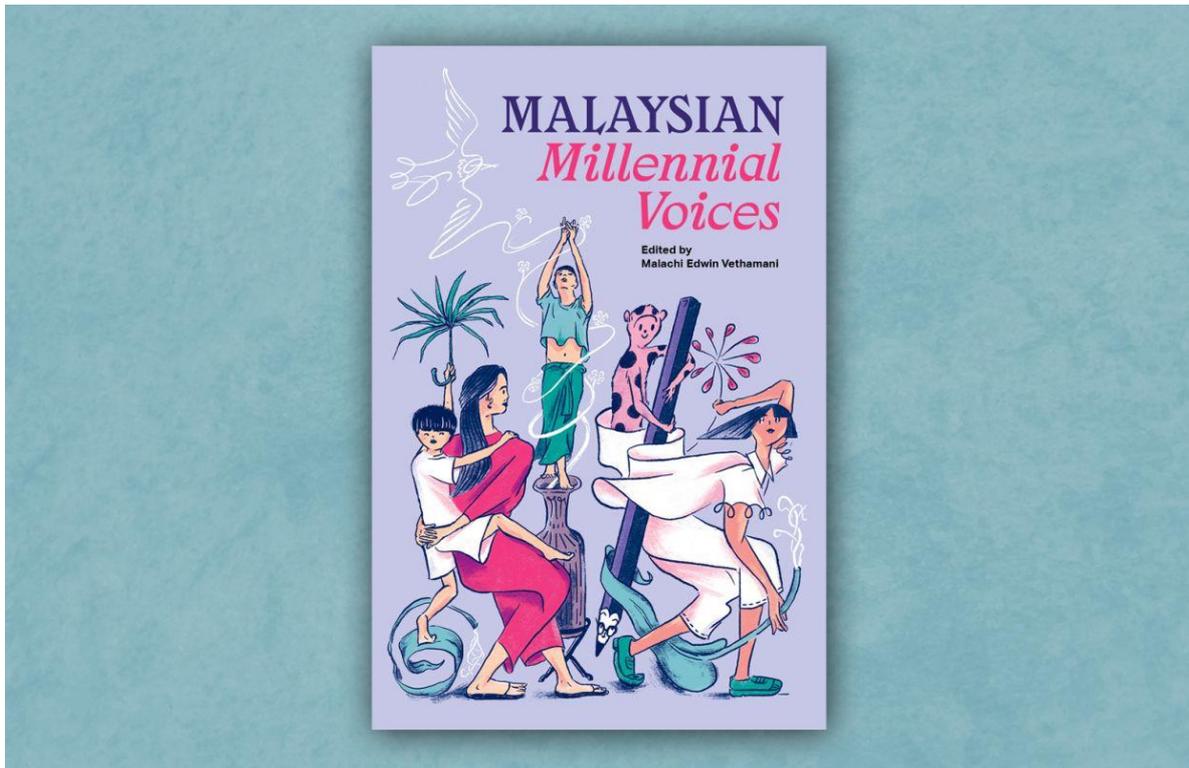


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This Poetry Anthology Aims To Find New Voices In The Malaysian Literary Landscape



The 'Malaysian Millennial Voices' poetry anthology, edited by Malachi, is available through Maya Press. Photo: Handout

Millennials. This often-misunderstood age group has inspired many stereotypes. Some people consider them free-spirited and passionate, eager to right the wrongs of previous generations. While others think them entitled youth, more interested in TikTok than actually working.

What actually goes on in the minds of modern millennials? How do they think, and what are they actually passionate about?

Malaysian Millennial Voices, a new poetry anthology published by Maya Press and edited by author/academic Professor Malachi Edwin Vethamani, might offer us some clues.

The book, available now, features 69 poems by 37 young Malaysian poets, all aged below 35. The cover art was designed by artist Jun Kit.

“I wanted to bring out a collection of poems for young Malaysians who have not had many opportunities to publish poetry in English. There are hardly any local publishers who are willing to publish poetry anthologies. When Maya Press agreed to support my project, I found a publisher willing to make this project feasible,” says Malachi.

“Young Malaysians have generally resorted to publishing their poems on social media like Instagram and Facebook, or self-publish them in personal blogs. I wanted to bring out a collection of poems to showcase the young Malaysian voices,” he adds.



'We wanted poems that presented the millennials' lives, concerns, worldview and experience,' says Malachi. Photo: Filepic

Late last year, Malachi used social media to seek out participants and entries for the anthology. The response, he says, was a success. In the end, he received 530 poems, from 135 poets.

From there, the poems went through several rounds of selection, with Malachi aided by 15 writers/poets. Their expertise helped in the final product, with Malachi eventually making his final choices based on their recommendations. The book also features praise for a range of literary names, including Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, Wong Phui Nam, Bernice Chauly, Danton Remoto Sharon Bakar, Preeta Samarasan, Sheena Baharudin, Susan Philip and Shivani Sivagurunathan.

“In terms of criteria, we wanted poems with ideas that were presented in an original manner with language that takes into account meaning and sound. Their use of imagery and poetic devices was of importance. We wanted poems that presented the millennials' lives, concerns, worldview and experience,” says Malachi.

He noticed that these young poets generally wrote free verse poems. They presented shape poems, spoken word poems and political satire.

"The language in this collection of poems is contemporary, youthful and often conversational. It has the distinct flavour of Malaysian English both in form and idiom. With regards to themes and subject matter, these were varied and diverse. The poems touch on themes that range from everyday concerns to identity, growing up, dealing with the loss of parents and grandparents and political awareness, " says Malachi.

When thinking of millennials, some people may think their relative youth presents a hindrance to the maturity of their thoughts. Malachi, however, says this is not the case.

"These poets created a freshness in the poems, and it has to be recognised they have a valid voice. Their writing style is emerging and as they continue to write they will be stronger and more confident and we need to encourage this."

In January, the powerful words and voice of poet Amanda Gorman, 22, America's National Youth Poet Laureate, stole the show at the inauguration ceremony of US President Joe Biden.

"I believe Amanda is going to be an inspiration not just for Americans but all young people who want to write poetry," says Malachi.

In many ways, this book project allowed Malachi to see through many of the common misconceptions people have about millennials.

"My experience in working with millennials is that they are a mixed lot. Some are not able to take direct and honest criticisms while others welcome this and rise to the challenge. Those made of sterner stuff are successful and fit better in the work world.

"Reading these poems made me very hopeful. I was certainly pleased to see these young poets drawing from their varied heritage, concerned about their identities, examining their lives and showing political consciousness, " he concludes.