

## **Panel 2**

### **Reimagining Poetry, Modern Media, and Interdisciplinary Engagements**

#### **The Nature of Neurons and Human Consciousness: Synaptic Connections Between Biology and Contemporary Poetry**

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According to the poet Jane Hirshfield, “Making a poem...is a way for new thinking and feeling to come into existence, the way in which disparate modes of meaning and being may join” (Hirshfield 16, *Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry*). It is in this way that the relationship between biology and poetry is literalized through synaptic connections in Diane Ackerman’s and Pattiann Rogers’s poetry. This paper analyzes three poems that discuss various forms of signaling: biological, environmental and human. Regardless of context, the mechanism of signaling includes reception and interpretation. Synaptic connections in biology represent the nexus of this signaling process, with Ackerman and Rogers utilizing the structure of a neuron to illuminate the connections between mind and body, as well as between humanity and Nature. Ackerman’s “Nightletter in Semaphore” (1978) deciphers the signals of neurons, exploring their secret, hidden language in the brain using imagery from Nature. Rogers’s “The Brain Creates Itself” (1981) and “How the Body in Motion Affects the Mind” (1981) focus on how the development of self-consciousness in the mind occurs through one’s exposure to Nature. By paralleling the aforementioned types of signaling, I argue that Ackerman and Rogers highlight the inextricable embeddedness of humans within Nature, where the creation of our minds and bodies is dependent upon and sustained by our ties to Nature. Overall, I aim to discuss how these biological concepts in poetry expand our understanding of mind-making and reconfigure the human-Nature relationship.

#### **Biography**

Jasmine Tan Hui Jun is a Part-time Lecturer at the School of Humanities in Nanyang Technological University and has a Master of Arts in English Literature from the same institution. She is currently pursuing her PhD in English Literature at the University of Birmingham and is the Singapore Asia regional representative for The Commission on Science and Literature (CoSciLit). Jasmine researches on contemporary poetry and the natural sciences, with a focus on biology and ecology. She has also published essays in edited collections on popular culture, science fiction, ecocriticism and monster theory.