Online Bibliography Launched at Literary Reading Night

By Chen Enjiao

Commemorating the launch of Singapore’s first-ever online bibliography of local English literature, writers, staff and students from various faculties gathered at the HSS Library on 23 October for an enthralling and absorbing literary soiree.

The library’s familiar layout received a revamp for the night: the reference section housed displays of local literary works, a room nearby had NTU’s “Online Annotated Bibliography of Singapore Literature in English” and student works all set up, and the section next to the front counter became the event venue.

The event was hosted by Hidhir Razak of Epiphany (NTU’s English and Drama Society), with University Librarian Mr Choy Fatt Cheong bidding everyone a warm welcome at the opening. Judging from the turnout, it seemed the library’s declared aim of “bringing people together” had been faithfully served. Professor Koh Tai Ann, author of the bibliography, introduced the project – one that involved many years of dedicated work by the personnel involved.

“The new online platform is the first-of-its-kind in Singapore. It allows annotated bibliography to be constantly updated, annotated, and expanded indefinitely, unlike the print or static version. It is designed with an interactive search tool that will meet the more exacting demands of the academic community and also for someone who knows nothing about Singapore writing in English,” explained Prof Koh.

With its new enhanced digital and search facilities, the comprehensive bibliography aims to include and annotate as far as possible every work by Singapore authors writing in English in the genres of the novel, short story, poetry and drama, making it a key milestone in the local literature landscape.

The soiree continued with readings from NTU-NAC (former and current) writers-in-residence Yong Shu Hoong, Grace Chia, and Boey Kim Cheng, and also Nuraliah Bte Norasid, Eric Tinsay Valles, Rijula Das and various students. Most of these were from recent works, as Yong himself pointed out with a laugh, “So I don’t know whether that’s in the bibliography”.

The readings ranged from a casual, caption-inspired poetry piece involving words association to a moving multi-part piece where Grace Chia related the experiences of her late cousin, Roger. Despite
the long and extensive line-up, the event did not feel dreary and the atmosphere did not flag; instead, the audience got a taste of how literature imbues the world with infinite possibilities.

For attendees, the graciousness and earnestness of the many students who shared their work was not only inspiring but also a great call-to-action. And indeed, Master of Arts (English) student Crispin Rodrigues took up and also threw down the guantlet with his poem about – what else? – the feeling of wanting to write a poem:

I want to write a poem about simple things / that are mute and have no voice / because I was once mute and had no voice / I want you to write a poem.