

KEYNOTE 2: DIVERGENT MODERNITIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CULTURES

Rajeev S. Patke

Abstract

Modernity maybe a single word but it is not a monolithic concept. It receives varying interpretations and applications in different cultures. If modernization may be understood as a social project and process, modernism can be described as its alter ego: a project that sometimes runs alongside social modernity, and sometimes against the grain of that project. All three – modernity, modernization, and modernism – developed in the shadow of Western colonialism, and they continue to work in the shadow of postcoloniality. In this global perspective, how individual writers arrive at their unique correlation between modernity and modernization can be approached from the angle of their engagement with the aesthetics of modernism. Modernist cultures diverge from region to region, and from individual to individual. I propose to illustrate both the variety of this phenomenon and the commonality that links the variety, by focussing on the cultural accomplishments of representative authors from several cultures. They include Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet* (1980-88), and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986). Through these examples, I will demonstrate the nature of the continual conversation that writing constitutes between history and futurity, between tradition and the individual talent, between cultural as heritage and culture as a weight that has to be shifted.

Biodata



Rajeev Patke is Professor of Humanities and Director of the Division of Humanities at Yale-NUS College, and Professor of English at the Department of English Language and Literature in the National University of Singapore. He is the author of *The Long Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Cambridge University Press, 1985, rpt. 2009), *Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Oxford University Press, 2006), *Modernist Poetry and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and co-author of *The Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English* (Routledge, 2009). He has also co-edited *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and its Empires* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008) and *Southeast Asian Writing in English: A Thematic Anthology* (National Library Board, Singapore, 2012), *Complicities: Connections and Divisions-Literatures and Cultures of the Asia-Pacific Region* (2003), and *Institutions in Cultures: Theory and Practice* (Rodopi, 1996). Non-print publications include two audio-discs of Singaporean poets reading from their work (1996, 1997).