

EMBARGOED UNTIL 18 July 2022, 11am (+0800 GMT)

# SLP 2022 SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED

# Edwin Thumboo to Receive SBC Achievement Award



SINGAPORE, 18 July 2022 – A total of <u>49 works have been shortlisted</u> for Singapore's top literary award, the much-anticipated biennial Singapore Literature Prize (SLP). The awards ceremony will be held at Victoria Theatre, and open to the public, <u>on 25</u> <u>August 2022 at 8pm</u>. Emeritus Professor and literary pioneer Edwin Thumboo will be presented with the SBC Achievement Award at the awards ceremony.

The <u>49 works</u> are <u>shortlisted</u> in 12 categories, across the three genres of Poetry, Fiction and Creative Nonfiction and four languages of Chinese, English, Malay and Tamil. A total of 43 writers will vie for the top award in the categories, which comes with a cash prize of \$\$3,000 and a specially-commissioned trophy. More than half of the writers are shortlisted (28) for the first time, while five will contest in two or more different categories, including Clara Chow, who has been shortlisted in English Fiction, English Creative Nonfiction and in the Chinese Poetry categories, showcasing her versatility as the first writer in the history of SLP to be shortlisted in three categories across two different languages.



2022 marks 30 years since SLP was first established in 1992. The theme of this year's SLP, Resonance, pays tribute to literature's power to evoke powerful emotions and memories in readers and writers as we re-examine our relationships after the pandemic. Edwin Thumboo, who is one of Singapore's pioneer poets, will be conferred with the SBC Achievement Award at the SLP Awards Ceremony. The Cultural Medallion winner founded the Poetry Festival Singapore, where SLP 2022 shortlisted poets will be featured.

SLP 2022 also sees the return of the SLP Readers' Favourite category. The public is invited to vote online for their favourite shortlisted book in Chinese, English, Malay and Tamil. The winning writers will each receive a cash prize of \$\$1,000, with the voters standing the chance to win book vouchers.

In the poetry category, two directors of the Singapore Writers Festival, one former and one current, Yeow Kai Chai and Pooja Nansi, are vying with Mok Zining's first book *The Orchid Folios*, along with Daryl Lim Wei Jie and Jee Leong Koh. Jee Leong Koh is also shortlisted for SLP's English Fiction category for the first time, along with children's books and Young Adult (YA) fiction writer Mallika Naguran and confessional poet Cyril Wong. All the writers in the English Creative Nonfiction category are shortlisted for the first time, including Wang Gungwu, who at the age of 91, is as old as Suratman Markasan, who is shortlisted for two works in Malay Creative Nonfiction. Both nonagenarians are the oldest writers shortlisted for SLP 2022. The range of works encompass travelogues, pirates and snowfall in Singapore.

SLP 2022 received a total of 192 submissions across the various categories, with the shortlisted works covering a wide range of topics, and representing different generations of writers. The drop from 2020's 224 submissions is an indication of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the publishing industry.

Please refer to Annexes A and B for the judges' comments and full shortlist of English works.



More information about shortlisted writers, books and judges in the Chinese, Malay and Tamil categories can be downloaded <u>here</u>.

For more information, please visit <a href="https://bookcouncil.sg/awards/singapore-literature-prize">https://bookcouncil.sg/awards/singapore-literature-prize</a>. More information about the programmes and Awards Ceremony will be added to the website in the coming days.

SLP 2022 Awards Ceremony

Date: 25 August 2022, 8pm SGT

Venue: Victoria Theatre

The public can register for the ceremony <u>here</u>.

For media related enquiries, please contact:

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Annex A: SLP 2022 English categories

**Poetry** 

What the judges say:

"Careful deliberation, with keen negotiations among the judges, has distilled this year's shortlisted books from a formidable crop of entries. These five books represent an inclusive variety of formal strategies and themes. The mix includes a book-length treatment of a single ostensible subject, playfully allusive verse, hybrid prose, explorations of love and desire. All of them are dynamic and brilliant."

**Creative Nonfiction** 

What the judges say:

"The books on the shortlist for the 2022 Singapore Literature Prize in Creative Nonfiction explore a range of subjects in a variety of forms, which highlight the diversity of compelling voices who demand and reward our attention. Wang Gungwu's meditation on identity and belonging in the unfolding story of Southeast Asia, Home Is Where We Are, is at once a paeon to love and the life of the mind and a study in the destiny of nations, while Nilanjana Sengupta's idiosyncratic biography of Singapore's unofficial Poet Laureate, Edwin Thumboo, The Votive Pen, examines the ways in which his life informs his writings and vice versa. Clara Chow's brilliant literary travelogue to New Orleans, in the company of writers from around the world, offers a unique vision of an endlessly fascinating city, which seems to generate stories at every turn. Finally, Kagan Goh's heartbreaking memoir of his breakdowns, breakthroughs, and mental illness, Surviving Samsara, will both haunt and hearten readers, because he understands 'how important the arts are to [his] journey of recovery.' In short, there is something in each of these books that will speak for different experiences."

**Fiction** 

What the judges say:

"This year's exemplary shortlist represents the breadth and scope of Singapore's contemporary literary landscape. Established and emerging authors share the honour of being finalists, showing that our stories can be widely captured by the perspectives and inventive capabilities of writers at all stages of their careers. The selected titles



explore some common themes that speak to the experience of life in Singapore, such as identity, mortality, transnationalism, alienation, the meaning of art and the negotiation of spaces. Yet the works are individually unique in each author's voice and style, taking risks with language and form that remind us of the invigorating potential of fiction. All of the works on the shortlist are purposeful with form and genre, making connections between narratives in various ways. It is particularly notable that a range of publishers are represented in the shortlist as well, from major presses such as Penguin Random House to independent presses and self-publishing platforms. This diversity of platforms is a reminder of Singapore's widening publishing landscape and the exciting growth in options for authors."



Annex B: SLP 2022 Shortlists (English categories)

Category: English Poetry

**Author** 

No.

# Daryl Lim Wei Jie

Bio



Daryl Lim Wei Jie is a poet, Anything But Human writer and literary critic from Singapore. His first book of poetry is A Book of Changes. He is the co-editor of Food Republic: A Singapore Literary Banquet, the first definitive anthology of literary food writing from Singapore. He was auoted in international media for his tabulation of similar texts in the plagiarism of the cookbook by Sharon Wee by Elizabeth Haigh. He has won (Landmark Books) the Golden Point Award in 2015, for English Poetry.

# **Book Title**



# **Synopsis**

"The land is furrowed deep with worry. The angsana trees are turning orange with pain." This collection emerges, squeaking and poorly oiled, from this rubbish heap we have all piled up. It revels in the transfixing beauty of this last age of man. These poems have dwelt too close to the nuclear waste facility. These poems have traversed through fields of madness for grains of truth. These poems attempt to wring the last dregs out of language. Anything but Human grasps for a poetry beyond our collective exhaustion.



**Author Book Title** No. Bio **Synopsis** 

# Jee Leong Koh



of the Year by UK's Financial Poems Times, and a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. He has published four other books of poems, a hybrid work of fiction, a volume of essays, and a collection of zuihitsu. The Pillow Book, which was shortlisted for the Singapore Literature Prize.



(Sibling Rivalry Press)

Jee Leong Koh is the author of **Connor & Seal:** A Inspired by Rita Dove's groundbreaking Thomas Steep Tea, named a Best Book Harlem Story in 47 and Beulah, Connor & Seal is a masterful queering of poetic lineage. We meet Connor, a native Nebraskan and fledgling grant writer, and Seal, a financial analyst from Kingston, Jamaica, as they flummox the space between desire and demise. With imaginative dexterity and stylistic flexibility, each poem in Connor & Seal becomes a cipher of the labor of tomorrow's construction: "a bench where two old faggots had to stop," an emblem of a future history, "as quiet as the siren / is alarming."

Bio

**Book Title** 

**Synopsis** 

#### 3 **Mok Zining**



Mok Zining is obsessed with The Orchid Folios random things like orchids, arabesaues and sand. She is a recent graduate of the MFA program at the University of Minnesota, where she taught creative writing. Zining presently a research associate at SMU. She spends most of her free time working on an essay collection—tentatively titled The Earthmovers—about sand. The Orchid Folios is her first book.



(Ethos Books)

A pot shatters. An arrangement falls apart. A florist finds herself amidst the scattered leaves of history. At once a poetry collection and a documentary novella, The Orchid Folios reimagines the orchid as a living, breathing document of history: a history that enmeshes the linguistic, colonial, personal. and biotechnological with the Vanda Miss Joaquim, the symbol of Singapore's postcolonial hybridity. While the Orchid has shaped the fantastical narratives that govern our multiracial City in a Garden, it continues to shape-shift and bloom on its own terms, challenging us to imagine a decolonised Singapore.

## Bio

# **Book Title**

## **Synopsis**

### 4 Pooja Nansi



Pooja Nansi's latest collection We Make of poetry We Make Spaces Divine published in Divine was January 2021. Her previous collections include Stiletto Scars and Love is an Empty Barstool. Her key performance work includes her evolving onewoman show, You Are Here which explores issues migration. She also wrote and performed Thick Beats Good Girls with Checkpoint Theatre which explored the intersections feminism, identity and hip hop. She received the Young Artist Award in 2016. She is also the co-founder of Other Tongues, a literary festival for minority voices and the festival director of the Singapore Writers Festival.

# Spaces



between (Math Paper Press)

These poems walk through cities in bodies that don't belong. They speak through moments in migration, music, film and pop culture. These are poems as acts of resistance, renewal and reclamation. Poems that make shrines of grimy corners. They are dancing until the sun comes up and laughing in the face of anyone who says they cannot take up space.

Bio

**Book Title** 

**Synopsis** 

#### 5 Yeow Kai Chai



Yeow Kai Chai is a poet, fiction One to the Dark Tower writer, and editor. He has three poetry collections, One to the Dark Tower Comes, Pretend I'm Not Here, and Secret Manta. He has worked in the media, including as an entertainment editor and music reviewer, in various publications such as The Straits Times, 8 Days and My Paper. He co-wrote The Adopted: Stories from Angkor Lost Bodies: Poems and Between Portugal and Home, with three other authors. A coeditor of Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, he was the director of festival the Singapore Writers Festival from 2015 to 2018.

# Comes



(firstfruits publications)

Each of us embarks on a life's journey to reach his or her own dark tower, but what lies behind the door? This collection, whose title alludes to Robert Browning's 1855 poem Childe Roland To The Dark Tower Came, is a personal and collective quest to uncover answers to life, death, grief, happiness, and the violence wrought on one another. Towers rise and fall, and real and fantastical monsters are encountered, as the writer/reader/pilgrim navigates the bumps and turns of an inquiry which challenges one's conviction in the Great Unknown.

# **Category: English Creative Nonfiction**

# No. Author Bio Book Title

# 1 Clara Chow



Clara Chow is the author of fiction collections Dream Storevs. Modern Myths (shortlisted for the 2020 Singapore Literature Prize) and Not Great, But At Least Something; the travelogues New Orleans and Caves; and bilingual poetry collection 几首 烂情诗/Lousy Love Poems. She has been writer-in-residence at Toji Cultural Center in South Korea and an honorary fellow of the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. Having started her career in journalism, she now runs tiny indie Hermit Press.

### **New Orleans**



(Hermit Press)

# Synopsis

New Orleans is a travelogue written during Singapore COVID-19 circuit breaker about a trip to the American city in October 2019. A Singaporean writer and an Argentinian playwright-director wander the streets of the French Quarter, staying sober in a party town, singing on Bourbon Street, refraining from gambling in casinos and dodging alligators in the bayou. It all ends with a gate-crash of Tennessee Williams' house. Along the way, some observations are made of art, friendship and being alive.

No. Author

Bio

Book Title

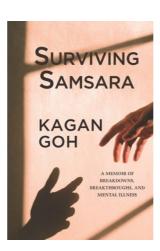
Synopsis

# 2 Kagan Goh



Kagan Goh was born in Singapore 1969. in He emigrated with his family to Canada in 1986 and now resides in Vancouver. He is a poet, playwright, actor, and mental health advocate. Kagan has been published in several anthologies, including Strike the Wok: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction and Henry Chow and Other Stories from the Asian Canadian Writer's Workshop. He has also been published in periodicals like Ricepaper, SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English, and Open Minds Quarterly.

Surviving Samsara: A Memoir of Breakdowns, Breakthroughs, and Mental Illness



(Caitlin Press)

In Kagan Goh's debut memoir, he recounts his struggles with manic depression, breaking the silence around mental illness. From the welfare office to the hospital ward and many places in between, Goh struggles to discern the difference between mental health breakdowns spiritual breakthroughs. Facing experiences with courage and authenticity, Goh shares his memories of family altercations, being pushed to the brink of living on the street, and visits to his psychiatrist. He explores his diagnosis of bipolar mood disorder not only as a medical condition but as а spiritual emergence—a vehicle for personal growth, healing and transcendence.

Bio

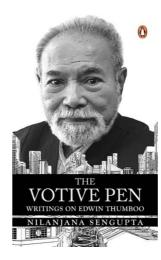
**Book Title** 

Synopsis

### 3 Nilanjana Sengupta



Nilanjana Sengupta is a The Votive Pen Singaporean author who has built her reputation on writing books which travel to unchartered territories. In A Gentleman's Word. she chronicled the legacy of a forgotten war hero, Subhas Chandra Bose across Southeast Asia. In The Female Voice of Myanmar, she wrote of the latent masculine bias of Burmese culture and women voices which have managed to cut through the clutter. A Biography of Μ Bala Subramanion was a nuanced look at the Tamils of Singapore who though the majority Indian community, struggle with vulnerabilities of their own.



(Penguin Random House SEA; Penguin Books)

A riveting look at the fiercely original, intellectually brilliant mind of Singapore's unofficial poet-laureate, Edwin Thumboo. He is brusquely vocal about poetry with a purpose and yet appears a hopeless romantic in his poems about his wife. What happens when a mind which is such a melting pot of brilliant ideas and contrary emotions tries to unscramble the identity of a country like Singapore which is known for a fierce economic growth that has often elbowed aside everything else? The Votive Pen sees Edwin Thumboo's poetry without the static of earlier critical writing and with an intense alertness.

Bio

**Book Title** 

Synopsis

# **Wang Gungwu**



Wang Gungwu, is the former Home is Where We chancellor of vice University of Hong Kong and is emeritus professor at the Australian National University and a university professor at the National University of Singapore. He is the author of some 20 books, including Home is Not Here and Home is Where We Are, published by NUS Press.

# the **Are**



(Ridge Books (NUS Press))

Wang Gungwu's account of his university education capture the excitement, the ambition and the choices of a generation that saw it as their responsibility to build the new nations of Southeast Asia. The exploration of the emotional and intellectual journey towards the formation of an identity extends in this volume into an appreciation of love, family life, and the life of the mind.. Wise and moving, this is a fascinating reflection on identity and belonging, and on the ability of the individual to find a place amidst the historical currents that have shaped Asia.



# Category: English Fiction

**Author Book Title** No. Bio Synopsis

#### Clara Chow 1



fiction collections Storevs. Modern Myths for the 2020 (shortlisted Singapore Literature Prize) and Not Great, But At Least Something; the travelogues New Orleans and Caves; and bilingual poetry collection 几首 烂情诗/Lousy Love Poems. She has been writer-in-residence at Toji Cultural Center in South Korea and an honorary fellow of the University of lowa's (Hermit Press) International Writing Program. Having started her career in journalism, she now runs tiny indie Hermit Press.

# Clara Chow is the author of Not Great, But At Dream Least Something



attachment to a piece of soap. A Chinese typesetter gets swept up in political winds of change in 1950s Malaya. A prosthetics engineer falls in love with a dancer, both of them outsiders in Boston, dreaming of taking flight. This new short story collection from a Singapore Literature Prizeshortlisted writer is a panoply of surprising voices.

A pirate in the waters off Indonesia confronts her

past and an unwanted pregnancy. Coffeeshop

denizens puzzle over an elderly Jewish man's

HERMIT DRES

Bio

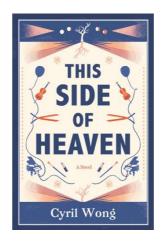
**Book Title** 

**Synopsis** 

### 2 **Cyril Wong**



Cyril Wong is the Singapore This Side of Heaven Literature Prize-winning author of poetry collections and a collection of strange short fables. He has served as a mentor under the Creative Arts Programme and the Mentor Access Project, and a judge for the Golden Point Awards in Singapore. He is a past recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award for Literature. His books include poetry collections Tilting Our Plates to Catch the Light and The Lover's Inventory, the novel The Last Lesson of Mrs de Souza and the short fiction collection Ten Things My Father Never Taught Me.



(Epigram Books)

A comedian, a nun, a reality TV star and countless others meet in a Garden. This is not the start of a joke, but the beginnings of a parable. These denizens may be running out of time, even as it seems there is all the time in their Kafkaesque world.

No.	Author	Bio	Book Title	Synopsis
3	Daryl Qilin Yam	Daryl Qilin Yam is a queer writer, editor and arts organiser from Singapore. He is the author of the novella, Shantih Shantih Shantih, and the novel, Lovelier, Lonelier, a finalist of the 2021 Epigram Books Fiction Prize. He co-founded the literary charity Sing Lit Station. His short fiction and poetry have appeared in the Berlin Quarterly, Transnational Literature, and The Straits Times. His first novel, Kappa Quartet, was selected by The Business	Shantih Shantih Shantih  SHANTIH SHANTIH SHANTIH Daryl Qilin Yam	An art student chances upon a former fling at Punggol MRT station. A reporter lies awake at four in the morning, chronically unable to sleep. Two men lie in bed, watching YouTube videos of hail falling in Singapore, while a sugar baby trawls through Google Maps. In this novella by Daryl Qilin Yam, a dozen lonely individuals in Singapore witness a freakish instance of snowfall, lasting for exactly four minutes and twenty-six seconds. Shantih Shantih Shantih is a heady mix of desire and dauntlessness that revels in its interconnections, pulling together a community that is at once together and apart.

Times as one of the best novels (Math Paper Press)

of 2016.

Bio

**Book Title** 

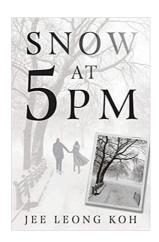
**Synopsis** 

4 Jee Leong Koh



Jee Leong Koh is the author of **Snow at 5 PM**: Steep Tea, named a Best Book Translations of an of the Year by UK's Financial Insignificant Times, and a Finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. He has published four other books of poems, a hybrid work of fiction, a volume of essays, and a collection of zuihitsu, The Pillow Book, which was shortlisted for the Singapore Literature Prize. His second Carcanet book Inspector Inspector is forthcoming in August 2022.

Japanese Poet



(Gaudy Boy LLC (Bench Press imprint)) The rescue of a literary manuscript results in a war of words over the interpretation of 107 haiku about New York's Central Park. In the battle of commentaries, what is at stake is nothing less than the meaning of America in an imaginary but highly plausible future. Re-envisioning Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire for a technologised age, Snow at 5 PM discovers revolutionary uses, and abuses, for literature and history.

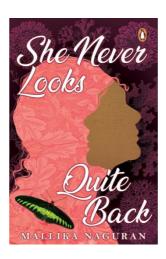


No.	Author	Bio	Book Title	Synopsis

5 Mallika Naguran



Mallika Naguran is a children's She Never Looks books and adult fiction writer. Quite Back Born in Singapore, Mallika published her first poem when she was 10. She authored adaptations of classics for children: Peter Pan, and Ramayana: The Quest to Rescue. She Never Looks Quite Back features her stories written over the last two decades. She is presently working on a fantasy novel for middle araders and an environmental fiction novel for adults. Mallika founded the sustainability media firm, Gaia Discovery, is passionate about and nature, the underwater world and music.



(Penguin Random House SEA)

The life of a woman typically encompasses loss and longing, despair and courage, love. She Never Looks Quite Back murmurs of such experiences. The stories depict themes of growing up, social unrest, nature, war, migration, reconciliation, and the pandemic. The narratives allow glimpses into lives conflicted by chance and choice... women who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances, yet never giving up. This debut collection reveals women's unquenchable thirst for life. Her lyrical style of writing amplifies the fragility of humans while bringing into play metaphorical connection and intervention. The tales are timeless yet prick at many of today's issues.

Images of the writers and book covers can be downloaded here.



# **Annex C: SBC Achievement Award Recipient**

# Recipient

## Bio

## **Edwin Thumboo**



Edwin Thumboo is Emeritus Professor and Professorial Fellow at the National University of Singapore, where he was the first Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The awards he has received include the National Book Development Council of Singapore Book Award for Poetry, the South East Asian Write Award, Singapore's Cultural Medallion, the ASEAN Cultural and Communication Award in Literature, the Raja Rao Award and Singapore's Meritorious Service Medal. Poetry Festival Singapore (2015) is his most recent start-up.

Singapore Book Council Building Our Imagine-nation

**Annex D: About Singapore Book Council** 

The Singapore Book Council (SBC) is an independent charity with IPC status.

Established in 1968 to support Singapore authors and literature, SBC aims to Build Our

Imagine-nation by developing creativity, imagination, original thought and empathy.

Our programmes focus on creative writing, reading, illustration, translation and

storytelling. We are committed to developing a multicultural, diverse literary arts sector

through our festivals, training workshops and courses, as well as book awards to

recognise excellence.

**Vision**: International recognition for quality, diverse Singapore literature.

Mission: To develop, support and advocate a multicultural literary arts sector.

SBC is currently chaired by Ms Claire Chiang, co-founder of Banyan Tree Hotels and

Resorts.

The Book Council develops and advocates Singapore's books and literary arts scene

by organising a variety of festivals, including the annual Asian Festival of Children's

Content (AFCC); giving out prestigious awards such as the biennial national award

Singapore Literature Prize; supporting community outreach through the #BuySingLit

movement; and building professional capacity through our Academy programmes.

Because it all starts with a story.

SBC is supported by the National Arts Council of Singapore under the Major Company

Scheme for the period from 2019 to 2021. For more information, please visit

www.bookcouncil.sg.



# Annex E: About the Singapore Literature Prize

Established in 1992, the Singapore Literature Prize (SLP) is Singapore's top literary prize, with more than 80 past winners. The prize is a biennial competition open to Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents whose works of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction have been published in Singapore or abroad during a specified period of time. The work can be published in any of Singapore's four official languages — Chinese, English, Malay, or Tamil.

The award carries a top prize of \$\$3,000 for the winner in each of the categories. In addition, the winners will be awarded a special plaque.

SLP has been awarded biennially and awarded to published works in Singapore's four languages since 2004. The award was expanded in 2014 to include categories for the genres of creative nonfiction category and poetry.

Many notable Singaporean writers have won the SLP, including Mohamed Latiff Mohamed, Yeng Pway Ngon, KTM Iqbal, Cyril Wong, Josephine Chia, Amanda Lee Koe and Sonny Liew.

For more information, please visit <a href="https://bookcouncil.sg/awards/singapore-literature-prize">https://bookcouncil.sg/awards/singapore-literature-prize</a>