

Koh Tai Ann, comp. and ed. *Singapore Literature in English: An Annotated Bibliography*. Singapore: National Library Board Singapore and Centre for Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, 2008. 280pp. ISBN 978-981-07-0060-7.¹

Comprehensive bibliographies are always difficult to construct and yet they are so very essential for researchers. Koh Tai Ann's new bibliography on Singapore literature in English is an invaluable reference source; it bears the mark of years of meticulous research and cross-checking and saves many researchers working in this area a tremendous amount of painstaking groundwork. As such, it is a milestone volume that will no doubt be constantly cited in the decades of research ahead.

Long recognised as an authority in the field, Koh is well positioned to provide a selected bibliography rather than a comprehensive bibliography but she apparently prefers to make "no literary or such judgements, leaving that to readers, time and posterity" (5). Singapore literature in English being still a relatively young literature, with only about half a century behind it, this is probably a better way to proceed as several of the lesser known younger writers may eventually emerge as part of the Singapore canon in the decades to come.

The comprehensive bibliography resulting from Koh's editorial decision is organised into various sections representing the expected literary genres such as novels, short stories, poetry and drama as well as other categories such as anthologies, miscellaneous output, periodicals, electronic journals, and author biographies. Entries in some categories such as novels and drama are often annotated with excerpts taken from their back covers or other sources; collections of short stories are accompanied by the titles of the short stories in the contents pages; poetry collections in the volume, however, do not normally have such information provided but, if a poetry collection has attracted a prize, then such information appears with the entry; sometimes, the notes to the poetry collections are about the title (Entry 783), the connection with previous works (Entry 771) or even the cover painting (Entry 774). One wonders why no explanation is provided for this treatment of the poetry entries, especially when there are explanatory notes (12-17) for the type of information provided for almost all the other categories; but this minor omission does not diminish the usefulness of the poetry entries as a whole.

It is worth pointing out too that the category of Miscellaneous is not quite miscellaneous but consists largely of a selected list of literary readings such as the evenings of poetry and music on the Singapore University Bukit Timah campus, where some of the finer voices of later times were first heard. Perhaps it would have been better to reshape this category as Literary readings and to include entries on

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similar events such as some recent events organised by the National Book Development Council of Singapore.

The inclusion of anthologies, periodicals, electronic journals, and authors' biographies offers much needed guidance to high school teachers wishing to introduce Singapore literature to their students as well as university scholars working in such an area, especially overseas researchers less familiar with Singapore but wishing to include Singapore in explorations of Asian literature in English. While the omission of books of literary criticism in this area is justified by Koh's reference to Ismail Talib's faithful compilation of bibliographic information for Singapore and Malaysia for the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (9), a later edition of the introduction to this bibliography might still benefit from the mention of a few seminal volumes which may help to connect Singapore literature to its region or to Asian writing in English more generally.

As a whole, the bibliography will prove immensely useful to anyone interested in Singapore literature or international writing in English. Unlike some bibliographies which are very comprehensive in coverage but rather private in terms of accessibility, Koh's work is well supported by most sources being centrally available at the National Library of Singapore. This collaboration is not a feat to be minimised as, without such accessibility, a bibliography is of limited use. Other compilers of bibliographies on national literary corpuses may benefit from such a mode of collaboration. The development of national literatures cannot be as vibrant as it could have been if sources are constantly lost or not easily tracked. By compiling this bibliography, Koh has done an immense service not just to the academic world, the reading public or young Asian writers wondering which journals will publish their nascent works. She has also helped to archive the development of an important aspect of her nation.

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