totally cut down by cheap Chinese labour. Environmental exploitation in Singapore is almost always coupled with human exploitation.

In the modern age, these patterns still exist, but they’ve been financialized. Singapore sends out large amounts of capital to reproduce this exploitation elsewhere. The logic hasn’t changed. Who does the work here? For the most part, labourers from South Asia and Mainland China. The current capitalistic system depends on exploitation and is fixated on disguising it. When the haze comes along, we rarely have discussions about how Singaporean companies are often the ones funding the palm oil. The logic of Singapore is that “you don’t have to think about it”. We’re tricked into living this ideal consumerist life without actually understanding the social and ecological impact of it.

So what does colonialism mean to you in the context of environmentalism?

We take some forms of exploitation for granted – as natural. This is really the logic behind both colonialism and imperialism. When people think about history, they think that the fundamental structures of colonialism were inevitable. There’s no argument that Colonialism is a human catastrophe. But it’s not inevitable. The Europeans didn’t have to come to America. They didn’t have to enslave people in Africa. Those were intentional, often politically motivated decisions. They resulted from an increasing dependence on a very predatory system.

But it’s now become the logic of developmentalism. There’s a hypocrisy in that logic. “It’s for the good of the Bangladeshi workers that we pay them minimal wages in inhumane conditions, because it develops Singapore.” We have become a model for developmentalism, and we’re exporting it freely. Environmentally, this is a problem. All our logic has been about controlling the land and society. We’re constantly bringing in a circulation of poorly paid migrant labour to control the environment. So really, what we’re exporting is environmental and social exploitation.
Singaporeans are alienated from natural environments. We derive so much of our GDP from refining and redistributing natural resources from other countries: oil from Brunei, timber from Malaysia, palm oil from Indonesia. Singapore is either invested directly in those activities, or provides infrastructure to transform these resources into global commodities.

**Where do the monkeys fit into all of this?**

I spent a lot of time looking at how Singaporeans deal with monkeys. There’s not a lot of them here, but they’re always painted as a nuisance species. They have no economic value and sit outside the logic of the developmentalist state. We’ve never really figured out how to control the monkeys. That’s so interesting! At first they were culling them. Now they’ve moved to a no-cull policy. They’re a native species living in the heart of the island. They represent the forest as it existed prior to development. Yet, they constantly gum up all the fundamental assumptions of control and social engineering, the ability to freely and effortlessly manage nature.

They’re part of my research about Chinese spirit mediums of the Monkey God. They all perform this mischievous Monkey God from Journey to the West: a character of unruly animality. Many of these mediums talk about having a closer relationship with the monkeys. Many admit to at least wanting to feed them, which National Parks Board emphatically discourages. I’m interested in seeing the basic limits of these ideas of control and management. How in everyday instances, dealing with a different species, we have so little control.

**Minorities and indigenous groups are often devalued in environmental narratives. Look at what’s happening in the Brazilian Amazon.**

Oh what’s happening in Brazil right now is... it’s a travesty. I don’t even have words to express it.

**Do you think these are these isolated incidents? Or is it part of a larger global trend?**

Yes, it’s a global trend. The theorist Cedric Robinson says race is inevitable in the forms of capitalism that exist today. You need to create supposedly natural differences between people to “justify” profitable exploitation. He laid out these ideas in his book, *Black Marxism*. Global white supremacy is worked out in two fronts. First is the elimination of indigenous people. In America, the genocide of Native Americans allowed Europeans to expand and profit. The second front is transforming them into cheap labour, which is used to exploit the environment for capital profit. Progress was seen as the transformation of natural resources into something that looks like European wealth or society.

Many people accept the premises of white supremacy without accepting white supremacy itself. They accept these presumptions that there is such a thing as natural superiority and embrace developmentalism. Even in throwing off those shackles of colonialism, you end up reproducing the logic of it. “We have to do this. We have to measure ourselves against this ideal which is always white and European.”

The same thing is happening in Brazil. White land holders are killing indigenous people, engaging in cultural genocide, destroying one of the most important natural resources in the world to impose a plantation economy. When they get challenged on it, they say they’re resisting colonialism. The irony is profound! Brazil is actually the second largest Black nation in the world (by proportion). Despite that, the current president Bolsonaro panders to White Supremacy. The conspiracy theorists and evangelical movements that support him actively attack Afro-Brazilian ritual practices. They’re openly racist against Black Brazilians.

When we talk about environmental exploitation, we need to take a step back and see how it’s connected within this wider history of imperialism and the proliferation of white supremacy. There is really no way to look at environmental exploitation without looking at its broader history and considering the normalization of exploitation as the necessary aim of human endeavor. There are very serious reasons to be deeply concerned about the future. Anthropology teaches you it doesn’t have to be that way. But we need to confront these realities and make change. Be willing to embrace that. Stop the political machine that depends on environmental exploitation.

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-Sankar A, Dean’s Fellow

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Hear nothing but the crickets cackle to the drum drum drumming blood pounding in your ears. Plant right foot before left foot before prickly shrub, loose rock, unpacked soil. With a sharp crunch the low hanging branch releases a green musk that mixes with the lingering scent of smoky barbecue: your favorite type of forest fire. Beneath the charred exterior is a still moist, still tender center. A perfect sear. Never mind the freshly torched soil that finds its way into your shoes. As the stray hands brush against crumbly bark let the baptism of soot christen the fire-expelled pine seeds, children of the skeletons that claw against your skin: sacrifices must be made for the forest to come to life again. Keep watching for the powdery green needles that will soon poke their heads out. Already the orphans crowd at your ankles. Soon they too must rustle to the cackling of crickets. Again the forest will burn, crunch and crackle: again the crickets will herald another parent’s sacrifice.

- Chrystal Ho, Peer Tutor
FROM THE NIGHTSTAND of Sankar A, Dean’s Fellow

SOMETHING TO READ
Liking What You See: A Documentary by Ted Chiang

Ted Chiang is a genius. He imagines a surgical procedure (called calliagnosia, or just calli) which removes your ability to appreciate human beauty. The documentary-style short story largely follows Tamara Lyons, a university freshman who has lived her entire life with calli. As she joins the university, Tamara turns off the calli, allowing her to perceive human beauty for the first time in her life. In the backdrop of all this, a school-wide debate about whether to make the procedure compulsory for everyone ensues. Chiang combines comprehensive world-building, an exciting documentary transcript format and a wonderfully creative premise to bring a truly thought-provoking narrative. This story made me question my inherent prejudices that affect my judgement on a daily basis. Should we remove these biases? Would we lose our humanity in doing so?

SOMETHING TO LISTEN TO
Life and Death in Singapore by 99% Invisible, Roman Mars
https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/singapore/

I’ve always been an avid listener of 99% Invisible. Ever since I watched Roman Mars’ TED Talk about terribly designed flags, I’ve been hooked. I enjoy listening to his deep but gentle voice as I fall asleep. So, one night, as I was scrolling through the episode list, I was surprised to see an episode titled “Life and Death in Singapore”. Intrigued, I clicked it and listened! The episode talks about the historic Peck San Theng Chinese cemetery. After Singapore’s independence, the nation entered a period of rapid development, where anything that didn’t serve a purpose was replaced with something that did. With millions of people to rehouse in tightly spaced government housing, there was little room for sentiment. Graves in Peck San Theng were exhumed and rehomed. What used to be a sprawling cemetery and kampung was transformed into a modern urban estate for millions – Bishan. Listening to this episode, I was reminded of Singaporean playwright Kuo Pao Kun’s classic The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole, where the protagonist had to beg and plead with a government official to let his grandfather be buried in a slightly larger grave. There is so little space given for heritage, nature, and memories in our rapidly expanding urban sprawl. Maybe it’s time to reassess.

SOMETHING TO WATCH
Andhadhun by Sriram Raghavan

Watch this movie. Don’t watch the trailer. Don’t even Google it. After all, the internet is dark and full of spoilers... This Hindi black-comedy thriller came out in 2018. It follows a pianist named Akash through a journey of mystery, crime and suspense and— I’ve already said too much! Watch this movie!
Dear Larry...

We collected some of your best questions and posed them to Lawrence Ypil, our resident poet and writing lecturer. Historically, this has been an advice column for aspiring writers. But as you’ll see, Larry always has wise words for any occasion.

Where in my room should I place my cactus?

Sharp things that don’t need moisture are tricky things to think about. By the window of sunlight. Under the porcelain of sink. Is it safe to say that under no circumstances must one place that perilous sharpness where it might scrape the flawless elbow unaware? My mother liked to talk about plants, but not once touched them. My father touched them all the time, but on the prickly subject of the cactus there was for obvious reasons a limit. So he put them as in tower against the post, where they served like the soft reminder of danger, especially to the kids who would run around the house. No kids run around the house anymore. But the cacti are still there. The way they were in the picture of my brother which I stared at in the album when I was four because I was afraid I would forget his face. I do not remember his face now. You put a cactus where it can be remembered. Under the sunlight so it shines.

I find it hard to write poetry without sounding pretentious. How do you write poetry that comes from the heart?

You cut things short. Or you let things slide. Or you pretend, as the poets of old suggest, that the pentameter is the natural length of the human breath, so you start measuring when you need to catch it and then you count backwards. Ta-dum. Ta-dum. Ta-dum. But that is the lungs and not the heart. The heart might say Lub-dub lub-dub lub-dub. I asked a poet once why her lines were always short and she said, "That’s because as a child I was asthmatic." I was a medical student once, not a very good one, but what I did know how to do was to use a stethoscope to listen to the heart. You could hear it on your chest. You could hear it from the back. You could hear it as far as it was able to reverberate on the body. In babies, they beat faster. In patients about to die, they could slow down. In order to practice, you sometimes listened to your own heart. You take your temperature. You measure your pulse. You hear your breath: in and out and in. You hold it. You listen to yourself. You write.
At what point do you say, “Ok that’s enough!”?

There is an art curator I know, a true caretaker of artists, who reveals that her true talent is helping artists let go of their work. Some artists, she says, cling to their work down to the very last minute before an exhibit opening. Others need to be coaxed, slowly, gently, their beloved sculptures, paintings, texts, as if they were that tender litter of kittens set off into the harsh cold world of the real. In certain complicated cases, the artist sometimes needs to reach a point where he oddly begins to be irritated by his own work, to not be able to stand its very presence, and it will seem like that textbook case of a stroke where by a fit of circuitry the left hand of a patient begins to seem like the hand of someone else, the beloved painting, sculpture, text, begins to feel like the handiwork of a stranger, which means it is, perhaps, ready for the rest of the world. My art curator friend says sometimes it is the only way to wrest the beloved work from its creator, to precipitate this vile and fabricated moment of self-derision, otherwise there is this only the long and endless clinging in the dark of night to “it could be better”, or worse “it must be best.”

Although I have to say, sometimes, all one needs is a tight deadline, a threat of permanent expulsion from the annals of eternity, and a nice pint of ice cream as reward— rum raisin, salted caramel, anything that your heart desires. You know?

And now, a message from Larry about Begin the Days...

This year at the Writers’ Centre, we continue Begin the Days. This is an open writing space, happening every other Thursday, at the wee hours of 8AM in the morning. Student writers gather to explore their writing practice and share ongoing work. It’s open to all forms of writing including journalism, investigative reporting, dramatic monologues, fantasy fiction, and poetry. Email me at lawrence.ypil@yale-nus.edu.sg if you want to come join.

Also, the next issue of The Hawker is focused on humour, so email me your funny questions for this column already!
WORKSHOPS

Writing workshops for First Years
PPT - Analysis & Evaluation
10 or 14 Oct 2019
LH - Reading & Responding to Text
24 or 29 Oct 2019

RSVP at bit.ly/ync-writing-2019

READING SERIES

Featuring Yale-NUS Alumnus and writer, Hamid Roslan and acclaimed author of Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows, Balli Kaur Jaswal
17 Oct 2019 | 7:30 PM

RSVP at bit.ly/ync-reading-oct

PRESENTATION CONSULTS

Have a big speech or presentation coming up? Not sure how you'd say something in a way that makes sense?

The Writers' Centre now offers Presentation Consults! Simply make an appointment with Ananthanarayanan Sankar on the WCONLINE tutor scheduling portal.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The next issue of The Hawker will be coming out at the end of the semester. The theme of the next issue is Humour!

So if you have a funny story, a satirical take on recent events, a humorous comic strip, a dank meme or just some witty questions for Larry, send them over to sankar@yale-nus.edu.sg!