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SPEECH BY MR WAN HUSSIN ZOOHRI, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (HEALTH AND CULTURE), AT THE OFFICIAL PRIZE PRESENTATION CEREMONY FOR THE 1982 SHORT-STORY WRITING COMPETITION AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM THEATRETTE ON 22 JULY 83 AT 5.30 PM

The Annual Short-Story Writing Competition is organised by the Ministry of Culture and the major dailies in Singapore, with a grant of \$23,000 from the Singapore Cultural Foundation. It is thus a competition held on a national level to promote creative writing among Singaporeans.

Altogether 217 entries in the four official languages were received from 181 participants. The judges have commented that the number of entries and participants could have been more, and the standard of writing better. From this viewpoint, the competition has perhaps not been as successful as expected.

On the other hand, we must never lose sight of the primary aim and objective of the competition, which is to provide an opportunity for writers, especially the lesser known writers with good potential, to exercise their creativity, and to have a platform from which to address their audience.

A writer cannot write without having his readers. Indeed, no one can write to and for himself - except to record events in a personal diary. Even then, it is with the aim of keeping alive certain thoughts that one is persuaded to give expression to one's inner feelings in a

diary, with the hope, perhaps subconscious, that they would reach someone else eventually. Robinson Crusoe (with his Man Friday) is a story of a person forced to live alone on a desert island, but the creator of this fictional character, Daniel Defoe, did not, I am sure, write this story just to have it kept in a manuscript not intended to see the light of day. He wrote his story to entertain, and to speak to his readers about an adventure which has been proven to have universal appeal.

A short-story writing competition such as this is one opportunity to have a piece of writing published. Further opportunities should also be available. These can take the form of short stories published by the media, be they the national dailies, the magazines and periodicals, the anthologies of short stories, or even the short serials and programmes over TV.

A short story, or any form of a literary endeavour, is not likely to find a publisher if it is judged not to have appeal. Lack of appeal could sometimes be due to conservative thinking or entrenched prejudices among the public which make it difficult to accept anything new or out of the ordinary. Tastes and preferences can eventually change. Nevertheless, there still remains the crucial test of whether or not a piece of writing can in the end appeal to the existing readership.

A writer can be successful in having a following only when readers can relate to him, when his words are edifying and can lift the human spirit up and away from the ordinary and the mundane. His stories must give expression to the social norms which are held to be of enduring value and relate to human situations which have a universal relevance. A good piece of a literary effort should have something of these qualities in order to captivate and hold the interest of a reading audience.

Much of the efforts by our writers have these qualities and hold promise of enjoying a higher degree of success. For them to command a much larger readership will take time. Among other things, they have to compete with some of the best in literature from the rest of the world which is available in most of our bookshops.

Nevertheless, we must all persevere in our efforts. Our writers should pursue their attempts to relate to their audience. Those of us in a position to promote Singapore literature should lend our support in having the works of our writers published. Our Singapore readers should give at least a second look to efforts by our writers. To all our established and aspiring local writers, I urge you to come forward to participate in the 1983 National Short-Story Writing Competition, which is officially launched today, and made possible again with a generous grant of \$23,000 from the Singapore Cultural Foundation.

On this note, I offer my congratulations to the winners of the competition, and I wish to thank the organisers and sponsor of the competition for their contribution and laudable efforts at promoting short-story writing in our Republic.

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