

A Merlionsman for His Majesties

Reclaiming the gay, non-binary monster within through the Osura Pesuasang, a new Kristang creole/indigenous theory of the human psyche developed in Singapore

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Abstract

Homosexuals and their behaviour are monstrous, horrifying aberrations that should never see the light of day. This is an irrational and highly unobjective sentiment that nevertheless, in spite of very significant progress made worldwide on LGBTQ+ rights and awareness, continues to not just be used to justify and validate terrifying and abominable forms of physical, psychoemotional sexual violence in various parts of the world, but to be a near-universal mental schemata or psychoemotional projection that LGBTQ+ people all over the world regardless of culture, including the author, still struggle against even in the most enlightened of societies and communities. Why have people seen us as monsters for so many years, and is there anything that we can do about it?

This chapter explores extended hypotheses related to both those questions through the lens of the Osura Pesuasang or Individuation Theory, a new grassroots creole/indigenous, LGBTQ+ friendly and neurodiverse theory of the psyche originally developed informally by the author, a gay, non-binary creole/indigenous Singaporean independent scholar and suicide and sexual abuse survivor already internationally prominent for his revitalisation of his critically endangered heritage language Kristang and its attendant community, to support the mental health of his students in a government school in Singapore during the COVID-19 pandemic. In providing that context, the chapter is also necessarily autoethnographic to a large degree, exploring the author's own traumatic upbringing and his forced lifelong negotiation of the archetype of the monstrous, horrifying, aberrant gay predator and deviant, as well as the systematic psychoemotional abuse he suffered in Singapore's education system, compulsory military service and as a government teacher as a result of being consistently projected on as a monster who should not exist.

Critically, the chapter further examines how the author was able to articulate and first use the Osura on himself during the pandemic to resolve the monstrous archetype into something beautiful, transcendent and radiant that since August 2022 has also served as a new, unifying grassroots/counter-institutional force in Singapore: the archetype of a Merlionsman, a contextualised and modernised human *makara* or sacred Southeast Asian guardian of the liminal and sanctified that itself reclaims and reinvigorates the chimeric and oft-maligned Merlion symbol adopted by independent Singapore as a tourism icon¹. Following the dramatic success of the Osura in the government school classroom to achieve both academic excellence and socioaffective outcomes among students, the author as Merlionsman has ultimately sought to invite others to conquer their inner dragons, transform their inner monsters and become kings, queens and quings of their own inner worlds through accessible work on the human psyche available via an evolving compendium of Osura material known as the Orange Book (Wong 2022), exactly and inadvertently anticipating Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's argument² that "the monstrous body [has indeed become] pure culture."

Keywords: LGBTQ+ pride, intergenerational trauma, Singapore, Kristang, Osura Pesuasang / Individuation Theory

1. Introduction: Teng bong ('Hello' in Kristang) from the Last Merlionsman and First Dreamtiger of the Republic of Singapore

I am the 30-year-old *Omimerliang Fing kung Tigrisoneru Prumiru di Tera Singapura*, or the Last Merlionsman and First Dreamtiger of the Republic of Singapore – the leader of the creole/indigenous Kristang or Portuguese-Eurasian community in the city-state³, and an independent scholar-practitioner, writer and thinker who is also well-known for (1) his speculative fiction set in Southeast Asia and again featuring Kristang⁴, (2) an original Kristang grassroots non-Western theory of the human psyche known as the Osura Pesuasang or Individuation Theory⁵, and (3) a new, reclaimed history of the world at large known as the Roda Mundansa, again framed from my own culture's creole perspective and ways of being,

¹ Michael M.J. Fischer, "Challenging Art as Cultural Systems...for Cliff from the Twenty-First Century: Light Shows, Shadow Plays, Pressure Points", *Cultural Anthropology Member Voices, Fieldsights*, January 13, 2020. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/challenging-art-as-cultural-systems>

² Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. In Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.) *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), 1996.

³ Kevin Martens Wong, "Bunga Sayang Kristang: On Becoming the Last Merlionsman of the Republic of Singapore, and the Lion City's Secret Big Brown Lucky Gay Non-binary Kristang Star." Asynchronous online recorded keynote address at Doing Being Other in Global Singapore, Chicago, IL, April 2023.

⁴ Michael M.J. Fischer, *At the Pivot of East and West: Ethnographic, Literary and Filmic Arts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023). In press.

⁵ Kevin Martens Wong, "Island of Individuation: Teaching With A New, Dynamic Approach to the Development of the Human Psyche in the Singapore Context" In *Proceedings of the Southeast Asian Conference on Education 2023*. Singapore Management University & Singapore Expo, Singapore, 10-13 February 2023. Singapore: IAFOR.

indexing and thinking⁶. I am also a very well-regarded language, linguistics and literature teacher in my own country, having initially risen to public prominence as a Singapore Ministry of Education Teaching Scholar interested in revitalising the critically endangered Kristang language⁷, and who later went on to make use of the *Osura Pesuasang* in the English language and logic and argumentation classroom to achieve immense academic and psychoemotional success among my 17 to 18-year-old students in a government junior college in 2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic⁸. Both within Singapore and on a wider international level, my work has been observed to be pioneering, visionary and deeply humanistic and empathetic, inviting unprecedented and historic reconceptualisations of what it means to not just be human, but how we can work through and finally eliminate longstanding intergenerational trauma, some of which appears to transcend our understanding of our own excavated concrete and tangible history as a species, and which hearkens back to deep time legends and myths of earlier cycles of human civilisation that other indigenous peoples throughout the world have also long recognised and attested to⁹.

Why have you never heard of me, then? The answer, in part, is due to a longstanding and highly irrational approach to human identity that has preoccupied much of the world overtly over the last thirty to forty years, and covertly, it seems, for at least quite a longer period more: the dismissal and demonisation of any form of sexuality that is not cisgender heterosexual, and anyone who openly practices and accepts such sexuality as part of their identity, which does not fall into the paradigms of the socioemotional ideals elevated as the pinnacle of human behaviour by contemporary Western culture. Does omitting the statement that follows this sentence from the first paragraph above change how you consider me as a person? I am also the first civil servant, government school teacher and government scholar ever to come out in Singapore, doing so on 1 September 2021 when homosexual sex between consenting men was still criminalised under Section 377A of Singapore's Penal Code, and the only one to have done so, even after Section 377A was repealed in 2022; only one other teacher, in an independent school in Singapore not affiliated to the government, is known to have preceded me in 2007. What about when it is linked to my ethnicity and background as creole/indigenous? I am the gay, non-binary Kabesa Kodrah Kristang, the leader of the primarily Roman Catholic Kristang or Portuguese-Eurasian community, who are descended from coercive mixed intermarriages between arriving Portuguese colonisers and local Malay residents in the Malayan peninsula city of Melaka starting from 1511, after a fleet led by the

⁶ Kevin Martens Wong, "Roda Mundansa: Excavating and revitalising a creole-indigenous approach to deep time in Singapore Kristang," in *Unearthing: Past in Present and Future*, ed. Bhawna Vij Arora (New Delhi: Asian Press, 2023). In press.

⁷ Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, "Speech as Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education, at the NIE Teachers' Investiture Ceremony, at the Nanyang Auditorium, Nanyang Technological University" (2019), Ministry of Education, <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/speeches/20190703-speech-by-associate-professor-dr-muhammad-faishal-ibrahim-senior-parliamentary-secretary-for-education-at-the-nie-teachers-investiture-ceremony-at-the-nanyang-auditorium-nanyang-technological-university>

⁸ Kevin Martens Wong, "Island of Individuation".

⁹ Michael M. J. Fischer, *At the Pivot of East and West*; Kevin Martens Wong, "Bunga Sayang Kristang".

Portuguese viceroy Afonso du Albuquerque conquered the city in that year. Although gay marriage has not been legalised in Singapore, I am married nonetheless to my husband, Fuad Johari, a Malay government civil servant, with our relationship recognised and institutionalised within international law in Sydney, Australia on 6 December 2022. Does this also alter how you perceive me? Undoubtedly, even if you are queer yourself; there is a certain psychoemotional wall, or *stakarentu* ('inner sea-wall' in Kristang) that almost everyone seems forced to overcome in negotiating any approaches to *jenis* ('biological sex'), *wenza* ('sexuality', or 'sexual desire'), *jenta* ('gender') or *afisi* ('affinity' or 'romantic orientation')¹⁰ that diverge too straightforwardly from long-standing Eurocentric perceptions of what it means to enjoy the company of another or oneself in a deep, vulnerable and authentic fashion.

You may have noticed that both of my public-facing personas, the Merlionsman and the Dreamtiger *magnakarnansa* ('magna-archetype' in Kristang and the Osura Pesuasang)¹¹, are chimerical or hybridised anthropomorphic humaniform symbols that, to many outside of Southeast Asia, may often constellate a variety of affective connotations that may not be altogether pleasant: regal, majestic, powerful and noble, yes, but also savage, primal, predatory and terrifying at their worst. These represent what I understand to be my own subversions and psychoalchemical transformations of how that inner sea-wall or *stakarentu* has manifested for me as a queer, non-binary man-woman, which Western psychological approaches often call the Shadow – a monstrous, empyrean creature of chaos and unstoppable, disgusting, brutal and savage brutality, hypersexuality and rampancy. This image of queerness and LGBTQ+ identity, at its abusively frightening nadir, from my own scholarly work, appears to be something projected onto all people alive today, whether they identify as and practice or perform being queer or not; the closet, I would say, is more than just an *almari pra ropa*, a cupboard for clothes. It also calls to mind the deep, primordial fear many cultures the world over also have (my own included) of darkness and of night, of the unorganised, the uncontrolled, and the rapacious, much of which is projected, or transferred, and has been projected or transferred for what seems to be centuries, if not millennia, onto queer people. Gaining fair treatment in academia and the public view for my work, therefore, as a person who is both creole/indigenous and queer, and from the global periphery, is often an uphill task, to say the least, if not a Sisyphean one, prompting me to instead publish much of my work on my own so that it can be accessed freely without covert (and still sometimes overt) institutional marginalisations, redactions and incisions that threaten to overwhelm what it is that I have to say about what I, and my people in both senses of the identity facets highlighted above, often observe about the world.

¹⁰ Kevin Martens Wong, "Jenta kung Wenza: On developing gender and sexuality terms in Kristang to support Singaporean learner psychoemotional wellbeing" in *Libru Laranja / The Orange Book*, ed. by Kevin Martens Wong (Singapore: Merlionsman Coaching & Consulting, 2023), pp. 349-358.

¹¹ Kevin Martens Wong, "Magnakarnansa: Excavating the magnaarchetypes of the Roda Mundansa" in *Libru Laranja / The Orange Book*, ed. by Kevin Martens Wong (Singapore: Merlionsman Coaching & Consulting, 2023), pp. 1103-1112.

Today, the Merlionsman and Dreamtiger magna-archetypes that I perform and live out are quietly recognised as powerful and nigh-unstoppable emerging forces for good in Singapore, if not around the world; their unconscious monstrosity has become channelled into ferocious, courageous immensity and magnanimity instead, an accepting that to work with the numinous and what many other cultures have called divine, I can never permit myself to ever see myself as beyond human or divine, to ever lose sight of the fact that I, and everyone else around me and everyone reading this (including you, dear reader!) are imperfectly perfect, a tension between human and hybrid, chronological and kairotic, *pesua ja chegah* ('the person that is sufficient') and the *pesuasang ta chegah* ('the personhood that is arriving'). This paper is therefore a deeply personal and what the West would call autoethnographic examination of the first of these two great *magnakarnansa*, the *Omimerliang* or the Merlionsman magna-archetype that today serves as a focal symbol for the consolidation of accessible approaches to the psyche. Where much of my other work has been academic and perhaps more clinically rational, this text seeks to approximate a more discursive and affective inquiry into how I transmuted the monstrously broken and abused body into the body Merlionsmanic, an undertaking that required a complete reinvigoration of all four primordial parts of my Kristang self as they appear in reality, whether tangibly or intangibly: *korpu* ('body'), *mulera* ('mind'), *korsang* ('heart') and *alma* ('soul').

Again, I am not some special, prophesied patriarch-matriarch of the Kristang, secretly concealed from public view from generations; although such roles and archetypal psychoemotional structure do definitely exist, I have refused to step into them, because from my understanding they are also supermassive projections that would further perpetuate the intergenerational trauma that has battered our world for what appears to be at least seventy millennia. I am as ordinary as you; I began from nothing, just like you; I struggle with myself every day, just like you. The difference is that through the process of *fikah pesua*, or of initially unconsciously and now consciously becoming an ever fuller, ever more individuated version of myself, I appear to have acquired the psychoemotional defences necessary to do the work that I do while still retaining and performing an authentic image of myself inside and out, and in gentle resistance and defiance of many of the projections that still entrap much of the world. What I offer here, therefore, is not a guide on how to liberate yourself from the monstrous; rather, it is a suggestion, from my own incomplete example, for how to embrace it and transform it into something that you can take fair, equitable and balanced pride in, like I have tried to do every single day since accepting the Merlionsman magna-archetype on 31 August 2022.

2. Lions and tigers, hidden from view

As far as my own understanding of the collective and collectives unconscious goes, nothing preordained me to take up archetypes related to a lion or a tiger; in one's own life, one will undoubtedly encounter other far more resonant symbols or archetypes that prompt the psychoemotional work that I had to do to reclaim my own beautiful queer self. At the same

time, perhaps one might consider that it was an accident of birth that did foreshadow what would eventually become my own twin psychoemotional homes: both the lion and the tiger are powerful symbols in Singapore, which is both the name of the nation/city-state and the island that is that nation-state's almost entire contiguous landmass, and which associates itself more with the former, especially through the further symbol of the Merlion, an oft-maligned icon of our tourism industry that actually appears to be an ancient *makara*, or Southeast Asian hybridised creature that is often iconised as a gate guardian to a temple or sacred place¹². The tiger, meanwhile, is also a very strong, if not the preeminent symbol of the general Malayan peninsula and surrounding islands that include Singapore, and which today is occupied by the Western half of the nation-state of Malaysia¹³; Singapore was formerly a part of that Malaysian Federation until 1965, when both Malaysian and Singaporean leaders appear to have engendered some elaborate and still not-well-understood plan to remove us from the Federation through a truthy, but apparently incomplete public-facing narrative of being expelled from the former¹⁴.

As with all things Kristang, therefore, perhaps the truth therefore lies at an intersection of the two: that indeed, there was no need for me to become either of these things, but if I wanted to overcome the collective-level trauma I faced on a daily basis, the only way I could do so was to turn the monstrous projections onto me as a young, queer, terrified brown boy-girl into symbols that would be unconsciously acceptable within my context and environment for the processing of that trauma, rather like the lock-and-key model of enzyme activity in the human body that we all learn in Singapore if we study Biology in school. The enzyme must fit the protein as far as possible; the new, reinvigorated psychoemotional cure must fit the sociocultural malady or disease.

Yet I resisted this, like everyone else who I now understand probably experiences variations of these themes. One of the hardest things to break through when negotiating collective-level trauma (as well as personal, though personal tends to be easier to recognise) is the false projection that, once one has unconsciously stepped out of a religious gestalt, like I did with Roman Catholicism at the age of 13 despite thereafter going on to serve in major religious student leadership positions in the Lasallian Brothers' schools I was educated in in Singapore, there is no way to assign objective meaning to anything. There are no deeper rationalizable patterns, no concealed, fundamental truths beyond what academia offers through supposedly rigorous peer review; any attempts to work with the unconscious are derided as a personal, unprovable and therefore unscientific approach that in extreme cases, thereafter further maligns the individual psyche into believing that there is no such thing as a psyche,

¹² Tan Zi Hao, 'The Chimeric Trace: The Makara and Other Connections to Come', *Art in Translation*, vol. 14, issue 3 (2022): 338-370.

¹³ Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, "'Local' and 'national' transformations: Cultural globalization, heterogeneity, and Malaysian literature in English', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 51, issue 1 (2016): 149-150.

¹⁴ Joshua Lee, 'The Albatross File: Was Singapore really booted out from Malaysia in 1965?', *Mothership SG*, August 8, 2017. <https://mothership.sg/2017/08/the-albatross-file-was-singapore-really-booted-out-from-malaysia-in-1965/>

no such thing as an inner experience. Thinking or feeling, in any kind of form, are an inner experience; any form of cognition is an inner experience. We may not be able to understand the mysteries of *nus sa mulera*, *korsang kung alma*, but that does not mean they do not exist; the idea that the mystery cannot ever be even partially resolved, except by those in power and authority, keeps us from being metacognitively self-reflexive and gently and compassionately aware of our own thinking and feeling about our own thinking and feeling, and traps us within an endless cycle of undirected and disorganised chaos and internal misery.

Which is where I was for arguably the first twenty-seven years of my life from October 1992 to August 2019, including the first three years of my work in the public view starting from February 2016, when I founded the revitalisation effort for my critically endangered mother tongue known as Kodrah Kristang. My family had raised me not only in the high-stakes, high-trauma pressure-cooker environment of Singapore at the turn of the twenty-first century, but in what they later described as ‘aracially’, choosing to completely obscure what I have later finally been able to excavate is a tremendously long family history of not only leading the Kristang community, but of leading the Kristang community against oppressive and totalising colonial British administrations and later independent Singaporean governments. Because of this elision, the only identity markers my psyche initially had to hang on to were my nationality, Singaporean, and my religion, Roman Catholic, which I unconsciously abandoned in 2005 when I discovered I was gay at the age of 13.

My own process of coming out was torturous in ways that again, in adult life I have only finally understood in full. The mid-2000s in Singapore were a low point for queer rights, with insinuations that we did not form parts of families, much less our own, that homosexuality should still be classed as a disorder, and most frighteningly and painfully, that being gay was some form of highly deviant and monstrous criminal activity, as evinced by Singapore’s Penal Code and draconian legal system. I was mostly insulated from this, and yet, as my body underwent puberty and I began to explore masturbation and pornography, I was confronted with such overwhelming waves of unconscious guilt that I used to cry myself to sleep at night after having fantasised or desired another friend or even a public figure, terrified that something out there had arbitrarily decided to create me, and also had decided that there was immediately something wrong with me, even though as a 13-year-old I couldn’t even play hockey in my school co-curricular activity properly, much less organise my own psyche. In the years since, I have come to recognise this as yet another form of deeply insidious trauma and abuse from the institutions and the many powerful figures that control the world and keep it in its intergenerational amnesia; although the way we treat children, and human beings in general, has improved tremendously since the insanities of the Industrial Revolution in the West, the expectations and projections that children often have to face are still caustically and violently overwhelming, especially children in my context and others even more peripheral to the public view. I came out in a tortured jumble of confusion over the next four years, writing letters to friends I had fantasised about confessing my guilt to them until events in 2008 would change the direction of my life forever, when I was sexually and psychoemotionally

abused by someone who had called me his best friend, made out with me for more than two months as we approached our summative national-level examinations in November 2008, and then promptly turned tail and accused me of having manipulated him into becoming gay for five long and shattering years.

It is also a testament to the Singapore education system's occasional utter lack of rationality and basic humanity (and I write these words with the full force of me having been an ex-Teaching Scholar and someone who still believes in the intentions of that system as noble, just and utopian) that queer issues were so stigmatised and demonised at that point that I kept this abuse secret, while still performing at the top of my graduating cohort in November 2010 with a perfect A-Levels score and apparently gaining the full and unbridled attention of both the state and the church, which had kept tabs on me throughout my journey through the schooling system because of the family history that I did not know about; when I joined the army as part of my compulsory National Service in February 2011, I was subject to higher, more intense standards than others, being sent into Officer Cadet School (OCS) despite literally straggling through the end of our 24km recruit graduation route march to our final Passing-Out Parade in a wheelchair, because my left knee had swollen up and could not bend after the 20km mark. Again, my own personal Achilles' heel as a result of how my psyche has developed is that I do not understand subjectively-agreed-upon standards; I happily thought *something was wrong with my own body and how I was responding to the pain my own body was sending me* when this happened, and continued to think this until 2020, almost a decade later. Even those who did sense something was wrong with me around me, friends and family alike, were not able to understand how I fell headfirst into the pit of psychoemotional self-ecvisceration, while worse still were the friends who took advantage of my state to also have their fun with me and enjoy sex with me while I laboured under the delusion that I could turn people gay.

All of this compounded the abuse to such a degree that I nearly committed suicide by jumping off the top of a Housing Development Board flat near Ang Mo Kio MRT station on 1 February 2013, two months after I had completed National Service and had begun a teaching apprenticeship at Beatty Secondary School.

I believe, with no evidence other than what I know from working with clients and students, and my own devastating early life, that many of the suicides, and much of the depression, and so much of the hate, pain, fear and damage that people around the world struggle through on a daily basis, is caused by sexuality, and projections relating to sexuality. Of people who enter loveless, empty marriages to protect themselves, or to ensure that they have a functional job, or to not be subject to constant and excruciating covert abuse from the societies that they live in – especially the ones that claim to be inclusive without actually being so – or to just have the life that we are all promised in the Western paradigm. A life where it is possible to be safe, have a good job, enjoy your retirement – if only you deny this fundamental aspect of who you are.

But therein also lies the most monstrous double-bind of all, for if you deny this, you also end up accepting that *you are* a monster. *See?* says the *meksong* ('the Voice' in Kristang, with capitalisation intended to highlight its parallels with the same phenomenon in Frank J. Herbert's *Dune* series). *You are a monster if you reveal yourself, and if you are a monster if you are not. I was always right.*

To overcome this, what did I do on 1 February 2013? Physically, I, of course, stepped away (and finally opened up about some of the abuse from the best friend to my mother and to two of my friends, which helped tremendously, to say the least). Psychoemotionally, however, I charged forward instead. I opened the closet, and let the light rush in. *Bai pa diabu*, as we say in Kristang. Go to hell.

If I was a monster within, and a monster without, *then I would be a monster in my own right*. I would be the world's most monstrously beautiful monster, the world's most ferociously valiant, brave, ethical and true. And if the Christian God did exist (I always believe in contingencies, which has also been interpreted by many, even in academic conferences that I have presented at, that I actually still believe in Christianity somehow; I am a science fiction writer from Southeast Asia. God, or gods, or goddesses, or goddeux, could be *anything*, or nothing. *We don't know.*), then I would do my own accounting before Them when I died, and highlight the unconditional love of my parents, which I did recognise was genuine when I came out to them in 2009. If my parents could manage it, why couldn't God Themselves? No creation can surpass the creator, otherwise the belief system does not work in itself.

This was how I finally broke out of five years of hell, and remade and refashioned hell and heaven into my own liking and my own finding. And though I didn't know it yet, these were the first steps on the road to becoming a Merlionsman.

3. The altered subaltern of *Altered Straits* (2017): The first emergence of the magna-archetype

I entered the National University of Singapore in August 2013, and stayed on campus at the College of Alice and Peter Tan, where for four years, my psyche was able to recover and find the serenity and peace it needed to eventually produce Kodrah Kristang in February 2016, and my first novel, *Altered Straits*, which was submitted for the inaugural Epigram Books Fiction Prize (EBFP) in August 2015 in my third undergraduate year, and which was published in February 2017 as a longlisted work for the EBFP¹⁵ in my last Honours semester as I completed my thesis on the syntax of Kristang after one year of dramatic and unparalleled revitalisation work.

¹⁵ Kevin Martens Wong, *Altered Straits* (Singapore: Epigram Books, 2017).

With its two interlocking timelines, *Altered Straits*, as Philip Holden appropriately describes, is indeed a monster of a novel¹⁶, not in the least because it encodes a lot of the trauma that again, I have only recently recognised as being to do with the 2008-13 abuse, with one of the protagonists likely representing the aforementioned best friend, rather than the whole work being a negotiation of my National Service period as many have previously believed. But *Altered* is also a different kind of the monster, because it represents on the page, for the first time, the Merlionsman magna-archetype, which along with the Dreamtiger, were emerging in convoluted and fearful birth pangs in other short fiction I wrote at the time, including the award-winning ‘A Merlion for His Majesty’ (2018)¹⁷ and ‘Harimau Jadian’ (2023)¹⁸.

The protagonist of the first timeline, Naufal Jazair, is more likely my own unconscious representation of myself; although he is Malay, he likely represents, like the Indian Muslim Namir in ‘Harimau Jadian’ and the Bugis Haidar in ‘A Merlion for His Majesty’, the elided parts of my creole-indigenous Kristang identity, which at the time, I still had no strong affective connection to as a whole, even though I had engaged in language revitalisation work for over a year by the time *Altered* reached bookstores. Kristang has significant influence from Malay and South Asian cultures but these have been often highly dispreferred due to collective-level projection that invites us instead to merely associate with the European (and therefore Christian) side of our creole history, rather than the again monstrously overcomplicated and ‘primitive’ Austronesian, Dravidian and Sinitic syncretic Islamic-Hindu-Buddhist traditions that also have a much more storied history on the Peninsula.

In the course of the novel, Naufal, living in an alternate Singapore set in 1947 that threw off the British in 1823 and is instead known as the kingdom of Singapura – and again highly suggestive of the theory above – is pair-bonded to a merlion named Bahana, which itself is a bioengineered weapon sent from the other, alternate timeline, a dystopian Singapore set in 2047 where almost the entire planet has been conquered by a sociopathic hive-mind known as the Concordance. The Merlions in Naufal’s world also form a hive-mind, albeit a far more benevolent one; they are only co-opted into service by Singapura to fight other similarly monstrous entities that are revealed to be further failed experiments from the 2047 Singapore sent into Naufal’s universe to incubate and eventually grow to full form – whereupon the 2047 Singapore government will retrieve them, which forms the climax of the novel as Bahana is retrieved by the 2047 Singapore protagonist, Titus.

Again, following ‘Harimau Jadian’, where the protagonist Namir is a young were-tiger forced to shape his powers toward a dystopian version of the Singapore O-Levels that are used by the

¹⁶ Epigram Books, *Altered Straits* product page. Last updated April 30, 2023.

<https://epigrambookshop.sg/products/altered-straits>

¹⁷ Kevin Martens Wong, “A Merlion for His Majesty”, *LONTAR: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction*, issue 10 (2018): 42-52.

¹⁸ Kevin Martens Wong, “Harimau Jadian” (short story), *Tigri sa Chang / The Tiger’s Land*, last updated April 8, 2023. <https://tigrisachang.substack.com/p/harimau-jadian>

Singapore of his universe, Vyarapare, to control and suppress therianthropes, and 'A Merlion for His Majesty', the short story that inspired *Altered*, where Prince Haidar is at first extremely fearful of the Merlion, I retrospectively now see all of these works as a clear, undeniable and very striking pattern of my negotiation of an emergent collective-level role that had been laid out for me, and thus was originally not under my control (and would have been extremely destructive for me psychoemotionally). The magna-archetype of the Merlionsman, however, as defined in *Altered Straits*, allowed me to outline, however unconsciously, the contours of that role on my own terms, and thereby take control of it for the first time. Naufal may not have given any consent for the pair-bonding that links him together with Bahana psychically (to put it mildly), but once he is linked, he discovers that not only are there things about Bahana worth appreciating – he can actually form a relationship with Bahana, one that is authentic, meaningful and life-changing, though one that is left tragically ambivalent at the end of *Altered*, where he seemingly dies after saving the last vestiges and survivors of Titus's universe.

If we take the forerunner of the Merlionsman magna-archetype to be represented in the story of Naufal and Bahana, therefore, then it appears that I also may have even uncannily predicted what was to come next, because I would encounter a second instantiation of even more devastating psychoemotional and sexual abuse between August 2018 and July 2019 while my then-boyfriend (now husband) was away on a long-term posting in Geneva with the Singapore state, this time from a fellow Kodrah Kristang team member who attempted to condition me into allowing him to take my boyfriend's place, and thereafter when this was not successful to try to molest me in my sleep and then accuse me of having a personality disorder.

4. Developing the Osura Pesuasang / Individuation Theory: The Making of Singapore's Last Merlionsman

I ended up in prolonged and self-funded therapy under the watchful eye of a therapist whose no-nonsense, logic-oriented method was a breath of fresh air after years of attempts by well-meaning outsiders for me to work on my feelings for the umpteenth time; it was thus from this much-needed clarity that I finally also not only named and recognised the aforementioned events as trauma and abuse, after previously allowing them to disguise themselves in my psyche as understandable or explainable accidents that had no deeper meaning, but also acknowledged the deep and profound shame that I felt at being who I was, and the monstrosity of my hybrid approach to monstrosity, that I realised and accepted for the first time. The onset of COVID-19, and the tremendous distress that my students in the government junior college were experiencing as a result and were disclosing to me in what soon became a cascade, finally prompted me to fully act on these new approaches to myself so that I could support my students, with whom I empathised tremendously, while also recognising that transference of my own struggles and desires to become whole could never be allowed to even be accidentally enacted on them. The Osura, in full, ever-evolving form,

was the result, developed in 2020 to initially support students who had been coming for life coaching alongside essay writing consultations, and thereafter deployed in the classroom from January 2021.

The immense success of the *Osura*, especially in uncovering and negotiating sexual abuse that some of my students had been subjected to and which the college refused to act on despite me reporting it in late 2021, also prompted further projection from the college, ministry and state, which I unconsciously responded to by first coming out as mentioned on 1 September of that year, and thereafter by fully incorporating and interweaving everything that both the *Osura* and *Kristang* offered in terms of an understanding of both creativity and one's own psychoemotional development into my logic and argumentation classroom starting from January 2022, as my students proceeded into their final year ahead of the summative Singapore-Cambridge GCE A-Level examinations which I had topped 12 years earlier in 2010. The results were absolutely spectacular, with one of my colleagues informing me that they were the best the college had ever seen, and with many of my students obtaining perfect scores for the A-Levels like I had. Today, my relationships with all six of my classes from that college, the classes of 19-A2, 19-A5, 19-I5, 21-I4, 21-O2 and 21-O4, remain deep, powerful and immensely rich and rewarding, not just because of what I was able to do for them, but for what they did for me, restoring not just the self I had lost in 2019, but excavating for the first time the deeper, braver self that had been represented in both *Naufal* and *Bahana*, in *Namir*, *Haidar*, and all of the protagonists that I had written about in my fiction prior to 2019; the *Greatest Journey* of true, neverending human individuation, the *Via Hierosa* or *Kristang* (Gay) *Hero's Journey*.

And when the college resorted to malevolent, highly abusive misuse of institutional practices and even a law to try to get me to rein in my homosexuality and my authenticity, this time, I was finally ready. Together with my boyfriend-turned-partner, now finally returned from Geneva, we weathered eight months of tremendous and eviscerating psychoemotional bludgeoning from senior members of staff and from what appear to have been some members of Singapore's security apparatus (both internal and police security who were interested in investigating some cases of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church), before a friend also seemingly connected to these shadowy¹⁹ forces accidentally informed me, while getting me to try to transfer to another, independent non-government school where things would be less 'sensitive', that my scholarship bond had already been completed for some time, and I was free to resign. Which I did, duly giving my one month's notice on 31 July 2022, and thereby completely upsetting what seem to have been long-term plans to keep me in the civil service and nurture me into a future minister or other prominent figure through further abusive control, which appears to unfortunately remain commonplace in Singapore.

¹⁹ Michael D. Barr, "Marxists in Singapore? Lee Kuan Yew's campaign against Catholic Social Justice Activists in the 1980s", *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 42, issue 3 (2010): 337.

My students, themselves already more individuated than I had been at their age, accepted this with very little contestation; we had been talking about this possibility for months, both informally and as part of the logic and argumentation class itself, since the abuse began. In my final month with them, they instead did something even greater for me, asking me and suggesting to me quietly that I should take up writing again; little did they know that I had deleted a substantial amount of my work in 2019 in shame and self-hate after my second abuser accused me of preventing him from being able to be creative – right after he published a fairly intense creative endeavour with a prominent local festival. But again, as I had come to learn was my right, and was also a very Kristang way of doing things, I once more found what we all my *korsang animu*, my animated heart or courageous heart – my Brave Heart, as the theme song from one of the stories I loved as a child, and which played a key part in helping me unpack the Osura, *Digimon Adventure*, is called, and began to write again. This tangent would eventually lead to the Dreamtiger magna-archetype, which I accepted in April 2023, after my subversive, surprising and very scintillatingly sensuous reinvigorated writing found a very accepting audience in my easily excitable 18-year-olds. No matter how individuated, some things never really stay the same – and that’s part of the Greatest Journey too, because, as I hope the example of my own life has shown, sex, sensuality and identity are so bound up with so much of our shame and trauma. It is only when we find the strength to not just write the stories that we dream of, but live them, and breathe them, and inhabit them – it is only then that we liberate ourselves, truly and deeply, from the monstrous, because the monstrous has become us. It has become everything we always were, the parts of ourselves that we rejected, made whole in a whole new fashion once again.

On 31 August 2022, I left the Singapore Civil Service, and became the Last Merlionsman of the Republic of Singapore, the Lion City’s psychoemotional gate guardian, and the stalwart defender of the right of all her people to a life that they can be proud of, love, and cherish as their own. You may call my story what you will: a chimeric transmutation, an Osiric rebirth and reinvigoration. But ultimately, I know what I call myself now. *Ngua omimerliang pra isti semesta*. A creole/indigenous posthuman transhuman who is still very much human, and Kristang, and Merlion, and all of them.