SOUTHEAST ASIAN REVIEW OF ENGLISH

No. 3 Dec 1981 KDN 0692/81 ISSN 0127-046X

Cover: ANAK ASIA III — 1981
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SOUTHEAST ASIAN REVIEW OF ENGLISH

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Single copy: local M$6.00, abroad US$4.00. Subscription: members M$10.00, others M$12 local, US$7.50 abroad; institution M$14.00 local, US$8.50 abroad.

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A Guide to Canadian Fiction

W.H. New

How to take a panoramic view of Canadian fiction in 1981? Fifty or sixty years ago it would not have seemed an impossible thing to do, and in fact many critics during the first thirty years of the twentieth century did exactly that. They reflected mightily on the growth of a nation, the nurturing of a culture, a society's advance into the future—all in prose that sounded as though it were written in capital letters. I suppose it would be possible to do the same today, but I am strongly conscious of the problems that attend such an approach, and they serve to dissuade. I am convinced that literature and society are related to each other — hence I believe those earlier commentators were right to have connected the growth of their society with the nurturing of a culture, though perhaps they assumed too simplistic a relation. Writers need not use their writings to celebrate the local social establishment or express the moral status quo. But they cannot help but write out of their own experience, and their perspective will be affected, whether they accept the values of their society consciously or not, by the systems of social priorities that operate around them. Thus Canada's occasional nationalism will show up in literature, as will its regional variations, its civil service sensibilities, its engagement with irony, its eighteenth century roots, its American ties, its official bilingualism, its laconic speech patterns, its attitudes to women and children, and many attributes besides. Yet to have identified these attributes is not necessarily to have written a literary appreciation; to have developed these cultural traits is not equivalent to acquiring a uniform national culture; and to have recognized a set of either social or literary patterns is not to have defined the independent worlds that the most able writers will have made.

Which brings me to a division of critical paths. There are two results that critics chiefly seek: political and aesthetic. They often make them mutually exclusive, though that need not follow. But in practice to seek a sociological result will mean investigating and placing a value on a number of works that will not seem significant aesthetically. And vice-versa: many works that will be claimed as aesthetically pure will seem to have little to do with "real life" — either with the daily events of a society or with the political realities that surround and possibly shape them. To seek one *or* the other is not my concern here; but clearly readers who wish to pursue the subject of nationalism and social structure, for example, or those who want to trace literary history, will find a plentiful body of material among works that much current Canadian criticism now involves itself with but essentially considers "background" to the major accomplishments.

Some of these works include nineteenth century romances, like John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1932) and William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877) or early feminist novels, like Frances Brooke's articulate epistolary piece (the first novel written in North America) *The History of Emily Montague* (1769). They include the enthusiastic Presbyterian didactic tales of Ralph Connor, the nationalist clerical tracts of Lionel Groulx and Jules-Paul Tardivel, the late Imperial elegies of Mazo de la Roche, a string of records of immigrant adaptations, and another string of realistic *Bildungsromane*. Among these works I would place the Andersonian stories of Morley Callaghan, too, which have been justifiably praised for their moral seriousness, but unwisely applauded for their style — which is *not*, as has been claimed, an "accurate" rendering of tough "American" street speech, and which *does* slide off altogether too easily into the arch and the maudlin. A more useful guide than Callaghan to the world of the Paris expatriates, moreover, is John Glassco's brittle but haunting autobiography *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970). But most importantly, the "background" works include a series of non-fiction pieces (in itself neither coherent nor unblemished) which has stimulated subsequent writers to respond: Samuel Hearne's *A Journey from Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean* (1975), Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It In The Bush* (1852), Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck* (1941), and the diaries of Louis Riel and William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Not enough has yet been written on why these five figures should have become literary talismans in Canadian culture, but repeatedly Canadian authors have been fascinated by their

small successes and grand failures, their public image and their double lives. They make a heterogeneous group: an arctic explorer who witnessed a massacre and could (or would) do nothing about it; an educated gentlewoman who at least physically gave up England, who followed her husband (as her "duty") to a difficult life in the Canadian bush, and who found then that she had also to acquire degrees of self-reliance and to give up some elements of English class-consciousness; a landscape painter who kept a monkey for a pet and who valued the metaphysics of northwest coast Indian culture; a Métis millenarian who led a 19th century separatist movement; a dour bachelor prime minister who believed in spiritualism. They are not the only figures to emerge from Canadian history into Canadian literature, but by doing so — repeatedly — they have almost acquired the dimensions of myth. They no longer carry about them just their historicity, but have become figurative representations of their history, and of the images and attitudes that within their society have come to carry resonant meaning. I am not saying that Canadians are all secret spiritualist. I am saying that that the society has had to redefine its inherited notion of civilization in order to accommodate its connection with wilderness; and that (as George Woodcock remarked in his biography of Riel's lieutenant, *Gabriel Dumont*) Canadians seem less attracted to Adamic heroes than Americans, for example, are, and more attracted to the failed visionaries of a postlapsarian world; and further, that (as Robertson Davies has declared) Canadians tend to hide their passions behind sober masks, to endorse magus figures as their most revered and reviled political leaders, and they use their laconic voices to document hidden stories and orchestrate ironies. What began, then, as a set of historical events is transformed not just into a set of literary themes, but more subtly into the indirect techniques of literary methodology. The contemporary novelist Robert Kroetsch keeps reiterating that the problem for the Canadian writer is not having a story to tell, but *how to tell the story*. The language is elusive, the appropriate forms fluid. But the good writers are those who have found some way of using them.

I speak, of course, of English language writing in Canada, though the predicaments and the techniques are not unknown in the other languages as well. Among francophone Canadian novelists, I therefore omit mentioning many talented writers, such as Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, Roch Carrier, Jacques Ferron. Less appreciated inside the country — though there are large audiences for such writers outside the country — is the fact that there are substantial numbers of works written in other languages as well. Canada's is a multicultural society in flux, and the literature reflects its current volatility. Some of these writers that we refer to as "multicultural" are native Indians (using languages from 14 different language groups) and Inuit; many others emigrated from elsewhere and often brought their literary reputation as well as their language and cultural training with them: Josef Skvorecky, for example, one of the finest and most political of current writers in Czech. There are writers who have written in German (William Bauer, for example, or for that matter Frederick Philip Grove in his earlier identity as Felix Paul Greve), in Hungarian (George Faludy), in Icelandic (Stefan Stefansson), in Ukrainian (Illia Kiriak); there are literary coteries with Chilean, South Asian, East Asian, and other backgrounds. There are, as well, many immigrant writers who write in French or English: Naim Kattan (with his Jewish-Iraqi roots), Austin Clarke and Samuel Selvon (from Barbados and Trinidad), Brian Moore (who arrived from Ulster, wrote *The Luck of Ginger* Coffey (1960) and other works, took out Canadian citizenship, and promptly left for the United States), Max Dorsinville (from Haiti), Audrey Thomas, Jane Rule, Clark Blaise and Leon Rooke (all from the United States), Bharati Mukherjee (from India, one of the finest of contemporary stylists in Canada, though she is currently resident in New York State). There have been visitors of some literary standing — Joyce Carol Oates, Malcolm Lowry — who came and went; there have been Canadians by accident of birth (like Wyndham Lewis) and there have been writers who emigrated to Canada only to become silent (like Judith Merril). Cultural patterns are, in other words, complex, which complicate the task of writing an overview, which negate a lot of thematic declarations concerning Canadian literary uniqueness, which undermine much generalization about the social basis for literary *topoi*, and which necessarily fragment a lot of commentary on writers' accomplishments.

So perhaps I am reduced once more to personal bias. There are many works of Canadian fiction that I enjoy reading, for different reasons. I value their differences. Because they invite consideration from various angles, one can also stretch them into a guide to anglophone fiction in Canada, but their essential value lies in their separate accomplishment, and in the degree to which they sustain a pleasurable rereading. That said, they also give voice to some of the recurrent motifs I spoke about earlier: the encounter between wilderness and civilization, the play with masks and maguses, the fascination with independence and grand failure. It is not their sole — or even necessarily their main — function, but it serves as a way of provisionally structuring an impulsively eclectic body of literature.

Start, then, with Sara Jeannette Duncan, one of those turn-of-the-century writers torn between fashion and conscience, between British Imperial Tradition and personal independence, between patriarchal political structures and substantially feminist observation — for whom literature was a means of essaying opinion and to whom the reprint industry has not paid enough attention. Many of her reportorial articles are now in print, and an accomplished period piece called *The Imperialist* (1904), but none of the trans-Atlantic mannered comedies (in the style of Edith Wharton) or the novels set in India, where she lived most of her adult life. She warrants reading. Though *The Imperialist* contrives to end too neatly (for the most part sorting out its matched pairs of lovers), this closing artifice should not blind us to the strengths of the novel or the predicament of the novelist. Clearly she begins by having her hero espouse an Imperial cause and connection that she herself felt drawn to, but as he novel develops, the characters and ideas take precedence: neither events nor her hero can justify the cause, and he ends up excluded from the neat ending. She writes, then, a somewhat wistful note about the tenor of the times, but by committing herself to the internal logic of her story and her characters, Duncan shaped a far stronger and more subtle political narrative than would otherwise seem to have been possible. Her hero Lorne Murchison asserts the virtues of an absolute connection with Britain. But it won't convince. The focus of the novel shifts to his younger sister, who observes everything with a shrewd eye and a caustic tongue. Her wit — like the novelist's, a way of leavening political pretence and daily reality — imparts to the book a way of reading the book: the tone shapes the meaning we must infer. As all the major characters loosen their public commitment to systems of absolute value, they reveal their dedication to the practicable systems of relative values which they have privately comprehended all along. The problem with these new systems, and the new sense of criticism they articulate, is that they are variously moral as well as practicably realistic. But as the author makes clear, this dilemma does not at the same time imply that the old absolutes (either for the old Europe or the new Canada) were any *more* moral. Hence the new society inherits wilderness, irony, and the twentieth century all at once, and the author, with the aloof tonal wit of the conservative stylist, makes political capital of it all.

Later writers were to take some of the same tensions and (with more associative styles) explore further the psychology of wilderness and irony in the twentieth century mind. The passion for wilderness has often emerged in Canadian writing merely as a descriptive fascination with landscape, resulting in the endemic critical assumption of geographical determinism. A change of some substance occurred in the writings of Malcolm Lowry — in *Under the Volcano* (1947),for example, which uses the mountainous Mexican landscape (and its Cordilleran extension into British Columbia) as an extension and a symbolic embodiment of a man's mind as his personal life crumbles and political events and alcohol consume him. *Under the Volcano* adopts a circular, cinematic, flash-back technique to document both the literal and the symbolic downfall of its central character; a later work, *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* (posthumously published in 1961), contrives in some ways to be formally more experimental as it tries that more difficult of literary tasks: to document the halting growth of happiness. An interrelated group of short stories (constituting yet another version, therefore, of a literary form in high profile in Canadian writing, observable in works by D.C. Scott, Leacock, Hood, Hodgins, Munro, George Elliott, and many others), *Hear Us* explores a series of separate identities for a man called Wilderness, who suffers natural disasters, mental dislocation, and an

alienating re-entry into Europe, but survives. In his last, unnamed — avatar, perhaps? — he even discovers a harmonious connection with the natural environment of the North Pacific Coast. Despite life's terrors and threats, that is , he finds he can live. What Lowry asserted for the country Canada — that in wilderness, not in its mock Europeanism, lay its true soul — he here works out in literary metaphor, and the final story of the sequence, emblematically called "The Forest Path to The Spring", sustains an eloquent prose lyric that is both a personal and pantheistic testament and a public declaration of the possibility of an equable society.

Other writers, too, have sought to plumb the wilderness soul, though — particularly with recent writers, like Richard Wright, David Adams Richards, Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel, and George Bowering — they have found there more violence than happiness. At the very least there is an ambivalence about the discovery, most admirably articulated in works like Rudy Wiebe's "Where Is The Voice Coming From?" and *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973), Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands* (1975), and Matt Cohen's *Flowers of Darkness* (1981). The re-emergence of Indian themes in Canadian writing in the 1970's — portraying the Indian no longer as a savage but more often as a troubled shaman — accompanies this fascination with the psychosocial wildernesses of contemporary life. The characters who emerge in many of these works, moreover — like Chief Big Bear himself, for example — convey a powerful sense of estrangement. Traditions around them appear to be being disrupted, fragmented, while they watch — by the speed of change, the power of relativism, and the waves of a more persuasive cultural force. Where in such a flux, they wonder, do values lie? They themselves, perhaps, once embodied them, but if the rituals become empty or if they wither when the keepers of the rituals attempt to step beyond them, their power wanes. Their culture then seeks — perhaps actively, perhaps passively — for a new magus to spell out their harmony for them again.

The clearest example of the magus figure in Canadian writing is the Jungian magician at the centre of Robertson Davies' enigmatic and urbane novel *Fifth Business* (1970), the first work in his trilogy about the reintegration of an identity/society, set in Europe, Caribbean America, and small-town Presbyterian Ontario. The fact that the "European" magician is really a small-town Ontario boy who has cultivated a mask to present to the world is germane to Davies' purpose. The twin question asks, moreover, is whether people can distinguish between their *mask* (or "persona") and their *self*, and whether they are aware of the components that go into the making of a "*self*." The magus figure, which offers a glimpse of order, of harmony, presents a challenge, therefore, both for the other characters in the compelling narrative, who struggle with the strange edges to their mundane lives, and for the reader, who must distinguish between order and the illusion of order. Illusion, as much as order, in fact, is Davies' subject; the story-teller himself becomes the magician, contriving a reality that captivates, instructs, illumines but is a fiction. The essential paradox here — of the potential for the fiction, the lie, to tell truths — invites the critic even with this most traditional of recent novels, to enter the swampy terrain of deconstructionist interpretation. But the role of the writer as magician is an old one and should not be unduly marvelled at. (Frederick Philip Grove saw himself in this role and invented himself anew in his "autobiography" *In Search of Myself*.) Nor should we be surprised that the magus figure should recur through Canadian prose narrative.

Other clear examples include the various diviners in Margaret Laurence's psychosocial history *The Diviners* (1974): Royland, who locates water; Christie, who tells tales of the European connection; Jules, who sings of the Métis roots; Morag, who ostensibly writes the novel we are reading; and therefore Laurence herself. Jack Hodgins' ebulliently comic account of the rebirth of an island community — *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* (1979) (the name "Bourne" is rich with multiple meanings) — is likewise full of characters capable of effecting transformations: particularly the mysterious woman who redeems the town from its superficiality and sterility. Coyote, in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959), performs some of the same mysterious balancing functions; and one might trace other versions of the illusionist from the garrulous, effective Yankee pedlar Sam Slick, in Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* (1836), through Stephen Leacock's most accomplished portrait, the sly grog merchant-*cum*-small-town politician named (suitably evasively) Smith, in *Sunshine Sket-*

ches of a Little Town (1912), to the minor figures in Hugh Hood's sketch cycle, *Around the Mountain* (1967), and W.O. Mitchell's evocation of a prairie boyhood, *Who Has Seen The Wind* (1947), to characters like the unconventional healer Jerome Martell, in Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends The Night* (1959), or Conrad Dehmel, the unconventional soldier in MacLennan's futurist warning of neofascist bureaucracy, *Voices in Time* (1980). Always these characters retain a little of their mystery at the end of the narratives they move through. Their effect is upon others, whom we are asked to understand more clearly. It is Timothy Wellfleet, for example, the aptly named, well-meaning, but largely ineffectual historian, upon whom we focus in *Voices in Time*, and George Stewart, the soporific political commentator in *The Watch That Ends The Night*. It is they who constitute the ordinary,and who are given anew a grasp at peace and for perhaps only a brief moment a power to see and to act.

But these, too, might be illusions, and there are more writers still for whom the failure to achieve harmony or insight is the more central, more compelling political and psychological subject. Here we may simply be distinguishing between essentially idealist and essentially ironic conventions — which does not mean that the "idealist" works are without irony, but rather suggests that they close with an eye on possibility, whereas the others close more with a sense of exclusion. Dave Godfrey's work is torn between these two, torn between cultural desire and cultural observation, the resulting tension affecting the tone his work adopts and swinging the narrative stance from celebration to sardonic critique. A prototypical note can be heard in the title of his essay "East and/or West." His *I Ching Kanada* (1976), in a series of reflective apothegms, sounds his faith in the capacity of his culture to persevere, despite obstacles; yet *Death Goes Better With Coca-Cola* (1967), for example (the title an acid inversion of a commercial American jingle) — with a particularly fine closing story, an ironically inverted quest myth called "The Hard-Headed Collector" — and a highly tempered, occasionally febrile novel set in Africa, *The New Ancestors* (1971), fasten on the obstacles instead, quoting Konrad Lorenz on aggression and sociological theorists on the expansion of imperialist states and the survival of the conquered.

These works demonstrate the passionate and most recent height of Canada's anti-Americanism in the late 1960's, and the degree of its intellectual identification with the third world. (At one level Pierre Vallières, writing about Quebec, caused a stir when he spoke of the people as "nègres blancs d'Amérique"; at another level entirely, Margaret Laurence wrote in *A Political Art:* "Are Canadian writers third world writers? In a cultural sense. . .yes. . .Canadian writers, like African writers, have had to find our own voices and write out of what is truly ours, in the face of an overwhelming cultural imperialism.") As well as political sensitivity, that is, Godfrey's work shows a concern for the authenticity of the language that should energize a work of art. A novel like *The New Ancestors* was part of a general Canadian literary shift in the 1960's towards a less linear fiction, an attempt to use a fragmented form both to reflect the disparities of the world being portrayed and to articulate a way of holding the disparities in an active understanding. Sounding simultaneously are the despairing cries of a disintegrating sensibility and the celebratory voices of a politically alive culture that appreciates the rituals (the symbolic "ancestors") that give it — or once gave it — its sustenance. But still there remains the tension. For simply because an author is sensitive to a sustaining ritual does not mean that he can alter the historical occurrences which might be overriding it. And knowing this does not make his art easier to write or bear; as Malcolm Lowry puts it in the title of one of his best short stories, there is "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession." Sardonically one might hazard that the only prophet such artists resemble is Cassandra.

In fact, for many of the authors who travelled beyond Canada and wrote out of their Third World experience, there developed this tension born of sensitivity. Always the quest for enlightenment that their characters go on runs up against the political realities of the present; always the rituals run awry. Their failure may not be something to emulate, nor may the amoral equation (between violence and truth) that the more extreme writers proffer be something to accept. Yet in their characters' predicament, wandering beyond the security of blind system and the insecurities of familiar life in a probably futile search for a greater order or a reconcil-

ing illumination, we can recognize the contemporary condition of dishevelled human-kind. Order is often disguised as freedom in such quests and enlightenment comes to be equated with personal desire. Margaret Laurence's African travel journal opens with the observation that the strangest glimpses one has in a foreign country are those of oneself; her neatly-resolved first novel *This Side Jordan* (1960) — more idealist than accurate about Africa, as she later came to see — fundamentally reported on her own aspirations for human connection. Political realities proved less easy to organize. The characters in Bharati Mukherjee's stylish *Wife* (1975) and Clark Blaise's terrifying "Eyes" (in *A North American Education*, 1973) also wander beyond their birth culture — to seek the promise of greater freedom, but to find the apparent inevitability of fear, to experience the certainty of alienation. Henry Kreisel's *The Rich Man* (1948) takes a man back from his modest "new" life in Canada to his European birth culture and shows him burdened by his deliberate masquerade — a failure in his own eyes if he does not appear more successful than he is, and a failure in any case because he does try to do so, because the trying involves him in living a lie. And another earlier novel, Abraham Klein's *The Second Scroll* (1951) — a brilliant chronicle of the wanderings of postwar Jewry — narrates the story of a young Canadian's vain search for his uncle Melech Davidson (another wise old man, who presumably holds for the nephew the potential for enlightenment); beneath the surface text this novel also tells of Klein's own quest for order in politics and language, a quest that led to dazzling linguistic experiments, deeply committed personal positions on faith and social justice, and — who can say for certain? — a kind of private despair that they should ever realize themselves in public order, perhaps, a privacy that closed in silence.

Clearly such quests could take place at home as well as abroad. Margaret Atwood speaks in *Surfacing* (1972) of being on "home ground, foreign territory." But she is one among many writers to make use of such a motif. Mordecai Richler takes his title character in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) out of a Jewish enclave in Catholic Montreal, puts him down among the middleclass, and isolates him both from his roots and from the Establishment; the textures are witty, sometimes even scabrous, but the agitation of the book scores rather than simply and superficially entertains. Ethel Wilson, in an admirably polished account of women's lives in the 1950's, *Swamp Angel* (1954), wrote of a woman in flight from herself, then in flight from an unsatisfactory marriage, then until she has come to terms with the fluid fact of pressure in her life, in flight from discovery. And Alice Munro, one of the most accomplished of recent stylists, has created in works like *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You* (1974), and *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) a series of subtly shaded portraits of ordinary people; reflecting on their separate lives' journeys, they find more in retrospect than in experience how disquieting their discoveries have been — or perhaps they only *acknowledge* in retrospect, and the disquiet is released upon the reader, who puts together the implications of the deliberately fragmented separate story lives.

But no writer better than Sinclair Ross, in his realistic diary-form *As For Me And My House* (1941), about a sham marital relationship, or "One's A Heifer," a mystery story involving a boy's naiveté, has probed more persuasively the ambivalence of the quest. Moral truths — justice and virtue — constitute his characters' ostensible guides through life, but always they are compromised. And the characters suffer an incredible pointless guilt because of this loss. Failures on a scale of absolutes, they achieve in place of the grand design only a degree of ordinariness, which (though they can justify their daily choices) they find it hard to accommodate in themselves. One of the problems they have is to know what it is they really want. In essence they find it hard to reconcile the idea of a relative value with the idea of a questor's goal. The *terms* collide: which is to say that their linguistic apprehension of reality — the very way they use words to articulate their relation with the world around them — appears to deny them the moral clarity they seem to desire.

While such an observation may have struck contemporary writers like Mavis Gallant and Timothy Findley as well, it does not appear to have been a conclusion with which either of them feels inclined to rest. In their world, guilt does not constitute a virtue. Findley's *The Wars* (1977) — the most accomplished novel to date in a body of work that includes TV scripts,

plays, and short stories as well — tells of the loss of ordinariness of a man named Robert Ross, who goes off from Canada to fight in World War I. At the back of his mind is a dream of the beautiful, made conscious in his love of horses; as his experience of war and of wartime authority rakes his soul and rapes his dreams, Ross is transformed from plain person into prime actor and potent symbol. But because the one last thing a bureaucracy wants in opposition to it is a noble symbol, the facts of his life are consequently obscured, fragmented, dimmed. The novel asks the reader to go through a process of sorting through "photographs" and fragmentary bits of data to reassemble the man — perhaps to "reassemble" man*kind*, for the process is as emblematic as the central character. Life — any life, it transpires — presents few hard facts to the observer, and a lot of ambivalence: all of which means that life, like a fiction, requires interpretation. The form Findley's fiction takes, however, is not (as in much earlier work) to imitate life, but to call attention to its own artifice, and by this means to suggest the inevitable artifice that is involved in human relationships. Had earlier works asserted such a conclusion, they would have decried the sterility, the lack of humanity implied by it; but here the observation does not carry such automatic echoes. It acknowledges, certainly, that they are possible; but at the same time Findley's fiction suggests a human need for masks and defences, and an accompanying need — made more fragile and more elusive by the other — for compassion. To act may be the fate and the opportunity for few in this world; life gives most the chance only to observe; but for the artist, to perceive is all (thereby to come close to *knowing*), and to create a work becomes an invitation to others to perceive in his company.

Mavis Gallant's fiction also requires this co-creative participation from the reader and for something of the same end: not to follow narrative, but to comprehend the motivations for human behaviour and to realize the need for compassion to enliven understanding. The author of two novels, novellas, and more than a hundred short stories, both collected and uncollected, Gallant has only belatedly been acknowledged and appraised — which is extraordinary, considering the substantial nature of her accomplishment. An eloquently plain stylist, she is more story-diviner than story-teller; her tales portray characters who are less experiencing crises (or even undergoing experiences in the shape of events) than coming to terms with absences and a failure of things to "happen." The diminishment of narrative perhaps explains the lack of a mass audience for her work, yet it is a literary device deliberately contrived to focus on people's "subsurface" motivations and attitudes. Behind plain exteriors there lurk raging emotional tensions that often do not find expression in action. Gallant seeks to elucidate premises rather than conclusions, to make clear the stories behind Story, the intellectual and emotional activity that is hidden beneath narrative event.

In the stories of *The Pegnitz Junction* (1973), for example, or *From the Fifteenth District* (1979), she tells tales that lead to no results, yet the tensions she reveals reverberate their way to scores of different outcomes. In one story, "The Moslem Wife," a woman who suffers through World War II and has her mind drastically altered in the duration, cannot put words to it; afterwards, therefore, she puts it all aside, surrendering what she knows to be true to the inaccurate verbal pictures which are drawn by someone else. In another, "The Latehomecomer," a German prisoner-of-war, by accident released after the others have gone home, returns to a Germany that is neither as he left it nor as he wants it to be; nor does it want him, for to the new society, he constitutes a reminder of an identity no longer prized. In a third story, a terminally-ill Englishman goes to the Riviera to spend his last days with his family — but lingers, till they instead draw away from him, and he less dies than ceases to be, perhaps (or perhaps not) forgotten. None of these is a cheering portrait. But that is scarcely the point — the point of the art (as with other contemporary writers: Blaise and Hodgins and Mukherjee, for example) lies in the way in which it renders the textures of human relationship. That is what we are invited to share in perceiving. But what then? In the absence of the fripperies of commercial entertainment, many readers would demand some other justification: a political message, a didactic moral, a reforming plan of action. Gallant supplies none of these (though there is clearly a passion for common justice and plain compassion enliven-

ing everything she writes); in their place she offers only understanding: the process of understanding is its own end, providing enlightenment only to the limited degree it ever can, or ever could.

Faced with such heterogeneity and with such sobriety, it would be rash to come to quick conclusions or narrow generalizations. Those earlier commentators I spoke of, those painters of literary panoramas, used to turn at this point from literary productivity to National Culture, and declare that Canada had just, or was just about to, come of age. Even the metaphor begged certain questions of nationalism and of literary expectation. We are no wiser now than they were, nor any more skilled with the different critical techniques we apply — for we remain, as readers, partial. If we talk of a growing national tradition in Canadian letters, we have to stay conscious of the literary variety at the same time; if we talk of recurrent motifs, we have to remind ourselves of the individuality of every good writer; if we talk of innovation and experiment, we have to balance these against history and international fashion. Yet somewhere in this morass of doctrinal temptations, there lives a commitment to art. To survey Canadian prose is to locate a number of writers whom one wants to read again because it is clear they have this commitment; and that is critical praise. With sensitivity towards human relationships, they have variously sought in fiction — critically, compassionately, formally, colloquially — a ground for human connection; with wit or with solemn utterance, through symbol and through simile, by open portraits or by avenues of indirection, they have found a way with words.

University of British Columbia

*anak asia**

mereka tidak akan mengerti
tentang kerut wajah kita dalam tidur
segala derita dunia dibawa ke ranjang malam
tak terhapus oleh suatu mimpi
berjuta pengungsi lari dari bedil dan kebengisan
tanpa perhitungan apakah lari bererti kehidupan

meski hitam atau kuning warna kulitnya
bayi itu tak berdosa untuk diwariskan keganasan
atau diajar apa ertinya kehidupan
dengan cara pembunuhan
atau dibesarkan dengan susu berbau mesiu
di bawah bayang-bayang sepatu perang

kerut-kerut wajah akan terbawa ke dalam mimpi
seperti garis-garis panjang menggerunkan
sewaktu ia bangun oleh ledakan
ia sudah dewasa
dalam bayang-bayang bergerak
dunia baginya gelap
harus diseksa dan dimusnahkan
lain tak ada pilihan

Baha Zain

**From Tiga Catatan Perjalanan (Three Sketches from a Journey), DBP, 1980.*

the children of asia*

they will never understand
our contorted faces in sleep
all the worldly sufferings that we take to bed
could never be erased by a dream
millions of refugees flee from the guns and violence
without knowing whether fleeing means survival

though black or yellow the colour of their skin
children are innocent to inherit the violence
or be taught the meaning of life
through killings
or be raised on milk with the smell of gunpowder
under the shadow of war boots

the contorted faces will drift into dreams
like long lines of terror
when they awake to the sound of explosions
they are already grown
growing up among moving shadows
the world to them is dark
should be tortured and destroyed
there is no other choice.

Baha Zain

*FORM AND FUNCTION IN MALAYSIAN ENGLISH: THE CASE OF MODALS

E. de Silva

There has been a growing interest in recent years in new varieties of or non-native varieties of English that have emerged in countries such as India, Jamaica, Fiji, Singapore and Malaysia. The varieties of English that have emerged are described variously as 'indigenous', 'nativised' or local varieties of English. Malaysia has shared in this experience of 'indigenization' of English with 150 years of English instruction in the school system.

A distinctive variety of English termed Singapore-Malaysian English developed through the education system, supplemented by transfer features from the Malay, Chinese and Indian speech communities and reinforced by locally trained teachers who themeslves spoke this variety (Platt and Weber 1980:21).

Malaysian English (ME)

Platt and Weber in their study of this variety of English are hesitant to speak of a 'Malaysian variety' of English if there was one, and delineate the complex nature of the situation:

> In a society such as present day Malaysia, where the whole language situation is in a process of re-orientation, particularly in regard to the status and function of English within the community, one cannot speak of any one variety of English, i.e. Malaysian English, as was formerly possible with reference to Malayan English. In fact, in the present period of transition there was strictly speaking, a number of sub-groups, each differing somewhat from the next in its type of English.
>
> (Platt and Weber 1980:167)

Platt and Weber recognize two groups of speakers of English:

1. Malaysian English 1 (ME 1): the English of the English-medium educated;
2. Malaysian English 2 (ME 11): the English of the Malay-medium educated.

The ME 1 variety, Platt and Weber say, 'is on the decline in Malaysia and eventually an ME 11 type will take over' (1980:182). ME 1 will have a declining number of users, but it is significant in that it is this model of English that influences the form of the emergent ME 11 variety. The most salient features and forms of ME 1 are likely to be transferred to the future variety of Malaysian English.

Malaysian English is at present in a state of flux. As Bahasa Malaysia becomes the dominant language mode, even those features that are normally considered permanent in a language, i.e. phonology and intonation, are being drastically altered as the Bahasa Malaysia sound system is imposed on Malaysian English. The lexicon and syntax will undergo even greater change.

This change in the form of Malaysian English is significant for those who prescribe the teaching model, particularly at a time of concern about the drop in standards of English. With the implementation of the Communicational Syllabus at upper secondary school level there has been a greater need to define norms and differentiate between standard and non-standard use, or acceptable and non-acceptable forms of English, in a language learning model.

An appreciation of language as it is used and a prescription of language as it should be used are two ends of a continuum. Very little research has been done on the ethnography of English

*This paper, based on an M.A. Thesis of the same title (University of Malaya, 1982), was presented at MACLALS Seminar on The Teaching of English in Upper Secondary Schools and Tertiary Institutions in Malaysia, September 1980.

language communication in Malaysia and the links between the two are not readily evident. In the identification of a teaching model it is useful to recognize how our speech community perceives language and uses it, i.e. to understand the form of the language and the functions of its use.

This paper will take the view that Malaysian English (ME 1) has a distinctive form and that this form is determined largely by the functions that the language is used for. The paper will focus on two main issues:

1. How do we use the English language? What are some of the features and forms of ME?
2. Why do we use English the way we do? What are some of the underlying strategies of second language use?

Modals: Types, Categories, Notions

I will confine my comments to the grammatical area of modals and to informal spoken Malaysian English at the mesolect (middle) and basilect (low) levels. The findings presented here are based on the results of a questionnaire, the respondents of which were native-speakers of ME 1 (see Appendix 1). Taped recordings were also made of ME 1 speakers (see Appendix 2) and the transcripts provided an interesting comparison with the intuitions of the questionnaire respondents.

Broadly there are two categories of modals according to use: those that have a logical meaning and those that have a practical meaning. These are variously termed *philosophical* and *root* modals. Philosophical modals deal with the truth value of a sentence and express the notions of probability, possibility, certainty and necessity. They are therefore expressions of the speaker's attitudes, assessments and judgements. Root modals express the notions of inclination, ability, permission, obligation and compulsion.

The description of modalilty has been one of persistent difficulty partly because both philosophical and root modals use common modals. For example:

John *can* be lying. Possibility — philosophical
John *can* go out tonight. Permission — root
John *can* lift this rock. Ability — root

This paper will show that the system of modality in ME is altered and functionally reduced through the continued use of 1) fewer and 2) semantically salient modals that serve multifunctionally across notions to give meaning to the expression of attitudes, assessments and judgements. The modals as they are used in ME 1 have acquired distinctive features of use and they have become so embedded in spoken English that they are likely to be transferred to ME 11 and stay as permanent features of use in that variety.

The Use of Modals in ME

ME uses fewer modals and expands the usage of these modals to cover a wider semantic field. The wide paradigm of use to express a range of different assessments or attitudes is not available in ME (See Appendix 1). The full range of modals is not used to express differences between the notions of probability and possibility, certainty and virtual certainty, inclination and ability and between obligation and compulsion. But this is not to say that these semantic distinctions are absent in ME: they exist but they are expressed through alternative devices that are functional in use. The coalescence of modals across types and notions can be noted. A few modals do a lot of work.

I. **Philosophical modals**

a. ***WILL, CAN/MAY*** ***Probability/Possibility***

The modal WILL is not used to express probability. The sentence is restructured to avoid using WILL:

British English (BE) = *That will be George at the door.*
Malaysian English (ME) = George is here already.
= Maybe George is at the door.
= I think that's George.

The use of the parenthetical verbs *I think* and *I don't think* to express positive and negative notions of probability is a device whereby a speaker makes an utterance and at the same time expresses an attitude to what he is saying (Lyons 1977:739). The use of this form is highly salient in ME in the expression of philosophicl modals.

The lexical items *maybe** and *probably* are borrowed from the possibility category and used as adverbs (modal adjuncts) to express modality. *Maybe**, an indigenized form, is the most salient of these forms, expressing both probability and possibility, and it acts in the place of WILL, MAY and CAN. It is usually placed in front sentence position for greater emphasis and focus:

That can be Ahmad.
Maybe that is Ahmad.
That maybe George.
Maybe that is George.

b. ***WILL, SHOULD/OUGHT, MUST, NEED, HAVE TO*** ***Certainty, Necessity***

ME does not distinguish in form between the notions of certainty and necessity. MUST and SHOULD, to a lesser degree, express these notions. SHOULD is used in ME to express virtual certainty. OUGHT and WILL are never used; instead, MUST is borrowed from the notional area necessity to express virtual certainty:

He should/ought to be here by now.
He must be here by now.
That will be George calling.
Must be that's George calling.

The negative form *shouldn't* is used though the sentence is often restructured to avoid modal use altogether:

You shouldn't have told him about it
Why you told him about it?

The interrogative from *why you . . .** is a common device to express disapproval or censure.

NEED is never used in ME to express the notion 'be necessarily so'. MUST is used in place of HAVE TO:

There has to be a mistake.
Must be there's a mistake.
Sure got mistake.

*Non-standard use

II **Root modals**

a. ***WILL*** ***Inclination, Willingness***

WILL is not used to express inclination/willingness. Instead CAN in the ability sense is used in its place.

I will lend you some money.
I can lend you some money.
If you want money, I can lend.

He will not be bullied.
You cannot bully him.
He cannot be bullied.

The lexical item 'want/don't want' is used in place of the modal WILL:

I won't go now.
I don't want to go now.

I will never speak to him again.
I don't want to talk to him again.

Will you/won't you have some cake?
You want some cake?

She would insist on going out on Saturday nights.
She always wants to go out on Saturday nights.

(In this context *MUST* is used in ME : She *must* go out every Saturday night).

Where would you like to sit?
Where you want to sit?

Would you like rice or bread?
What you want? Rice or bread?

b. CAN_2, CAN_3, MAY_2 ***Ability, Permission***

There is a high degree of consistency in the use of CAN to express the notions ability and permission. MAY is not used in ME to express permission and CAN is used in its place.

CAN also functions as a question tag:

You wait for me, can?
Give me a lift, can or not?

The full uncontracted form *cannot* is used to express negation:

You may not park here.
Cannot park here.

c. ***SHOULD/OUGHT, NEED/HAVE TO, MUST*** ***Obligation, Compulsion***

ME does not differentiate between the notions obligation and compulsion. MUST is used to express both notions and it is often used in place of SHOULD, OUGHT, NEED, and HAVE TO : *(Ought* is never used).

You should/ought to wear seat belts.
Must wear seat belts.

You need to buy tickets to enter.
Must buy tickets first.

He needs more practice.
He must practice some more.

You have to pay your school fees.
You must pay school fees.

In contexts when the speaker wishes to warn or advise, the lexical form *better* is used.

You must leave now.
Better go now.
You shouldn't refuse him.
You better not refuse him.
You need to be more careful.
You better be more careful.
You have to be careful with your money.
You better be careful with your money.

Though NEED is never used to express obligation, its negative form is overused and has become an institutionalized phrase, 'no need', in ME:

You needn't pay that fine.
No need to pay that fine.
You needn't hurry.
No need to hurry.

Conclusions

Table 1 illustrates the reduced use of modals according to semantic notions in ME. The modals of maximum semantic salience therefore are: MUST for certainty and compulsion; CAN for permission and ability; and SHOULD to a lesser degree for certainty and obligation. Modals of low usage are WILL for probability and insistence; OUGHT for certainty and obligation; MAY for possibility and permission; GOT TO BE for necessity and obligation; and NEED for necessity. Instead of using these modals any one of the alternative devices below is used, either singly or in combination.

Strategies

1. A modal from another type or notion is borrowed. This has been demonstrated.
2. A non-verbal modal from is employed, using lexical items such as *probably, surely, maybe*, must be*, can't be**, as adverbs (modal adjuncts). Usually these are placed in front sentence position for greater emphasis and focus.
3. The parenthetical verbs *I think* and *I don't think* are used as sentence openers to express a categorial speaker attitude.
4. *Resstructing* or *paraphrasing* avoids modal use altogether, especially for difficult or abstract notions. Simple declarative, interrogative or imperative sentence types are opted for in making comments, asking questions or giving orders. An opener for the declarative form is *I think . . .* and *Why you . . .* for the interrogative.
5. Some modals are institutionalized through overuse. Through constant use some modals achieve strong expression content. They are non-grammatical by conventions of standard use but strong in expression force. Such instances of use include *how can* to express improbability, impossibility or uncertainty; *no need* to express lack of compulsion or need; and *better not* for compulsion. *Dare not* is another modal that is institutionalized.
6. One form is used for one function (Richards 1979: 9). In BE, as in the ME acrolect, many forms are used to express any one function, but in the mesolect and basilect where the full range of grammatical forms is not available, one form or variations of that form tend to be used (See Appendix 1):

*Non-standard use

You needn't hurry.
No need to hurry.
You don't have to be back by ten.
No need to come back by ten o'clock.

7. Conversely *several functions* may also be assigned to *one form*. For example, CAN is used in varying functional contexts:

Will you lend me your pen for a moment? (willingness)
Can lend me your pen? (permission)
How's the food at the Bunga Raya?
Can do. (approval)
Shall we go to the movies tonight?
Can also. (agreement)

8. Transfer features from the native languages (Malay, Chinese and Indian) play a great role in determining the form of ME. It is no coincidence that the most salient modals in ME, CAN, MUST and SHOULD, have direct semantic equivalents in the native languages which make them perceptually salient.
9. There is a direct and straightforward relationship between content and expression, between what the speaker wishes to say and how he says it. At the core of every sentence there is a proposition, i.e. what the speaker wants to talk about, or the idea he wishes to express. There is a tendency in ME to pick out the most basic or underlying proposition and express it directly as a comment or question in surface structure:

She could work hard if she wants to.
She lazy lah.
According to the map this should/ought to be the way.
This way, lah. See, the map.
The map says this is the way.
You can't be hungry so soon.
So fast you're hungry.
He won't do as he's told.
He stubborn.

There is a close match between structure and function. The speaker, while expressing his subject matter or perception, i.e. proposition, is simultaneously expressing his attitude towards and his judgement of what he is saying. This is the function of the system of modality which the British or American English speaker adeptly uses to participate in or disassociate himself from the speech event.

This exercise has shown how, in Malaysian-English, one large grammatical area is reduced and simplified by the construction of an optimum grammar where a small number of modals are worked to a maximum to operate functionally across a wide range of meaning. The resulting grammar may be ill-formed from the point of view of standard English; yet it is functionally efficient, if only for the purpose of language as basic communication.

TABLE 1: THE USE OF MODALS ACCORDING TO SEMANTIC NOTIONS IN MALAYSIAN ENGLISH (ME) ___

MODAL VERB MEANING	I PHILOSOPHICAL MODALS		II ROOT MODALS		
	Probability/Possibility	Certainty/Neccessity	Inclination/Ability	Permission	Obligation/Compulsion
CAN/MAY WILL	Maybe/Probably/Surely I think Neg: Cannot be I don't think		CAN Neg: Cannot Question: Can or not? Neg: won't don't want to Question: You want . . . ?	CAN Neg: Cannot	
MUST SHOULD NEED		Sure, Surely Neg: Can't be Must Neg: Shouldn't Question: Why you . . . . ?			Should, must, better Neg: don't, cannot Must Neg: No need Question: I must is it?
PAST TENSE COULD/ MIGHT		Maybe	Can	Can	

APPENDIX I

Samples of questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised 130 sentences which covered the two categories of modals. The sentences represent instances of language use in standard spoken British English and were taken from various pedagogic grammar texts in which they were used as illustrative sentences to demonstrate the grammatical category mood.

The 10 respondents were speakers of the Malaysian acrolect. They were each asked to give two equivalents or alternative expressions as they thought Malaysians would use in an actual language context. If they felt the notion was not likely to be expressed they were encouraged not to provide equivalents. The date is rank-ordered from the basilect to the acrolect.

I. PROBABILITY

Will

That will be George at the door.

1. That George (pointing).
2. That one George.
3. I think that George.
4. George outside, maybe.
5. You see, maybe George come.
6. I think George come already.
7. I think George came already.
8. I think George's come here.
9. George is here already.
10. Maybe George is at the door.
11. I think that's George.
12. I think George is outside.
13. I think it is George coming.
14. I think that's George (at the door).
15. I think that's George.
16. Probably that is George at the door.
17. That could be George arriving.
18. That is George at the door.
19. That's George at the door.

I. POSSIBILITY

May/might

She may be the thief.

1. She the thief lah.
2. The thief I think, she.
3. I think she no good. She steal people's things.
4. Maybe she thief.
5. Maybe she thief.
6. Maybe she thief.
7. How you know she not the thief?
8. I think she the thief.
9. Maybe she's the thief.
10. Maybe she is the thief.
11. Maybe she's the thief.
12. I think she's the thief.
13. I think she is the thief.

14. She's the thief, I think.
15. She may be the thief.
16. She may be the thief.
17. She might be the thief.
18. It is possible she is the thief.

I. VIRTUALLY CERTAIN

Negation

You shouldn't/oughtn't to have told him about it.

1. Why you tell him?
2. Why you tell him?
3. Why you go and tell him?
4. Why you tell him about it?
5. Why you tell him about it?
6. Why did you tell him about it?
7. Why you told him? You no work ah?
8. Why you told him about it?
9. You wrong to tell him.
10. Why you told him about it? You shouldn't have.
11. You shouldn't tell him about it.
12. It was wrong to tell him about it.
13. You shouldn't to have told him about it.
14. You shouldn't have told him about it.
15. You should not have told him about it.
16. You shouldn't to have told him about it.
17. You shouldn't to have told him about it.

II INCLINATION

Willingness, Insistence

He will not be bullied

1. He you cannot bully lah.
2. Can't bully him one man.
3. He cannot bully lah.
4. He cannot bully lah.
5. He cannot bully.
6. Don't bully him. You can't bully him.
7. You cannot bully him lah, he not frighten of you.
8. He not easily bullied.
9. He cannot be bullied.
10. He cannot be bullied.
11. He cannot be bullied.
12. You can't bully him.
13. You can't bully him.
14. You can't bully him.
15. It is not possible to bully him.
16. He will not be bullied.
17. He will not be bullied.

II PERMISSION

Negation — May/Might

You may not park here.

1. Cannot park here lah.

2. Cannot park here lah.
3. Cannot park here.
4. Cannot park here.
5. Cannot park here.
6. Here cannot park lah.
7. Here cannot park.
8. Here cannot park.
9. Here cannot park lah.
10. Here cannot park.
11. Can't park here.
12. You cannot park here.
13. You cannot park here.
14. You cannot park here.
15. You cannot park here.
16. Not allowed to park here.
17. Don't park here.
18. You can't park here.
19. You can't park here.
20. You're not allowed to park here.
21. You are not allowed to park here.
22. You are not allowed to park here.

II NECESSITY

Obligation — Should/Ought to

You should/ought to wear seat belts.

1. Hey, must wear seat belts man.
2. Must wear seat belts you know.
3. Must wear seat belts.
4. Must wear seat belts.
5. Must wear seat belts.
6. Must wear seat belts one.
7. Seat belts must put on.
8. Now must wear seat belts.
9. You better wear seat belts.
10. You better wear seat belts.
11. Have better wear seat belts.
12. You must wear seat belts.
13. You must wear seat belts.
14. You must wear safety belts.
15. You must wear seat belts.
16. You should/have to wear seat belts
17. You have to wear seat belts.
18. You - should wear seat belts.
19. You - should wear seat belts.

II NEED

Necessity

He needs more practice.

1. He not enough practice.
2. No good lah. Practise can get better.
3. He no good. Must practise more.
4. He must practise some more.

5. He must practise some more lah.
6. He must practise some more.
7. He must practise more.
8. He must practise some more.
9. He must practise some more.
10. He must practise more.
11. Better practise more.
12. He should practise more.
13. He should practise more.
14. He needs to practise more.
15. He needs more practice.

APPENDIX 2

Transcripts of taped recordings of Malaysian English

This conversation is between two ladies. F1 is a university lecturer recounting her travels. She tells the story of a friend who is given a diamond ring by a fellow passenger. F2 is a travel agent.

F2 You had overnight in Prague?

F1 Ya, overnight. Delay. So by the time we arrived so tired, so can't be bothered. And then I met a few Muslims ah, Middle Eastern you know, Lebanese. Wah! Friendly like hell. Because I look so young and so small they all . . .

F2 Protective, lah. Very protective!

F1 Some of them look so oily. On top of that, wah! showed me a photograph. Very high class. Their features very sharp. And then his son, wife.

F2 Lebanese can have wives.

F1 Can only have only one wife, he said, in English lah. English broken, broken.

F2 Can have only one wife. Mistress lah.

F1 My classmate's sister, you know, she was working as a secretary in KL. Then you know, going to Europe. So she went to London. They got a sister in Switzerland . Married there lah. So she went over to London. She worked there. She just went for holiday, of course. Return ticket, lah. When she run out of money, she work as a waitress or as a dish washer and all those things, lah. So she was there for a year, you know. Off and on struggling, lah. But anyway, she said she enjoyed it. Touring Europe. Then on the way back, er, she couldn't help it. Actually she didn't want to come back. But then ah, you see, illegal worker. So she said getting very, very hot already. So she was coming back. Not because done anything, but moving from place to place, very obvious. Come back, she flew. I don't know she flew on which airline. She met one of those Middle Eastern people. He was so nice. So lucky! Just gave her a diamond ring, you know. In the aircraft, not that she has gone out with him, but it just so happen, they sat together, like that. Fancy! Like that one, you know. Actually, she's pure Chinese, can pass off for Eurasian, Malay and all that thing. All these people look very tanned. Came back here, just like that. That man gave her, lah abroad the aircraft. I think she must have taken a flight that goes to Teheran or Bahrein. He got down, our friend came back to KL. So lucky, you know.

This conversation is between three ladies, all of them educational television producers. They talk of beauty gadgets, cooking etc.

F1 Come and play tennis lah!

F2 Play tennis? So fat, I don't want to show my thighs.

F1 You and your bloody thighs. As if anyone is going to look at your thighs.

F2 See, huh, so fat. That's why I don't want to wear higher lah. If mini skirts come back, only I die, lah.

F1 Go and do that 'Trim Away'.

F2 I bought, $15 and then I bought it in the old house, lah. So my husband said, 'When are you starting?) (When I am in the new house.) But in the new house: 'When are you starting?' I go and put the screws. He got so fed up. I said 'don't look lah'. It's almost a year already.

F1 It's supposed to be quite good.

F2 I know it is. I know. My son. He's taking out and putting because actually there are no screws to hook the thing.

F3 On the windows, you can do it yourself, lah. Very useless.

F2 That's the trouble : to lift up the hammer and bang. Sayang my house broke. (laughter)

F1 On the window you haven't got those . . .
F2 I got, I got.
F1 Ah that's good!
F2 Ahh. the thing is I'm lazy, lah.
F1 Ya, that's the thing, not the nail or anything, you see. When you haven't got the thing, ah, the thing. Once you buy it. . . .
F3 You want to buy ah . . .
F2 Could you beat it? I got the Carmen curlers, I bought I never use.
F3 I also never use.
F1 So never mind you go and sell it to me because I'm going to keep my hair long I must use curlers.
F2 No good lah. I don't know. It doesn't burn lah, if you have curly hair all right, but I got that then I got the tongs.
F1 The tongs I cannot use, I gave away to my sister.
F2 See, my husband said 'What you doing with it' Oh Ida, will inherit all with my property . . . (laughter)
F1 By that time she say 'Mum these squary things, lah. Today we have microwave and a dozen other things!
F2 Waste!
And my pressure cooker, you know, the pots er? Four years I haven't used it.
F1 Ours is used every day.
F2 I use once it got burnt, you know I don't know how it got burnt. I don't know how I tried to boil the kachang, you know. All burnt inside.
F2 The water dried . . .
F1 Not enough water lah.
F2 Not enough water ah?
F1 In our house its everyday used.
Without the pressure cooker, etc, we are lost.
F2 Is it ah? You must teach me how to use lah.
F1 Very senang, man. Everything you simply take and put in lah.
F2 Yes ah?
F1 Now you cook curry ah?
F3 My aunty, er boil the red bean. Ah shoow! (Disaster)
F4 Even in our house also, my sister-in-law nearly . . .
F1 & F3 What? What were they doing?
F4 She was cooking dhall.
F1 That's right. The thing is, you put it on and let it — boil on
F3 Ah yes!
F1 Put for certain time lah. Maximum ten minutes or fifteen minutes.
F3 But quick
F1 Check. You just can't leave it then go out!
Although the water is not hot.
F3 I think she didn't close it tight.
F4 I think not enough . . .
F1 Not enough water ah?
F1 I mean how could it be . . .
Put the oil and 'tempe'
Put the meat.
Put little of whatever this thing we use for . . .
Put the time for 10 minutes.

5 or 10 minutes
10 minutes
Really it is about 10 minutes.

F2 Now going to buy the crook pot

F1 I got the crock pot.
Before you cook, ah, usually you put oil. Fry onions and garlic.

F3 We better go down Ann

F1 . . . you put the chilli with the rempah, then you fry a little more — and then you put the gravy, isn't it?

F4 Then you . . .

F1 Once it boils cover it!

F2 Finish lah! Very good!

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THE PELANDUK

1

SOME YEARS AGO a new housing estate, Taman Bahagia, on the outskirts of Pasir Panjang caused the people of the Settlement to relocate their houses. They moved to a site behind the row of modern detached and semi-detached houses, closer to the jungle and the hills. The Settlement inhabitants rebuilt their houses, really shacks, and fell back into the pattern of life that had been interrupted for a while. Their tin-roofed, dingy wooden dwellings were accessible only through a gravel, skirt road. The residents of Taman Bahagia collected funds and put up a protective wall so as to keep out unwanted intruders.

The people of the Settlement did not resent this gesture against them. Instead they consolidated the ritual of retreat they had developed over the years. The guiding spirit and pundit of their community, Govindasamy, assumed the powers of prophecy and predicted that the universe had entered a destructive phase. His was a deviational Hindu philosophy that, denied the checks of native soil practice, evolved strange myths for itself. The Tamils who lived in the Settlement, having lost contact with India for more than a generation, depended upon the more learned to interpret a vaguely remembered cosmogony.

Govindasamy was never abstract in inculcating the people with his views. Even in the old Settlement, nearer the main road, he had made, through the skills of a wandering temple-builder, four statues. When the Settlement shifted, he had the pantheon of goddesses installed at the entrance facing the common compound of the houses. He fasted periodically and in the evenings told the Settlement inhabitants the mysteries and powers of these goddesses: Saraswathi, Letchumi, Parvathi and Kaliamma. The occasions were frequent and even children knew when to echo his words.

"We come from dream time," he said, giving his words a strong rhythm. "When Brahma was awakened by his quarrelling brothers, he made the universe for them to romp in. They got tired of wandering through the empty lands and appealed again to their brother. He populated the world with a variety of human beings. But all these creations would observe the life-span of a dream. There would be identity, recognition, nostalgia and destruction. Each would form a duration of time named after the goddesses."

"Saraswathi, Letchumi, Parvathi, Kaliamma," the children chorused.

"In the first duration," Govindasamy chanted on, "men identified the objects of the earth: stones, plants, animals, hills, rivers and seas. They learned about their surroundings. They conquered land, water and air."

"The Age of Saraswathi," the children chorused,

"In the second duration," he went on, "men began to recognize their powers, while the gods watched in amusement. They exploited land, water, air and men. They made use of these to enrich themselves and to gain power."

"The Age of Letchumi," the children chorused.

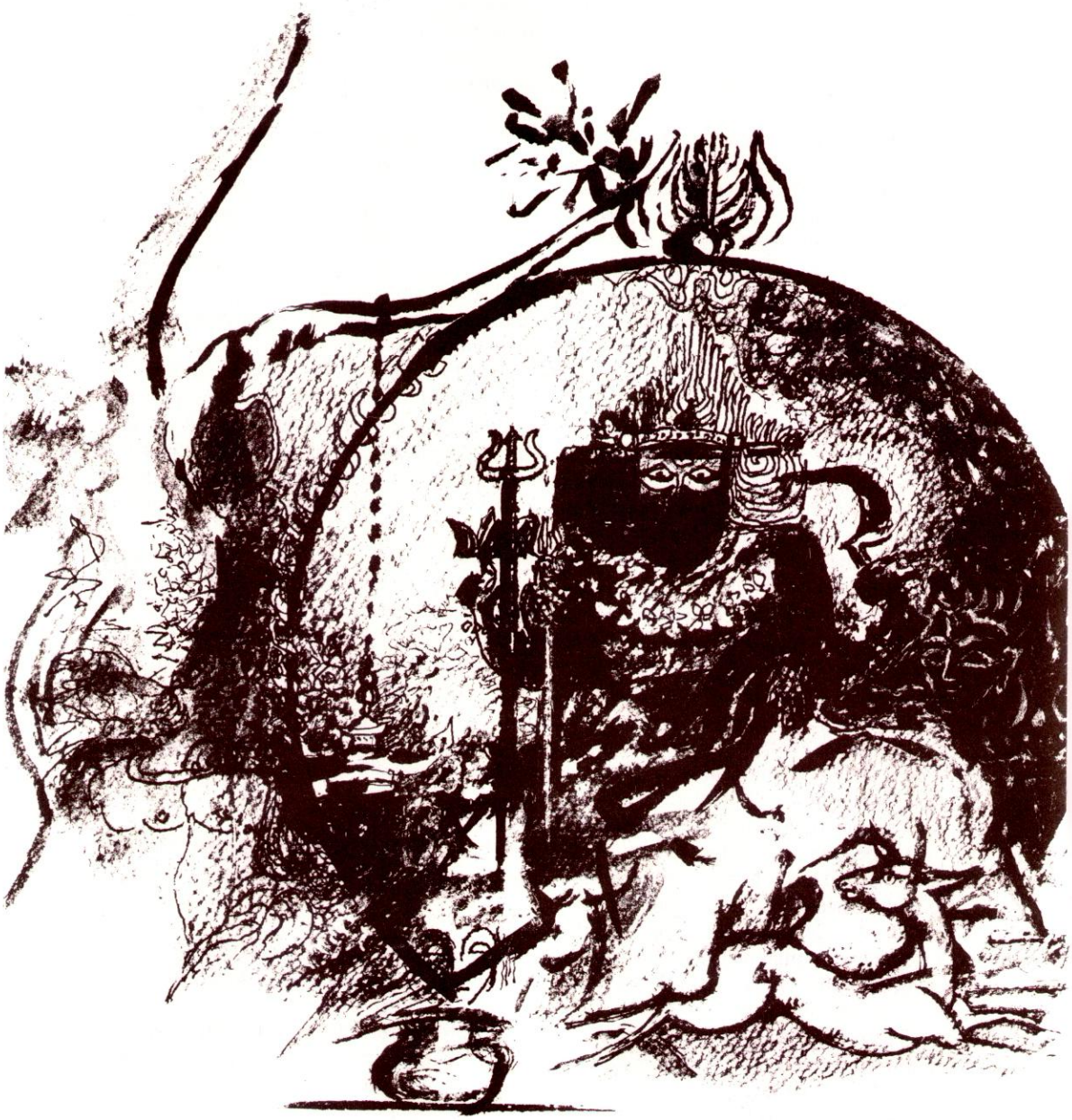
"In the third man realized that he has lost his identity. He is without a compass as Parvathi is, awaiting her spouse's Shiva's return. This is the phase of nostalgia or longing."

"The Age of Parvathi!"

"The fourth and the last we've just entered. This is the duration of destruction. Man has to solve the riddle of existence: are we a dream or are we real? He has to destroy everything he has known to reach the other realm. He must take vengeance upon himself."

"Kaliamma's Age!"

Govindasamy strewed *malligai* flowers on the statues, Kaliamma towering higher than the others on a separate pedestal. The audience sang out the four names, once more reminding themselves of the features of the time phases. Mesmesized and convinced, they crowded into their small homes to sleep and wait.



"I presented the dilemma of the universe to you the other day," Govindasamy said, having fasted and prayed for the umpteenth time. "Today we'll become aware of a way out. Once the world rested on the gods' shoulders. Now it's the duty of man to bear the weight. The dream has to awaken the sleeper. In this Our Mother, Kaliamma, will intercede for us."

"Our Mother, Kaliamma," the children chanted.

"Brahma produced the universe out of a dream," he said, "now man has to produce the vitality of life. He has to discover the magic that will take him out of the dream. So far mankind has been passive and shown glimpses of understanding. That's why the time durations bear the names of goddesses. But too much passivity will lead to aggression. That's why Kaliamma, the goddess of violent revelation now rules the world."

"Kaliamma, Kaliamma, Kaliamma, Kaliamma," the children sang, entranced.

"There must rise up from among us someone to serve the cause of Kaliamma," Govindasamy said. "Think, in the days to come, who among you that will be."

He led them in the praise of and submission to Kaliamma. The night air echoed with her name; some late sleepers in Taman Bahagia looked out of their windows. They saw a dark mass of people gathered at a gaudy collection of puny statues.

2

The Settlement inhabitants observed one another. There was Kumaran, the truck driver, violent enough when he had gulped down a pint of *samsu*. Muniandy, the furnace attendant, had once possessed a powerful muscular body, but it was sagging under the onslaught of age. Sometime he had no control over his thoughts and seemed to be waiting for death. A few of his peers had meekly followed him until Govindasamy appeared on the scene. The younger men fought against the fatigue of supporting growing families on meagre incomes. They were even too tired to go out and look for part-time jobs that were available in the rapidly expanding Pasir Panjang.

There remained Arokian, the husband of the childless Kali (to be distinguished from the goddess Kaliamma), who had taken, with a distracted obsession, to hunting. He discovered this interest only after ten years of barren marriage. The Settlement was surprised as it had taken him for a mild-tempered man. He had shuffled his way through the events of the community; he had spoken only under the insistence of constant prodding. It was rumoured that he was the barren one, Kali having consulted the oracle of mediums in the temples around Pasir Panjang. The Settlement inhabitants made much of trifles. Once when Arokian was present at a *puja* for Kaliamma, the garland slipped from the goddess' neck and Govindasamy had looked at him significantly.

The Settlement gathered at the Kaliamma shrine every evening, but Govindasamy indicated it would be a momentous occasion by getting into a white *vesti* the minute he got back from work. He walked about the compound clenching his fingers and rubbing his thin long nose, absorbed in thought. The people then washed themselves with extra care and were at the shrine earlier than usual. Govindasamy, who would not have talked even with his wife, approached the deity with pronounced humility and began lengthy prayers. The crowd stood behind him, hushed, or knelt with reverence when he made his obeisance to the vengeful goddess.

As he entered deeper and deeper into the invocation to Kaliamma, the suppliants behind him fixed their eyes on the sickle the goddess held. It gleamed with strange light that dusk, the hour when spirits abroad — so the Settlement inhabitants believed — crossed the consciousness of man. Suddenly, Govindasamy ceased his chanting. His body convulsed and he spoke with effort in a hoarse voice. He kept wiping his sweat-drenched face with furtive, apologetic movements.

"Our Mother, Kaliamma," he said, "has reached me today. She has asked to tell you all a story. Behind the words lie coiled the course of our action. So, listen carefully."

The children and women sat down on the ground the older girls had smoothed with their daily sweeping. Some of the men followed suit but Kumaran and a few others continued to stand.

"Are we ready?" Govindasamy said. "I want you to recall another story I told you all in the other Settlement. It was about how Ravana lured away Rama so that he could abduct Sita. Maricha, his counsellor, was induced to transform himself into a golden deer and enchant Sita with its loveliness. Maricha did so. Sita, entranced by its beauty and constantly changing colours, called excitedly to her husband, Rama. He saw the deer and was immediately seduced by its grace and form.

It was a golden deer and while Rama, Sita and Lakshamana (Rama's brother) watched, it gambolled and changed its hues. Now it was the rippling wave of a green field, now the azure of a lofty sky, now the sparkle of sapphire, diamond and pearl. 'Capture it for me,' Sita said. 'I suspect some mischief,' Lakshamana said. 'If you can't take it alive, put an arrow into it,' Sita said. 'Even the skin itself is a treasure!'

While Lakshama watched over Sita, Rama went in pursuit. Maricha as the golden deer was too swift for Rama, but not for his arrow. As the arrow struck the deer Maricha regained his own form. Rama was deceived. We know what happened when he returned to the *ashramam*. The deer has magical powers," Govindasamy paused to wipe his face again.

The night had grown sultry. People, like the statues, were immobile, suspended in the cross-current of vaster designs.

"And the deer has always appeared in our forefathers' lives. More recently among our father's generation. Not long ago it was reported that a man went in search of the elusive deer. For months he came back empty handed. One day he sighted a mother deer with its calf. Intending to take them both, he crept cautiously towards the animals. But when he was upon them, he discovered that the calf had vanished. He brought the mother deer down but he found the carcase too bulky to carry. So he cut, cleaned and wrapped the body in a large leaf he discovered at the spot of the kill. His neighbours collected at his house, on his return, to see what the bundle contained. When he unwrapped it they saw that the severed portions had fused into a whole deer!

Realizing the potentials of the leaf, he hurried back to the jungle. On reaching the spot, he cut his index finger at the first joint. Tearing off a strip of the leaf, or what looked like it, he bandaged the severed sections together. but the finger never joined back again. The man discovered that he had plucked the wrong leaf. He went over the plants again, but the darkly fragrant leaf was nowhere to be found. To this day, the stump of his finger as a reminder, he ranges all over that jungle in search of the leaf.

As Govindasamy rubbed his face again, he scrutinized his audience. They were bewildered by the tale and waited for more.

"Don't you see that it's the deer that leads man to the elusive, magical quality of life!" Govindasamy said impatiently. "We've to find that deer. In this country it's called *pelanduk*. Someone has to hunt down and kill the *pelanduk*."

"But the government will put you in jail," Kumaran said.

"The forbidden fruit tastes the sweeter," Govindasamy said. "That's why the *pelanduk* is protected. It has strange powers."

"Who's going to kill it?" Muniandy asked.

"Arokian," Govindasamy said.

For the first time that night, the people laughed.

"He doesn't even know a finger from a monkey's tail!" Kumaran said.

"But he's the chosen one," Govindasamy said. "Kaliamma made him barren. Don't you remember the garland that fell? This is his usefulness to the community."

3

It was into this situation that Pandian, a man in his twenties, walked when he arrived with a sling bag over his shoulder, one afternoon. He looked about himself cautiously, almost with a kind of nervous energy. His hands swung loosely at his sides, his gait shook his whole body and his lips bore a constant smile. He came from an estate in the remote hinterland of Pasir Panjang. As he made known the first few weeks in the Settlement, he had only recently buried his mother. The households extended a frugal hospitality, finding him helpless even in making himself a mug of coffee.

The Settlement divided its attention between Arokian and Pandian. Pandian floundered about so much that they had to lead him almost by the hand. The families took turns to give him his breakfast and dinner. The midday meal he had in town. Arokian, they had to feed with confidence. Their reversal of feelings made him, in the beginning, highly distrustful. He withdrew into himself completely; he sat for hours in his verandah repairing his arsenal of hunting implements. But he never went out.

At work the two, employed by the town council as garbage collectors, almost touched shoulders. Flinging out his hands with uncontrolled energy, Pandian shovelled the morning's rubbish from the truck. Arokian tamped it down on the bank of the River Merbok, the town's reclamation project.

"Why do you work so fast?" Arokian asked.

"I want to save money quickly," Pandian said. "I promised my mother a beautiful headstone."

"You'll get the same pay," Arokian said.

Pandian was not to be curbed. Over the weeks he developed a rhythm out of the chore. This was more evident as he worked behind the moving truck in the streets of Pasir Panjang. He lifted a bin, emptied it, turned round to replace it and then walked on to the next all in one coordinated movement. He was learning to discipline himself. But in the Settlement he was still clumsy. He knocked into people, turned over pails, spilled rice from his plate and stuttered if spoken to. When the people gathered at the Kaliamma shrine, he stood at the fringe looking on curiously. The repetition of the stories and Govindasamy's philosophy soon wearied him. He remained in his rooms waiting for the people to disperse so that the children could come to him. He liked having them around him, listening to the anecdotes he told about estate life.

The gloom and pessimism of the Settlement were evident everywhere. The walls of the shacks were unpainted. Sawdust that had fallen into heaps when these ugly buildings were raised, darkened and decayed. Some of the windows had become unhinged and were unrepaired. They sounded like deep utterances of fear when they were pulled to at night. The Settlement inhabitants walked about the compound, crossing over to their neighbours' houses, in slow, listless movements. Women stood for hours in the dark doorways gazing at nothing, letting mosquitoes feed themselves to bloated satisfaction.

Pandian's despair became unbearable as he watched the children waddle about, their rounded, half-filled bellies thrust before them. The girls were all wiry and haggard, perpetually busy with some chore their mothers assigned them. Both the boys and girls, once they returned from the schools in Pasir Panjang, were forbidden to step beyond the Kaliamma shrine.

"Put some *thurnuru* on your forehead before you leave for school!" the mother yelled. "That's what protects you from the evil in town."

The boy would take a pinch of the holy ash from the heap in the tray placed at the foot of the deity, Kaliamma. The ash pile never seemed to diminish.

"Wash your feet," the same mother said when the son returned from school. "We can never know what spirits followed you home."

"There is an invisible giant in town, son," Pandian heard a woman tell her boy. "His eyes are everywhere. He watches out for little boys because their blood is fresh and healthy. The giant displays wonderful toys, nice clothes and lovely sweets to draw the children's attention. When they wander into the town alone they disappear. It seems he hides them in a cave far, far away and when they are fat enough he cuts them up and eats them."

The boy edged closer to his mother and the next time he was near the Kaliamma shrine he knelt down surreptitiously and placed a broad stroke of the ash on his brow. Pandian, observing him, was amused by the youngster's abrupt, comical gestures. Pandian took off for Pasir Panjang in the evenings, to escape for a few hours the oppressive air in the Settlement. When he returned the people would be at the shrine.

Arokian had been wooed back into the fold. He stood around awkwardly, at the *pujas* that Govindasamy conducted at the deity's altar. He accepted from his wife, Kali, a pinch of the holy ash. She displayed a smile on her plump face, acknowledging a secret hope. Govindasamy described the golden, magical deer again and again until Arokian had its antics imprinted deeply in his mind.

The young man found Arokian changed. There was a purposefulness about him as he worked at the dumping ground. Pandian himself felt he was beginning to view life differently. His promise to his mother sat on him like an irritating burden. He had been hasty in the past. He thought that the existence he had led under her supervision was a humiliating record of blind impulses. He decided he would buy a simple, marble headpiece for her grave and absolve himself of all debts to her.

4

When Pandian returned from the brief visit to his mother's grave, he found the Settlement aroused by a mild form of excitement. The children as well as the adults had their attention focused on Arokian's hunting trips. This was not an exaggerated showing, but revealed itself in suppressed smiles and constant casting of glances at the other side of the Settlement from which Arokian would emerge.

Arokian had, by this time, collected a whole arsenal of hunting gear. It consisted of a hand fishing net, weighted with such globules of lead that even a child could handle it; a bigger cast net that could be used upstream; a pair of bamboo poles slung across with nylon netting to trap fruit bats; several wooden spears of varying thickness that he would drive into the hearts of boars; a sturdier piece of nylon, noosed, to strangle iguanas and anteaters; and a quiver of bamboo splinters swollen at one end with a sticky resin with which he would jam the flight feathers of rare birds.

He had gone out that day with the hand net, towards the shallow stream in the jungle behind the Settlement. The people had met at the shrine and dispersed. The men sat in groups, talking about Pasir Panjang and the horrors they had seen in it.

"I've never seen so much filth in my life!" Govindasamy exclaimed. "The dustbins are overflowing and flies settle even on our faces."

"The restaurants are even worse," Kumaran said. "The people sit at tables as if at altars. The waiters come like priests with the offerings. Heaps of crab shells, prawn shells and *siput*

shells rise on the tables. The eaters push the food into their mouths as if they have been starving for a hundred years!"

"They eat strange things," Muniandy said. "It was the healthy chicken, mutton and pork in my days. Now you see thin, smooth white legs that are frog's legs. And they cut open a pregnant sow. Take out the foetus, make a soup of the whole thing. I don't know how they can eat that!"

The man shuddered at the thought, Kumaran grunted.

"Don't forget it's the Age of Kaliamma," Govindasamy said. "They might even eat the flesh of Hanuman. I mean his brother, the monkey."

Pandian, who had been listening to them, went into his house and noiselessly shut the doors and windows.

It must have been an hour later that Pandian woke up to new sounds in the Settlement. The chill static air was penetrated by a sharper smell. He heard the men and women crowding round Arokian, who tried to keep them off gently.

"You'll see," he said. "Let me put my things down."

The night filled with the tang of raw fish, sap of leaves that had been plucked to wrap them in and the clinging odour of fine river clay. The following morning the woman made fish curries to be eaten with cold overnight rice at breakfast. Pandian refused the plateful offered to him and drank only the coffee that accompanied it.

The young man began to drift away from the Settlement's preoccupations. He went more often into town, but found out that his pay would not allow him to find lodgings there. At the Settlement, he enjoyed the benefit of a spartan hospitality and the rent he paid was only nominal. He sensed that he was indebted to them. The Settlement women were kind in their way. They sent round whatever special food they prepared on festival days, and they did his laundry. He was reminded of his mother's concern, however misguided that had been, for him.

For a time he languished in his shuttered house, let the loneliness and diffuseness of existence drain the energy out of his body and mind. The town fell away into some treasured, but not to be enjoyed, memory. The streets, shops, cinema, pubs, restaurants and mini-supermarkets came up at him, alluring and definitely there, when he followed the truck on its garbage trail trough the town. He noted, with some deep-seated dissatisfaction, the old stalls being pulled down, the proprietors of this small-time business displaced. Some of these men, pedalling costume jewelry, Tamil magazines from South India, Silverware and other articles for household worship, lived in the Settlement. They complained, without forcefulness, of the injustice done to them and waited to expatriate themselves to India.

In the estate, living with his mother, Pandian had no time to observe, think and choose. The daily routine precluded any distraction except the celebration of holy days and mulling over family problems. On most days the people had only time to work, and fatigued by it, to go to bed early. Though his mother had not allowed him to join the tapping or weeding gangs, he was kept busy cleaning the tools she needed for her occupation and running to the estate shop for necessities.

Those weeks of isolation in the Settlement wrought subtle changes within him. He emerged, having experienced the frustration of suspension between the past and dreams, fully determined never to capitulate to helplessness again. Following the garbage truck through Pasir Panjang, he brought the movement of his limbs under control. There was no more the wild flinging of himself into a special rhythm. He conserved his energy and in the afternoons looked for a job in the restaurants and clothes emporiums.

He found one, first, in a restaurant. He swabbed the floors, wiped the tables and washed the dishes used at the lunch hours. The management offered him paltry wages and an early dinner. For a time he was satisfied. He saved the extra money until his plans became clearer. When he had put by enough, he bought himself some new clothes. He took such an obvious delight in these that the Settlement began to look at him with new eyes.

His wants increased as the people paid more attention to him. The slop from the restaurant sink splashed on his new clothes. His colleagues smelled of sweat and swore in coarse language.

He was lost, removed from the glamour in the front sections of the restaurant. He would have liked to don the white uniform of the waiter and, enveloped by the warm smell of food, bend down to the strange fragrance of ladies, taking their orders among the tables. He began casting about for another situation, and secured one in the Titi Wangsa Clothes Supermart.

There, he felt, he was truly in his elements. There he saw shapeless young men come haltingly in and go out more confident, turned out in a soft, neatly cut shirt or trousers. There the young women ambled in uncertain and self-conscious, and returned with the parcels of the latest fashions in their hands. Once an old man had marched in and demanded to be shown the most recent shipment of jeans.

"For your son?" Pandian asked.

"For me!" the man said indignantly.

The smell, texture, cut and design of the clothes fascinated and impressed Pandian. His wardrobe increased to include jeans, flare pants, shirts with pleats and trousers that had to be belted above the waist. He spent at least thirty minutes, choosing his shirt and trousers, before he walked out for an evening in Pasir Panjang.

The Settlement, though curious about his new lifestyle, had misgivings about its influence. The women were flattered when he stood at their doorstep drinking the coffee they offered in cracked enamel mugs. He would place one foot on the single step, while the other carried his weight, and displayed the soft fall of the shirt at his waist and the sharp continuous descent of the trouser crease to its leg fold. The children followed him to the end of the Settlement, where Kaliamma seemed to smile on their discretion.

After a few months, Pandian had enough money to paint his house and furnish it with attractive, comfortable furniture. The bright orange of the house gave it a doll-like appearance and the children, entering the living room, discovered the strangeness of a novel world. Pandian turned on a cassette player and they listened, excited and wondering.

"All this can be yours if you grow up," Pandian said mysteriously.

"Is something wrong with us? Can't we become men?" a boy asked.

"Ask your father," he said, laughing, and puzzling them even more.

5

One evening as Pandian was about to set out for his second job, he heard Arokian coming into the Settlement. The children rushed forward, flinging questions at him.

"What's in that sack?"

"Is it a big snake?"

"Will it bite use?"

"Enough!" Arokian raised his voice. "Move back. Let the thing enjoy its last few minutes."

The children stepped back as Arokian loosened the neck of the sack. There was a frenzied wriggling and then the snout of an iguana appeared, its eyes malevolent and tongue lashing out. The children screamed, half in fear and half in delight, and their mothers hurried over. The coarse-skinned reptile was dappled with varying shades of brown so that it would have escaped notice, poised for a strike at some prey, on a rock. Now with its hind legs trussed up it pushed itself towards the onlookers, dredging up some ferocity, and then flopped down into vacant staring.

"It's a long time since we had iguana meat," Letchumi said. "Must send my husband for extra ginger. It takes a long time to cook!"

Arokian flipped the reptile on its back, and gripping a tapering spike in his unsteady hand, drove it into its soft, white under belly. There was only a fine jet of blood; the reptile convulsed and lay, abruptly, still. He strung the carcase to the rafters of the verandah and began skinning it. The children watched, silent and awed.

"Mustn't burst open a vein," Arokian said more to himself than the children. "The meat would smell if that happens."

"When will you get that deer?" Govindasamy, who had just returned from town, called.

"What deer?" Arokian asked.

Pandian passed them at that moment, crossing the vision of the two men and Arokian caught a strange expression on the part-time salesman's face. It could have been self-satisfaction or presumptuousness or even a superior smirk, but Arokian bent swiftly to his task. A quick incisiveness attended his strokes and the reptile, shorn of its rough skin, was revealed in its vulnerable nakedness.

The next time Arokian and Pandian met at the dumping ground, the younger man sidled up to him.

"When are you getting that deer?" Pandian asked.

"You stick to your dirt, boy!" Arokian said.

"Why do you all trust strange superstitions?" Pandian asked, ignoring Arokian's insult.

"How did you become wise so quickly?" Arokian said, sneering.

"By keeping my eyes and mind open," Pandian answered innocently. "There is no need to be angry. I'm only curious."

They worked on in silence for the rest of the afternoon. When they knocked off for the day, Pandian hurried back to change into his immaculate clothes and report at the clothes supermart. Arokian sat among his hunting implements, mending the fishing nets, sharpening the wooden staves and honing to a keener point the steel spears he had recently collected from the blacksmith.

The dusk closed earlier over the Settlement, drawing sudden flapping sounds and isolated squeaks into its harmony of expectations. Arokian saw plummeting down the sky, towards Tok Aman's *dusun* behind the Settlement, the first fruit bats of the year. They were also called flying foxes, compelling attention to their pointed faces and crafty nature. Once they were nestled among the rambutan and mango trees, they could be easily mistaken for some angular darkness or a piece of branch jutting out against the fading light.

Arokian had waited for these signs, ready to wield the heavy bamboo poles with the nylon net stretched across their ends. In a week or so he would be under the trees — Tok Aman glad that someone kept away the pests from his fruits — before the day died, quiet and vigilant. The furry mammals would alight noiselessly, then hang in musky hordes on the branches waiting for human movement in the nearby kampung to cease.

There was a maddening moment, Arokian having flung stones at them to rouse them out of their upside-down cunning, and they rose in a cloud of crossed, high pitched squeaks towards the sky. The blood rushed to Arokian's head. He lunged forward with the bamboo poles, clamped the net over them, plucked the furry creatures and shoved them into his sack, and rushed forth at those winging blindly in the darkness. He did this repeatedly, scrambling over bushes, wild undergrowth, avoiding trees, but keeping the poles clear above his head and when his sack was full, panted with unexpected success.

He brought them back, after having skinned them sitting beside a cool stream, furtive and suddenly efficient, to the Settlement, where the people awaited him. He pulled the mouth of the sack loose, and the fruit bats tumbled out, their limbs folded against their dark bodies, their tiny faces surprised like children roused out of deep sleep. The Settlement inhabitants made their pick; some roasted these bats; some garnished them with coriander and chillie; some fried them. As the children gnawed at the meat, they squeaked at each other with malicious relish.

The Settlement enjoyed the luxury of abundance during the fruit season, but the taste of the fruit bat meat soon palled. Arokian reverted to fishing and hunting down the occasional anteater or iguana. The people of the Settlement were not to be so easily deceived. Iguana and anteater meat was an affront to their recently acquired predilection for the fine flesh of the fruit bat.

"When do we see that golden deer?" Govindasamy asked.

"Here, it's the *pelanduk*," Kumaran said.

"Duk, duk, duk," the children said, testing the sound on their tongues.

Soon there could be heard, after the people had assembled at the Kaliamma shrine and dispersed, scattered, ominous "duk, duk, duk" from various corners of the Settlement where the children were catching belated play.

6

While Arokian entered a lean phase (the *dusuns* were empty, the streams depleted and the iguanas in hiding), Pandian was on the ascent. The Settlement rarely saw him, but when they did they had to hang their heads down in envious admiration. Their secret glances revealed a different Pandian approaching them at the different times. He had grown tougher and more self-assured.

"You don't have to hide your face from me," he said to Vimala, Kumaran's wife.

"You're almost a stranger," she said, self-consciously.

"You should look at people more," he said. "Not at stone faces."

"Don't say that," Vimala said. "Kaliamma may be offended."

"No use talking to you all," Pandian said.

"You've grown too big for your shoes," Vimala said, hurt.

"Look at them!" Pandian said, striking his boots with his hand. "I bought them only two days ago. I work hard. I make money."

"Who wants money?" Vimala said.

"It's not to be despised," he said. "The men here hide their laziness behind fear."

"You can't be like Arokian," she said. "He faces many dangers."

"And brings back corpses," Pandian said.

"Go away!" she almost shouted.

The months neared Deepavali, the one festival the Settlement celebrated lavishly. In this too, Govindasamy's influence could be detected. He had imperceptibly brought them round to thinking that they were commemorating Kaliamma's long awaited but brutal justice. In the past they had borrowed indiscriminately, knowing that their creditors could not insist on repayment in the face of their poverty. The *Bayi,* the chettiar and the shop-keeper had become wary; they would give neither cash nor credit. The men put up a wall of preoccupation against the women's and children's references to the approaching occasion. The women, being mothers, became desperate. They could not bear the silent reproaches of their children.

Vimala was the first to go to Pandian. He had just returned from the Titi Wangsa Clothes Supermart. Vimala, not wanting to be seen entering his house, burst in abruptly and found him stretched out on his sofa. He was knocked in, his face haggard and, for a moment, he was lost. Then recollecting himself, he wiped his face with a large, ornate handkerchief and smiled at her.

"You come empty handed," he said recalling the brown sweet rice she had brought on *Ponggal.*

"To have it filled," Vimala said directly.

"Filled?" he said. "What do I have?"

"Money," she said reluctantly.

"You despise money, remember," he said.

"Not when I look at the children's faces," she said.

The other women visited him just as secretly and came away relieved. The men glowered at them but did not insist that they return the money straightaway to Pandian. Arokian hoping to supply the Settlement with some kind of meat went daily to the jungle fringe, only to return late at night, the sack flapping against his back.

Deepavali came and went. The children wore their new clothes, fired their small supply of crackers, tripped to the cinema in Pasir Panjang, and munched throughout the week the *palagaram* they had rejected on Deepavali day.

Arokian brooded himself into desperation. Govindasamy trailed him impatiently; the children muttered "duk, duk, duk" into the corners of the Settlement. The women regulated their spen-

ding, intending to pay Pandian back. Pandian had bought himself a quartz watch for Deepavali and now he rode into the Settlement on his new Honda motorcycle.

The Settlement had seen many motorcycles before, but none had been parked in any of the houses. Even the residents in Taman Bahagia looked over the wall and into the Settlement compound. The sight of Pandian cleaning and polishing the machine must have impressed them for they occasionally turned their heads towards the Settlements in the days that followed.

The man and the machine commanded respect. The children had a new sound to imitate. They sped past the houses on their imaginary bikes and then halted, letting the engine idle "duk, duk, duk." Arokian and Pandian were openly hostile, Govindasamy fuelling the enmity by appealing to the goddess Kaliamma for a substitute, saving ordeal.

"Our Mother refuses any other trial," Govindasamy said to his audience that evening. "Arokian must find that *pelanduk* quickly."

"I've never speared moving animals before," Arokian said. "I must go deeper into the jungle."

"You're afraid," Govindasamy said.

"A man goes towards his goal stage by stage," Arokian said, defensively.

"There won't be a Settlement by the time you reach yours," Govindasamy said.

"The jungle is a new territory to me," Arokian said. "You must know its contours, moods, open spaces, hiding places . . ."

"And we must become old men," Kumaran concluded.

"I'll get my experience first," Arokian said, cornered. "I'll look for the wild boar, before the *pelanduk*."

"Let the man start there," Govindasamy said.

Arokian began his preparations the following afternoon. He went over all his hunting paraphernalia thoroughly, then abandoned them and went off to town. When he returned, he was staggering drunk.

"I'll kill a tiger for you, Kali!" he shouted drunkenly at his wife. "And I'll kill a lion for Kaliamma!"

He was heard banging the walls of his house, cursing the impotence of his wooden and metal spears, then abusing and challenging Pandian to a fight. The young man had returned from the Clothes Supermart, and heard the insults and the taunt, but he remained in his house. Even when they worked together at the bank of the River Merbok, the next day, Pandian was silent. It was only when the people were gathered at the Kaliamma shrine that he made his declaration.

"When I first came here," he said, "I was shy and afraid. I only knew the world my mother let me experience. My father died when I was beginning to follow him around. This Settlement here is like that estate. Tucked away in the jungles of superstition. I won't quarrel or fight with Arokian. But I'll go on the next hunt with him and I'll bring back an animal!"

"The man may be irreverent," Govindasamy said, "but he has spoken the truth before Kaliamma. Let him go with you, Arokian."

"I'll bring back an animal, too," Arokian said, looking at Pandian.

7

They went that weekend, Arokian dressed in his khaki shorts and Pandian in a pair of tough jeans, army shoes, long-sleeved cotton shirt covered over with a jacket. Arokian carried his knives, nylon rope, plates, a small pot, torches and bottles of water in a sack. He had tied together his spears and balanced the bundle on his shoulder. Pandian strapped on a traveller's pack containing canned fruits, drinks, transistor radio and change of clothes. They intended to stay overnight.

"See that no one touches my motorbike," Pandian told the grown-up son of his neighbour.

Govindasamy had brought the tray from Kaliamma's altar. He placed camphor cubes on the pile of holy ash, lighted them, and conducted a brief *puja*. Arokian rubbed a pinch of

the ash on his forehead, throat and the spears. Pandian stood at a distance from the ceremony, refused the ash and moved ahead of Arokian when Govindasamy completed his invocation to the goddess.

The Settlement grew anxious when Arokian and Pandian did not return, as agreed, on the afternoon of the second day. Govindasamy posted lookouts, bathed early and started prayers at the shrine.

"I won't stop until they arrive," he announced.

The children and women stood behind him for a while, then drifted away to their houses. The hours passed slowly, laced together by Govindasamy's lonely voice at the foot of Kaliamma. Some of the men walked about the compound; the sentinels returned to their houses. The women sat in the doorways, their younger children reclined on their laps and fast asleep. In a while they roused the sleepers and followed them to bed.

Govindasamy's hoarse chanting slipped into a whisper; only the light at Kaliamma's altar was strong. The man must have dozed for he sat up suddenly and listened. An unfamiliar song reached his ears. He looked towards the Taman Bahagia houses. They were shuttered and dark. He rose and walked over to the other side of the Settlement.

A torch flickered over the muddy path leading to the Settlement. Govindasamy saw two figures struggling under a burden. Pandian's transistor was on, accounting for the song Govindasamy had heard. The grunts of the men hauling themselves up to the Settlement mingled with the music, creating a macabre effect. Then the two men came into sight. They carried two wild boars slung on a couple of poles. Arokian looked tired, his clothes crumpled and dirtied. Pandian appeared as fresh as when he had left, his clothes barely soiled or rumpled.

"We can feed the whole town!" he said jubilantly.

Arokian set to cleaning the boars without a word.

"Aren't you tired?" Govindasamy asked.

"If I'd obeyed him, we would have come back with nothing," Pandian said.

The details of their trek into the jungle came in fragments. When Pandian was at the Supermart, Arokian claimed that the young man had been frightened. He had kept waking Arokian up on hearing the faintest movement. The following morning he had found a clean swift stream, turned on the transistor and made a picnic out of the food he brought. Only when Arokian threatened to leave him did Pandian sober up and follow him, clinging to his shirt tail. At the death throes of the boars he had tuned on his transistor and turned his back on the animals.

"He's liar!" Pandian said. "I scented the boars first. He was cringing behind me. He put a wooden spear into my hand, pushed me into the darkness. The tusks gleamed dangerously, but I wasn't afraid."

He demonstrated how he had thrust the pointed stick into the boar's heart and held down the beast until lashing out for life, it died. The Settlement did not know whom to believe. After that initial account of their trip, Arokian fell into an obdurate silence. There was a haunted look on his face.

For several weeks Arokian neglected his hunting. His arsenal lay about the verandah untouched. He seemed to have withdrawn into himself as Pandian had done when he first came to the Settlement. His wife's shrill nagging did not affect him. He watched the people, as Pandian had done, going about their life, detached and reflective. Only Pandian's bike stirred some vitality in him. Then he stared at the young man getting down from his machine, swift and graceful.

Pandian had adopted more styles. His hair, grown long, hung sleekly down his collar. He wore his shirt a button or two opened at the neck. His body had fleshed out, his movements co-ordinated so that it was impossible for the women to watch him without flinching.

"We must pay you back some time," Vimala told him one evening.

"I don't need that money," he said with a magnanimity that hurt.

Another time he appeared with his hair all curled and fluffed out, a pendant glittering on his chest, slung at the end of a gold chain. Arokian observed him change from day to day.

He would flash by all silk and folds one evening, creases and coarseness the next. It was a long time before Arokian heard Govindasamy's protests and the children's "duk, duk, duk."

"I'll go after that *pelanduk,*" he said as if waking from a reverie.

"When?" Govindasamy asked.

"When Kaliamma speaks more clearly to me," he said.

Arokian returned to his nets, bamboo poles and wooden spikes. He spent long hours sharpening each of the steel spears to a delicate point. The children watched silently and with interest until Pandian arrived and then they ran after his motorcycle. Their parents had softened towards him and permitted their children to enter his house.

"I've seen the *pelanduk*," Arokian told Govindasamy one evening. "It's deep in the jungle."

"Kaliamma showed it to me," he said. "I can't go alone."

"So he can't do it by himself, ah?" Pandian said when approached.

They set off again, this time Govindasamy subjecting both of them to an elaborate *puja*. Arokian prostrated himself before the Kaliamma shrine, then sighing, started off with Pandian.

Govindasamy, confident that Arokian was on a holy mission, did not keep vigil at the shrine even on the second night. But there were no signs of them even on the fourth day. A week passed. The Settlement alerted itself. Govindasamy fasted and prayed. The children looked at the silent motorcycle; the women went about their work with wooden faces. Kali beat her breast and rolled on the floor in grief.

"He didn't give me a child!" she wailed. "But he looked after me!"

Arokian was among them even before they could react to his presence. Pandian did not accompany him. Arokian did not say anything, only sat in his verandah gazing at the Kaliamma shrine. He had become skeletal; his lips were cracked and his eyes blood-shot. His shorts and shirt were tattered.

"Where's Pandian?" Govindasamy asked.

Arokian did not answer him. Kali brought him a mug of water but he waved it away.

"Where's the boy'?" Govindasamy asked.

Arokian, still looking at the Kaliamma shrine, spoke slowly and painfully.

"I killed the *pelanduk*," he said. "Like Maricha it turned back into a man. He was confused and afraid, like us."

K.S. Maniam

R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*: a Reading

Margaret Yong

R.K. Narayan has earned considerable critical attention since the publication of *The Guide* (1958) established his stature as a novelist. His work has been identified with the humane qualities which delineate his generous vision of existence. In his best-known work, *The Guide*, however, his achievement may be more profound in that he has transcended the human limitations of this conception of life.

The structure of this transmutation is paradoxical. Theoretically stated, Narayan's vision suggests total aloofness from humanity. In its expression, there is simply a sense of grace unperplexed by turmoil. His vision accepts human complexity by disavowing its urgency in the light of mystical reality. As such, it assumes a view of existence which goes beyond the usual interpretations of "acceptance" or "asceticism."

Narayan's perception of a harsh reality which it is man's lot to endure does not rest solely on a stoical refusal to cry out against fate. Endurance is indeed its basis, as commentators have noted.[1] But it is not just an ascetic acceptance of pain, nor is it merely another form of denial of the flesh. His vision seems rather to offer itself as an affirmation of the whole structure of existence. It is in this sense that V.S. Naipaul's somewhat condescending interpretation of Narayan's work has a bearing. In its intensity, Narayan's vision does constitute "religious fable," a term which Naipaul uses in *India: a Wounded Civilization* (1977). By calling it religious fable, Naipaul suggests that Narayan's fiction evades the real issue of India, by which he means contemporary India. Naipaul's rejection of the implied escapism or "quietism" of Narayan's novel is based on the assumed discrepancy between "Narayan's world" and "the distress of India." He discusses this discrepancy in *India: a Wounded Civilization*:

> But Narayan's novels did not prepare me for the distress of India . . . The small town he had staked out as his fictional territory was, I knew, a creation of art and therefore to some extent artificial, a simplification of reality. But the reality was cruel and overwhelming . . . I felt that his comedy and irony were not quite what they had appeared to be, were part of a Hindu response to the world, a response I could no longer share.

Naipaul recognises the essentially religious impetus of Narayan's vision. However, by dismissing the religious in terms of an irrelevant Hindu appeal, he neglects its transforming power in Narayan's art.

In *The Guide*, the process of religious perception is inseparable from the narrative mode: the narrative technique delineates the growing sense of discovery within Raju. Raju narrates his story and in the act of telling, his consciousness changes. By the time he reaches the end of his story, he has prepared himself for religious conviction. He has been released from old illusions. With his new understanding, his whole being is transformed, so that he comes to accept a part in existence that is at once essential and harmonious. The enactment of spiritual transformation in Raju constitutes the central theme of *The Guide*.

Because of the gentleness of Narayan's perusal of man's metaphysical condition, it is the immediate, the concrete, the mortal that comes most readily to view. But his underlying subject seems to be the movement towards the eternal, the abstract, the abnegation of the mortal. However, the consideration always remains a movement rather than a stasis, a movement quickened by an infusion of life. In this way, the transcendental perception incorporates earthly life; it does not deny it.

Life in Narayan's world of Malgudi is caught in the moment of time when change threatens the culture of a long and rich past. The seemingly unruffled rhythms of village life move uneasily with the forces of change, in a shifting relationship which forms a dense social structure. It is Narayan's distinctive genius that he has evoked a sense of a whole national condition in

the specificities of Malgudi. The forces of modernism are ironically summed up in the portrait of a degenerate Raju attempting to live it up with prohibition whisky and buying influence "at the current market price." Raju's mask of modernity is contrasted with the traditional forms which he has evaded. The contrast is invoked by Nalini (Rosie) when she asks Raju amidst his careless prosperity, "Is there no way of living more simply?" The values of the traditional way of life figure as a simpler, more honest management of life: Raju's "modern" style of living is built over a financial chasm corresponding to a moral gulf in himself.

The compelling freshness in Narayan's evocation of an Indian world invites a deeper cognizance of life. The thematic search for spiritual being illuminates the study of a microcosmic world, and this theme has received keen critical attention. Yet Narayan is not primarily concerned with the inner adjustments to life that arise out of historical change. He delineates this change sensitively in order to suggest a more radical discovery about the nature of spiritual understanding. It is this area of consciousness or being that commentators have been reluctant to define. They hesitate to step beyond the threshold of spiritual "acceptance" and "endurance" into a world remote from the plane of the normal and the human.

The existence of this other dimension in Narayan's writing has been perceived largely in terms of the extraordinary or the grotesque, which (it is felt) invites an exploration into "the dilemma of being normal."[2] It has been Narayan's fate to have his interpreters protect his novels from the rigours of his own vision. The usual view of this vision is that it is modulated by Narayan's consummate decorum. The unexpected beneath the surface is glimpsed but securely contained within the harmonious confines of his comic skills. Irony, that is to sa y, equips Narayan with an existential weapon to keep the real demons at bay. Further it may be argued that it is precisely because of his skilful and tender use of ironic penetration into his world, that this world remains on a human plane. The humanness of Narayan's world has never been doubted. His tone habitually produces a world that is civil, kind, benevolent, gentle, tempered by grace, and sustained by unfailing compassion.

The climactic crowd scene in *The Guide* demonstrates the basic humanism of Narayan's response to his microcosmic Malgudi. At the same time, this episode affords the paradoxical formulation of his recognition of the mystical and the abstract in existence, and it is this which this essay examines.

In *The Guide*'s last scene, the sense of life is palpable in the evocation of crowded, jostling, happy humanity:

> But each day the crowd increased. In a week there was a permanent hum pervading the place. Children shouted and played about, women came carrying baskets filled with pots, firewood, and foodstuffs, and cooked the food for their men and children. There were small curls of smoke going up all along the river bank . . . It was studded with picnic groups, with the women's bright-coloured saris shining in the sun; men too had festive dress. Bullocks . . . jingled their bells, as they ate the straw under the trees. People swarmed around little water-holes.

Only the last sentence reveals the note of menace in this celebratory air.

> Never had this part of the country seen such a crowd. Shops sprang up overnight, as if by magic . . . The Tea Propaganda Board opened a big tea-stall . . . The people swarmed around [the free tea-bar] like flies, and the flies swarmed on all the cups and sugar-bowls.

Human existence, as mirrored by this confused mêlée around Raju as he begins his vigil, is qualified by domesticity (children playing, women cooking), a sense of fantasy (the magical shops) and a threat of disaster (flies and people both "swarming", a term which reduces the human to the minimally bestial). Overall, however, is still Narayan's comic sense of incongruity which makes the threat (implied also by the "little water-holes") only a muted one.

The significance of this inconsistent mass of men and beasts is made clearer in the comparison with another passage from an earlier work of fiction about India by E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924). Forster's novel too calls upon an image of "the toiling ryot" (i.e. Indian peasant, but with the suggestion of a multiplicity of men) crowded around a divine being:

> They were the toiling ryot whom some call the real India . . . The assembly was in a tender, happy state unknown to an English crowd, it seethed like a beneficent potion. When the villagers broke cordon for a glimpse of the silver image, a most beautiful and radiant expression came into their faces, a beauty in which there was nothing personal, for it caused them all to resemble one another during the moment of its indwelling, and only when it was withdrawn did they revert to individual clods. And so with the music. Music there was, but from so many sources that the sum-total was untrammelled . . . This approaching triumph or India was a muddle (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form.

Like Forster's, Narayan's press of life is an image of a protean muddle, a vision that can encompass all extremes on the scale of existence. The scale remains wholly agrarian and traditional, despite the presence of modernistic features (such as the Tea Board, Health Department, DDT, Government of India propaganda films: comically distanced). Narayan removes the issue of the conflict between tradition and change, agrarianism and industrialism, to a plane of perception which makes the issue irrelevant to his preoccupations. The scale of being is ethical rather than historical. Hence, in *The Guide*, there is "far off, outside the periphery" the secular indifference of the man who "had opened a gambling booth;" but at the centre of its universe, the true worshippers who "always stood around and watched the saint with profound awe."

Narayan's philosophy, though, is not simply one of ethical relativity. All in his universe, it is true, are dependent upon each other, and all exist in a relationship of harmony with each other. The real harmony, the ultimate beauty, of his vision, it would seem, goes beyond human language, human comprehension. Like Forster's, it is "a beauty in which there was nothing personal."

Narayan's method for enunciating the absolute harmony of his universe rests on the appropriate imagery of Nature, of the world divested of human complication:

> It was an all-night vigil. The numerous lanterns and lamps created a criss-cross of bewildering shadows on all hedges, trees, and walls . . . The morning sun was out by now; a great shaft of light illuminated the surroundings.

As Raju approaches what in conventional terms must be paraphrased as "sainthood", the human world ("a criss-cross of bewildering shadows") is transformed. Mystical illumination symbolised by the great dawning light of Nature, envelops his being: it is the process of "man" becoming "god" or "saint" that Narayan's narrative method is attempting to project. Inevitably, such an attempt in literature can only be a partial success. Language by definition cannot express the incommunicable. Yet this seems to be precisely Narayan's subject. His vision in *The Guide* inexorably leads towards the definition of the mystical affirmation of the ineffable.

Narayan's achievement is to have discovered the literary technique to embody his mystical theme and to have avoided the attendant stylistic dangers of his theme. He overcomes this twin problem of language by his sure grasp of comic tone. William Walsh notes that "Narayan's work is singularly free of pretentiousness. A cool sympathy, a highly developed sense of human discrepancy, a rare feeling for the importance and the density of objects — these check any straining after undue significance or any tendency to lapse into a search for large truths about life."[3] It is Narayan's distinctive achievement in this novel that he has discovered a compelling method by which to fuse the longing for Absolutes with a fundamental sense of the mortal

strictures on humanity. In this way, our apprehension of Raju's humanity is in no way diminished by the discovery of his mystic state.

His vision achieves a sense of poise that is remarkable for its complete absence of recrimination. As such, the final vision of *The Guide* effectively evokes Yeatsian empathy with the whole of creation. The affinity between Narayan and Yeats sheds light on the sweetness of Narayan's own statement about existence. Yeats, who was much drawn to Indian thought, resolves the conflict between the sensual body and spiritual aspiration in terms that strikingly describe Raju's apotheosis. In particular, the imagery of the Yeatsian chestnut tree from his poem, "Among School Children" is substantially similar to Narayan's margosa/tamarind tree:

> O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance?

Sanctity and wholeness: these are also the two major qualities expressed by Narayan's vision. The juxtaposition of the symbols of tree and dance in Yeats's poetry has its parallel in Narayan. Tree and dance in Narayan's fiction also symbolise mortal man's longing for the absolute. The child Raju had glimpsed the possibility of eternity, playing in his innocent "freedom under the tamarind tree." Nalini's dance is the ritual celebration of this mystical union, and expresses the essential vision of harmony:

> This was a song that elevated the serpent and brought out its mystic quality; the rhythm was hypnotic. It was her masterpiece. Every inch of her body from toe to head rippled and vibrated to the rhythm of this song which lifted the cobra out of its class of an underground reptile into a creature of grace and divinity and an ornament of the gods.

Tree and dance are literary devices, then, usefully employed to depict the thematic whole.

Yet the problem of language persists. In the end, Narayan seems to have settled for silence. The silence of Raju on his evolution towards spiritual transmutation is absolute. Silence is implicit in the artful structure of the novel. The novel interweaves memory with the present, as though narrating a human past in the process of becoming distant. In turn, the perspective of the symbolic "ancient shrine" becomes increasingly the greater reality. The narrative method enhances the aesthetic distancing of Narayan's protagonist in the final episode. Raju at the close of the novel is entirely remote: isolated, alienated, almost lost in the seething throng surrounding him and completely beyond human utterance.

The sense of final irrevocable remoteness is augmented by the peculiar features of Narayan's English. His adaptation of the English language exhibits a quality of translucence, which commentators have felt to be appropriate to an Indian sensibility.[4] Narayan's English suggests a cool abstraction of language from its earth-bound and human roots; at the same time, Narayan's mastery over his medium is complexly modulated by a vivid sense of those same roots of mortal life. The richly ambiguous tones of his language may best be apprehended by a metaphor such as that describing the initiation of the child Raju into the reality of the adult world:

> I lost to some extent my freedom under the tamarind tree, because trucks were parked there.

"Freedom under the tamarind tree" exactly captures the modulations possible in Narayan's grasp of language and of reality. His language, as is his subject, is rooted firmly in the density of the tamarind tree, while striving to attain the freedom of the infinite.

The metaphor of the tree may indeed exemplify for Narayan the thematic longing of earth-rooted man for the aloof heavens: the use of the margosa tree in *The Sweet Vendor* (1967) reinforces the symbolism of the tamarind tree of the earlier novel:

> Jagan had immense faith in the properties of margosa, and in spite of its bitterness he called it 'Amrita' — the ambrosia which kept the gods alive; and sometimes he called it 'Sanjeevini', the rare herb, mentioned in the epics, which held at the nostrils could bring the dead to life . . . He chewed its bitter leaves once a month, . . . and he felt elated when the breeze blew . . . and during the summer rains the place became fragrant as the little yellow flowers drifted down like floss.

The tree of life for Narayan is also the tree of man's spiritual aspirations. The imagery of the margosa tree serves as a reference point to Narayan's belief that the religious experience embodied in the Ramayana remains pervasive in Indian cultural life.[5] In the margosa tree passage from *The Sweet Vendor*, the pull of earthly life is strong. While remaining vividly earth-bound, the image is fraught with religious overtones. It is a joyous celebration of life, in which the gravitational pull of mortality is balanced by the sense of being buoyantly airborne. Narayan's language itself, then, seeks the qualities of earth and air, of "freedom under the tamarind tree." It is to this dimension of experience — the religious, the spiritual, the abstract — that his pellucid prose aspires. His language mirrors the cool regions of abstraction, remote from earthly being.

In *The Guide* such linguistic design is entirely consistent with thematic considerations. The apotheosis of Raju is, in a very basic sense, the process of growing away from the mortal state and from its corollary, human language itself. Raju's silence at the end of his life is intensified by contrast with his former self. The character of Railway Raju had developed from Raju's illusions about life and language. For Railway Raju, existence was to be got through as successfully as possible by playing such roles as circumstances might suggest; and language was merely another theatrical or role-playing device to help him get his part perfect. The early Raju had been distinguished by his eloquence. In particular, his eloquence exhibited a virtuoso manipulation of reality to suit the circumstances in which he found himself. Language for Railway Raju was not the human convention for an objective reality. He shaped linguistic reality to his needs and failed to understand that his grasp of reality was severely hampered by his linguistic blindness. He often equated the acquiring of an appropriate "jargon" with a real grasp of the subject. Thus, he viewed his crucial relationship with Rosie in terms of adopting the jargon of her art. Being at a loss for words made him impotent for the first time in his life.

> I felt rather baffled by her fervour. I wished I could keep pace at least with her idiom. I felt that I ought immediately to pick up and cultivate the necessary jargon. I felt silly to be watching her and listening to her, absolutely tongue-tied.

Raju is significantly silent before the great abstract mystery of Rosie's art, because her art is a gesture of the absolute and thus utterly impersonal:

> She danced a few steps, paused for a moment, and explained, 'Lover means always God' . . . She held the performance for nearly an hour; it filled me with the greatest pleasure on earth. I could honestly declare that, while I watched her perform, my mind was free, for once, from all carnal thoughts; I viewed her as pure abstraction.

In the meeting of man with the absolute, Raju can only affirm his sense of awe in silent reverence, but the experience itself is incommunicable. Language from this perspective functions only on the level of the mundane, trivial or irrelevant. The inappropriate questioning of Malone, the Hollywood agent, supports such an interpretation. Raju's answers consequently are perfunctory and almost platitudinous: just the sort of replies expected from the public image of the saint. Malone, the man who represents the kingdom of illusion, will take back to America only the illusory image of Raju captured on film. Significantly, Malone employs an understudy for Raju in order to rehearse the scene before he shoots it. The satiric structure

of illusion thus built up around Malone deepens the conviction that in his remote and silent vigil, Raju is witnessing a far greater truth.

Nevertheless, Narayan leaves us with a final ambiguity about the meaning of this "truth". With its final words, *The Guide* gently suggests yet once more both the fragility of man's hold upon the earth and the tenuousness of his moment of illumination:

> It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, 'Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs —' He sagged down.

Narayan's prose is a delicate balance between the upward vision of the mystic, and the weight of his mortality which keeps him earth-bound. But in that finely balanced moment, he has unfolded a glimpse of the infinite.

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Introductory to Song of Myself, M.M.

I like to feel my feet firm on the ground
    though her eyes dazzle
    brightness falls
    the particular Platonizes
  to the Idea
    religion rationalizes
  butchery
    the sky aches cool and blue
    In me you will not find
    those awesome/awful antics
    of the bottomless mind
    called divine metaphysics
    As for attempts to define
    substance through subtle syllogistics
    the less said the better

I will be seventeenth-century background?
    And sixteenth-century foreground?
    Me — required reading!
    New Learning's microcosm!
    Humanism's humour heart and head!
    That's how they'll fix me
    nicely when I am dead?
    It all has a grand sound
    to it, but I write to see
    more clear-eyed than most, not create
    patterns of intellectual climate.
    I write for the private pleasure
    of friends and relatives
the only book in the world of its kind.
Doubtless scholars will spend leisure
hungrily feeding the footnoting mind
on what sometimes I quote in good measure.
    But though I may be partial
    to Virgil Horace Martial
    Aristotle Amyot St. Augustine
    Lucan Livy Jean Bodin
    Philemon Guacciardini
    Seneca Pliny
    Anacreon Petrarch
    Juvenal Plutarch
    Socrates Plato
    Menander Cicero
    Terence Quintillian
    Ovid Claudian
    Lucretius
    Macrobius
    Propertius
    Herodotus
    Tacitus

Catallus
Dante du Bellay
I must protest if scholars essay
figuring configuration of influence
and debts to the traditional confluence.
As if I imitate
or name-drop merely!
What those writers say
only help formulate —
exactly the way
words do from the dictionary —
the tone of my thinking,
the shining and shading, the shaping
of becoming to the being
that — bodied, blooded — shows itself
familiar, there in me
all the time, conceiving.
Thanks, and more, I owe
to their works, as I do
the words I work in,
the logos of my being.
In me they new define
themselves; in them I find
that self to which, before all
juices dry, salt and savour pall,
I must as to nature cleave
for the greatest work of all
given us to weave
to perfection: properly to live.

Who is it who will tell me who I am?
Who but me, Montaigne, and all others who
gently give the lie
to what in me is sham —
the unreflected on, the ham
acting, the distance from those I love
with a love final beyond reason's reach:
because it is them
because it is I.

obe

Song of Myself, M.M.

So, today, I am fifty-six years old.
But I won't wear my trousers' bottoms rolled,
nor strain out desire to slim my soul.

Not as unmannerly as before, now
no more my senses prick as sharply
at scent of bliss. But though they no more sniff
and lift and swell as imperiously as

at prime, they are not by any means stiff
with decrepitude. When I give my mind
a jolt and observe it closely, I find
it the same, though weakened, as in my most
licentious days. Should I therefore repent?
Give thanks to impotence for any good
it may do me?! In some rare mystic mood
I may turn up my nose at earthly food
to snuff heavenly incense transcendent,
but most times I can never feel it right
to tie a philosopher's tail to
the head and body of a libertine.
I am not that but I am a far sight
nearer that than saint, which is a fine
figure to cut — and cut, and so refine
oneself to airy thinness for soulful flight.

Man's position in the chain of being,
between God and angels, and beasts and worse,
makes him over all earth and sea the king,
but gives neither reason nor right to curse
the lava of lust and surge of sense: the link
stronger than gravity we think we can
sever and so, at one stroke, soar and sing
out of nature to being more than man.
We must be stark staring mad so to think!
We dare not call our parts by their right names
but are not afraid to do dirt on them
in every sort of debauchery.

Men are like monkeys clambering up a tree
from branch to branch till they get to the top
and there show their backsides for all to see.
And women — some of them so get to be
exercised by thoughts of the male member
it would be better once and for all to
incorporate it in them. No wonder
we want to evaporate into air
and angels, to escape the agony
of having to maintain that harmony
which is God's greatest challenge to mankind:
the devilishly difficult marriage
of mind and body. Simpler to unbind
what God wants joined, but in the miscarriage
the blame, the rabid fury of the lash
of contemptus mundi, falls on the more
sinned against than sinning: poor tender flesh.

I may make much of the natural man,
but I don't, God knows, deify the body
the way some divinize spirit or soul.
My bed's hard board; my legs and thighs aren't more
covered than by a silk hose, winter

or summer. But if I itch I should be sorry
not to be permitted to scratch, scratching
being one of nature's sweetest pleasures.
I cannot bear that inhuman teaching
which disdains attending to the body.
Both kings and philosophers defecate;
the ladies, too; only angels sublimate.

obe

diary notes

Murderous this March noon
sweltered sultry brooded
broiled burned to after-
noon evening and thunderstorm
blind berserk world suddenly all
weird wind-whirled water water
wind whined and howled
howled tore purged purged
restored stale tired earth blood
to old beginnings memories
of something far long
ago touched quickened to
wonder
earth water grass glittering
green
erect
You could touch the new light
You could see the air crisp

This March night rinsed
clean
by rain and cool
and virginal as air-
conditioned bodies never know
came lovely to its own there
out in the garden as
garden night and the guava tree
entered my mind insisted took
hold
took it away from
the light the book in my hand the house out
to the sound there
a guava dropping and there
again another whooshing
down the dark held
still and waiting for
guavas ripe for the earth
they took life from or for
the torchlight to blind
cradled in the grass
bruised
passion spent

obe

poetics: some notes

'The Impulse Behind My Writing'?

I should hope, for starters, there *is*
impulse, always, if not *the* impulse,
whatever that is.

Certainly not for money.
As well wax poetic and say,
to gather the honey
of one's mind, or some special day.

Sometimes, unsolicited, words come.
Until one finds them fit company
they won't go away nor be dumb.

Out of the blue
something true
in a phrase will form
will stick
repeat
repeat itself
into a brain-storm—
    compulsion enough
    to get it off into
    their context, a poem.

To claim, in mystification,
'a vision of beatitude'
would be to strike an attitude
staring down expectation—
    or, worse, guilty
    of the cavalier,
    the throwing of caviare
    to the laity.
When it comes on, vague
but there, the urge itself to write
satisfies: when it comes off right,
come hell come plague
    nothing matters then.

Wrestling restlessly
with words; gingerly
teasing shapes; lightly
touching phrases to erection
of sense, curve of
feeling; barbarously
having one's will, as joyously
surrendering it—
    and then, after all, nothing—
    nothing likelier than anything
    fine most times. But if *something*

comes, if a single line
firms pregnant and, perfectly paced,
perfectly delivered, then bliss
comes innundating, sweet
like nothing else can be.
Not even climactic ecstasy.

Much less absurd, *that,*
at any rate, than to say
(desperately at bay):
seeing one's name in print
is like getting a kick sexually—
better, too, at that.
This, though, I'll bet
is nearer truth than
claiming promoting Culture,
Literature, Morality and
all that jazz and postur-
ing.

obe

THE MALAYSIAN RACIAL DILEMMA IN LLOYD FERNANDO'S *SCORPION ORCHID*

Abdul Majid b. N. Baksh

The publication, in August 1976, by Heinemann Educational Books, of Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* marks, in so far as the content is concerned, the most exciting event in the history of the Malaysian novel in English. It is the first Malaysian novel in English to take a hard look at the realities of the Malaysian situation, to consider in a forthright manner the inexpressible and perhaps even inexplicable racial dilemma confronting the country and to try and suggest not only a solution to the racial problem but also a perspective or approach to it. The details of this claim are examined below but for the moment it is submitted that *Scorpion Orchid* is easily the best Malaysian novel in English to date because of its subject and the treatment accorded to it by the author. These aspects of the novel are considered below.

First, the subject of the novel. The novel deals with the Singapore racial riots of the early 1950's. The danger of racial conflict erupting among the different ethnic groups who populate Malaysia and Singapore is as real today as it was in the Singapore of the early 1950's. The May 13, 1969 riots as well as measures adopted thereafter by the Malaysian government to prevent such a recurrence are ample testimony to this ever present danger. So that the racial conflict treated by the author is but a metaphor of the real concerns of the novel: the relationship between the different races; the very tenuous and fragile nature of these interracial relationships and the way in which these relationships can, at a moment's notice, be negated for no apparent reason and lead to interracial bloodshed. By locating the action of his novel in Singapore and in the early 1950's, the author achieves geographical and historical distancing from his material.

Fernando depicts not only the dangers of the racial conflict but also the genesis, the origins of the racial riots in which such conflict manifests itself. Racial riots, he seems to say in the novel, erupt not because of any specific cause or event but out of a crucial inability of people to understand each other, because of a crucial uncertainty about each other and of each other's motives. Once distrust emerges to the level of consciousness, it can be fanned and sparked off into a horrendous racial conflagration by any immediate event — such as a speech. Thus in the novel we have the dire warnings of Tok Said which give rise to and accentuate the feelings of unease, of tension which precedes and adds fuel to the current of mistrust that finally erupts into the riots. The police, it would seem, are justified in trying to suppress the rumours of impending trouble attributed to Tok Said. The constant references to Tok Said and his Cassandra-like prophecies therefore make of him a preparatory technical device used by the author to pave the way for the riot that occurs later in the novel. In technical terms, Tok Said's warnings constitute the device of foreshadowing whereby the reader is prepared for the riots that ultimately occur. Thus, L. Fernando depicts not only the riot itself but also the web of circumstances which conspires to produce a riot.

Lloyd Fernando's anatomy or analysis of a racial riot is presented not in the dry dispassionate manner of a social scientist but in human terms, primarily through the lives of four undergraduates in the then University of Malaya in Singapore. Sabran, Santi, Guan Kheng, and Peter are representative respectively of the Malay, Indian, Chinese and Eurasian who populate the country. In addition to depicting their experience of the riot and its impact on their relationship, there is also depicted the impact of the riot on the expatriate community. The latter is achieved through the account of the way in which Mr. Ellman and Miss Ethal Turner react to the riot (by making love for it is then that Miss Turner finally succeeds in getting Ellman) and in Ellman's subsequent mental breakdown. In any case, Lloyd Fernando begins by presenting the relationship of the four friends and showing it as the warm, easy camaraderie of four young men who have more or less grown up together, shared the same experiences and done their drinking, ragging and whoring together. Then he puts that rela-

tionship to the test by having them go through the riot. The relationship, sadly enough, does not survive the crucible of the riot for the four discover that like their respective communities, they did not really know each other. This is clearly indicated by the following remark: "the uncomfortable truth was that after decades of living together they remained strangers still" (p. 100). The remark is made in connection with the efforts of trade unions to launch a joint programme but is as applicable to the four friends as it is to the different races.

The problem inherent in any interracial relationship and in any multiracial situation is also elucidated in the novel. Very simply stated, the problem is one of cultural conflict. Let me try and explain that. When one travels to a foreign country, one comes into contact not only with foreigners but also with foreign ways. Everyday, commonplace actions like ordering a cup of coffee or asking for directions become a chore as one is not quite sure of the way in which it is done in the foreign country. For sensitive people travelling abroad for the first time, this produces what is known as "cultural shock" — a condition characterised by depression and withdrawal. What happens in culture shock is that the things that one has taken for granted, the speech patterns, and other gesture that one normally uses without thinking are rendered inoperative and one has to consicously think out one's words and gestures in order to avoid being misunderstood or giving offence. Having thus to think out gestures and words means that one is not quite at home in the given situation. And this is precisely Lloyd Fernando's point about interracial relationships in Malaysia: that a true understanding and acceptance of each race by the other has yet to take place and the relationships are thus fragile, fraught with tensions which can at any moment shatter them. In other words, the different races in Malaysia have yet to become "Malaysian"; each is still distinctly Indian, or Chinese, or Malay as the case may be. Only when each of the races stops having to consciously think about the susceptibilities and sensitivities of the other races, only when the races can mingle with each other without this consciousness of racial difference, will there be a Malaysian people instead of the different racial groups. That is to say, what is wanted is a context in which every individual (of whatever race) could take virtually everything for granted and not one in which nearly every gesture has to be thought out. This point is explicity made by Sabran: "He wanted a context he could take for granted, not one where nearly every gesture has to be thought out" (p. 104). In so far as interracial relationships are concerned, it is the absence of such a context which renders them so tenuous and so likely to give way under pressure.

In considering the racial issue, Lloyd Fernando also examines the relationship that obtains between the different racial groups and the country itself. This particular relationship is dealt with not directly but symbolically — through Sally. Sally, a waitress, is associated with all the four major characters and this, together with her rape by the rioters (and the emphasis given to her in the novel), invests her with a symbolic significance. She seems to have no distinguishing racial characteristics for she is variously mistaken as a Chinese and a Malay — and she is fluent in both languages. Ultimately, the Inspector says she is Malay but she could have fooled — and she does — everybody else in the novel. The point is not that she is either Malay or Chinese or both but rather that she is racially indeterminate, that she is what the beholder would make of her. If this position — that she is racially indeterminate — is accepted, she could stand for the ideal Malaysian — who could be of any race but without any racially identifiable characteristic. She could thus be Fernando's vision of the ideal Malaysian. While she may be that, she can also be interpreted as Malaysia itself, as a symbolic representation of the country. The four undergraduates, representatives of the four major races — the Malay, Indian, the Chinese and the Eurasian — go to her and she accepts all. She rejects none. As she says:

> Tok Said had told me I would be forced to love all who came to me, but was this what he meant? Why must I only give, why should they not love me in return. Why do they take, hurting. Why can't they take with love. Why do they find that so difficult. I have taken whoever came to me, so often without money. I have given love so freely I thought I had the patience to wait even until I die to find someone who would love me. (pp. 77-78)

The foregoing passage would aptly describe the relationship of the country to the different racial groups inhabiting it. The country accepts all, gives them love/protection/livelihood only to be abused by them all. Whatever the inhabitants — whether the immigrants or the Malays — give in return is paltry; mostly they just take by force and use the country for their own gratification. Sally makes the same point later:

> You mean what I'm doing is not love because they give me a little money? It's love. Maybe I never see most of them again, but when they're with me, I give them a little love. Even the rough ones I give them a little love. They are all so lonely. They only act tough. They are frightened, all of them, as if they are running away from something and want to rest. Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, I give them rest. I know they are confused, they talk bad of one another sometimes — sometimes even they get very angry. But when they are with me they become calm, they don't argue, they don't talk. Why shouldn't this be called love, too? (p. 110)

Leaving aside the remarks about what constitutes love, this passage also describes the relationship of the country to its inhabitants. It should be noted that Sally neither singles out for special mention any one of the races *nor* does she spare any of the races from her strictures.

On the question of the relationship between the inhabitants and the country, then, Lloyd Fernando seems to indict all the races for exploiting it instead of having some deeper commitment to it. Even Sabran, the representative of the Malays, is criticised by Sally for not taking her away from the attention of his friends. That is to say, he is criticised by her for not being any different from his non-Malay friends in simply using her, like them, for his own purposes without any consideration for her ultimate or long-term well being.

Incidentally, one-sided though the relationship between the country and the inhabitants is, and unhappy as the inhabitants may be, Lloyd Fernando does not advocate that they leave the country if they are dissatisfied and ill at ease. This is indicated by the account of Peter's emigration for he finally discovers that there is no place like home. For the Malaysian/Singaporean, emigration is no answer to his problems: if he is unhappy, if he does not belong in the society, emigration does not solve these problems for he is just as unhappy, as lonely and as much a stranger in his host country. In making Peter, a Eurasian, and not one of the other racial types, leave Malaysia/Singapore, Fernando is not necessarily being derogatory about Eurasians. Peter is merely the vehicle through which the author expounds his view on how Malaysians, of whatever race, must be committed to the country and work out their salvation within the country; they cannot overcome problems by running away to a new country. This is perhaps the most obvious and direct part of the book for the account of Peter's experience overseas and his decision to return home is presented in summary form. It is true that the summary is presented in the form of a letter but even the device of the letter does not render the author's message any less direct or obvious.

"Hovering" throughout the novel is the shadowy, enigmatic figure of Tok Said. Tok Said is obviously symbolic. No two individuals who have seen him perceive him in the same way. To Sabran, he is a Chinese (pp. 54-55); to Santi, he is a Malay (pp. 55-57); to Guan Keng he is a Eurasian (pp. 68-69) and to Sally, he appears to be an Indian (p. 25). But whatever he is, to all he delivers pretty nearly the same message of impending trouble, of a time when the blood-dimmed tide will be loosed upon the world. While it would be possible to dismiss Tok Said, as the police do, as a political agitator or even as something concocted by anti-racial elements to subvert the peace, law and order of the society, such an approach would be too facile. It would also ignore the significance attached to him in the novel. Tok Said seems to be the embodiment of the Malaysian consciousness, a psychological entity akin to the Spiritus Mundi of Yeats. The concept of a racial memory/racial consciousness is fairly well established in psychology. Lloyd Fernando, however, goes beyond the racial consciousness to posit a consciousness that is above race and that applies to all the races. It is, in short, the country's consciousness. This could explain why no character in the novel sees him as belonging to his

own race. Further, if we accept Tok Said as the country's consciousness, then his prediction of how Sally will love all those who come to her becomes clearer. It is merely a case of the country's consciousness speaking to the country!

From the foregoing, it should be obvious that Lloyd Fernando has a very definite idea of both

(i) how the country's racial dilemma should be approached; and
(ii) how it can be solved.

It should be viewed not as an economic or political problem as such but in more fundamental terms: as a problem involving the people themselves. The racial problem exists because the people have yet to learn to trust each other and be at ease with each other. And it is the absence of this trust, this ability to be at ease with each other, that generates the distrust that makes the political and economic problems themselves so urgent. That, at least, is the implication of this position. The solution to the problem is implicit in the statement of the problem. The solution requires the eradication of the psychological barriers which separate one race from the other. How these barriers can be eradicated is not specified but a possible avenue is prescribed by the relationship of the four undergraduates before it is overwhelmed by the riots. What is required is not less but increased, frequent and close contact between members of the different racial groups. Only through this can the racial problem be overcome. Such, at least, seems to be the author's solution.

The fact that Fernando knows how the racial problem should be viewed and solved has affected the structure and technique of the novel. To show the fragile nature of the interracial relationship, he has first to show that set of relationships in an apparently healthy state and then show the relationships disintegrating. This he does quite well by presenting the apparently strong relationship between the four undergraduate at the beginning of the novel. Then he shows how the relationships change in consequence of the riots. While this aspect of the novel is well handled, his delineation of the characters of the four undergraduates is not quite satisfactory.

The four undergraduates are delineated as racial types, as representatives of the four major races. Consequently, they are identifiable only in terms of their races. Guan Kheng may be distinct from Sabran, and from Santi and from Peter but he is distinct only in so far as he is Chinese. In fact, he could be any Chinese. So that what he is, is a racial type and not an individual as such. What is true of Guan Kheng's delineation is also true of Santi's and Peter's. Sabran is similarly a Malay but he is slightly more developed than the representatives of the other races: he is not only aware of social issues but is also a social activist of sorts by virtue of his involvement in the trade union movement. But the fact that Sabran is slightly more developed does not make him any more a real individual than the others. All four remain racial types/representatives. This underdevelopment of character is demanded by the author's need to show how, in spite of decades of being together and in spite of apparently close friendships, people retain their racial identity. So that the characters are merely puppets operated by the author to make his points.

While its focus is on the contemporary racial situation in Malaysia/Singapore, *Scorpion Orchid* does attempt to set that situation in a historical context. The device used to this end is an academic one, that of reproducing in the novel extracts from the *Hikayat Abdullah,* the *Sejarah Melayu* and *Syonan — My Story*. For example, in the opening chapter of the novel, Santi's family returns to India and by this action becomes representative of a group which refuses to join, to become part of local society. The chapter closes with an extract from the *Hikayat Abdullah* about a man who is brought before a master and asked: "Do you wish to join this society or not?" After the question is put to him three or four times, the man finally replies "No" and reiterates his refusal on being asked the question yet again. The man is thereupon thrown on the floor and flogged by his captors till he shrieks with agony. The man's refusal to join the society not only parallels the refusal of Santi's family to join Malaysia/Singapore society but also comments thereon; the man, unlike Santi's family, not

only does not have the freedom to leave but is, in fact, punished for not wanting to join the society. A further and perhaps more important function of the extract is to suggest that the problem of people opting not to become/remain members of society in Malaysia/Singapore is not one new to the country; it is, as the extract indicates, one which has confronted it as long ago at least as the last century. The historical basis that these and other extracts are supposed to provide the contemporary issues under scrutiny in the novel is, however, easy to miss.

That the purpose of the extracts is difficult to grasp is amply illustrated by Chapter X which begins with the story of the Raja of Haru, extracted from the *Sejarah Melayu*. The Raja hears of the beauty of Raja Puteh and proposes to go to Bentan to seek her hand. His mother advises him not to do so as the Raja of Bentan is an enemy but he is adamant. After this extract the rest of the chapter is a "stream of consciousness" account of incidents and people in Santi's life after the riots. This essay in the stream-of-consciousness technique probably reflects Santi's delirium when, following the riots, he becomes ill. The significance of the story of the Raja of Haru, but not its connection with the stream-of-consciousness passage, is tenuously clarified in Chapter XVI which consists of passages drawn from historical and contemporary accounts and interspersed with the lives of the characters in the immediate present of the novel. Among the historical passages, which collectively trace the highlights in the colonisation of Malaysia/Singapore over the last two centuries, is an earlier one which presents the migration of the family of the famed Malay warrior, Hang Tuah, to Bentan. Hang Tuah's family and the Raja of Haru are thus linked by the fact that both head for Bentan where the former settles permanently and where the latter sojourns for some time. The movement from one place to another is immigration and the point of the two accounts seems to be that the Malays are as much an emigrant people as the non-Malays; only, it might be added, by an accident of history, they settled in the country before the non-Malays. The issue of joining the society, inherent in the situation of immigrants, introduced in the first chapter emerges explicitly in this chapter in the context of the Japanese Occupation of the region during the Second World War. Now, it is the Japanese conquerors who torture their subjects to get the acceptable response to the question "Do you wish to join this society or not?" The message is clear: the immigrants in Malaysia/Singapore really have nothing to complain of! The last passage in Chapter XVI, which is also the closing paragraph of the novel, drives home the point that emigration is a perilous process for the travellers are warned that there are "fierce crocodiles" (p. 147) in the river along which they must travel "upstream" to reach their goal.

Scorpion Orchid could have accorded sensational treatment to its potentially explosive subject. Instead, it scrutinises the racial dilemma confronting Malaysia in a restrained, academic manner to plumb not only the genesis, course and consequences of a racial riot but also the historical factors responsible for the same. In this, the emphasis is not sociological but human, and the treatment is generally not direct but oblique. In both, adopting the indirect approach to the art of the novel and opting to confront the most "sensitive" issue within this region, Lloyd Fernando has broken fresh literary ground which qualifies *Scorpion Orchid* as the best Malaysian novel in English to date.

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Self-Delusion as Poetry in *REFUGEES AND OTHER DESPAIRS*

Wong Phui Nam

Wilfred Owen said of his poems that "the poetry is in the pity". He was in no way making a special plea for the reader's indulgence for incompetence in the handling of language. Rajendra is, when, in referring to his own case, he too claims *his* "poetry is in the pity". He is, of course, merely misquoting his sources in his pleading to be read only for his "message". But he sees difficulty with language as merely deficiency in technique. He implies he must be forgiven his impatience at having to school himself in the production of aesthetically satisfying metaphors, "correctly" scanned verse or well-turned "poetic" phrases. Technicalities do not matter as long as he has statements of great importance to make.

The problem, I think, goes much deeper than he has ever been willing to consider or even to understand it. He will agree that it has something to do with language, but he thinks it so minor a preoccupation, little differentiated from a concern with technique or from "art for art's sake" (in his peculiar understanding of the term), that he will not understand why attention to detail in language matters. He considers it unimportant to ask the questions that Orwell said every writer should ask: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

That such questions should have mattered is illustrated by his own practice. Despite his often expressed intention of making statements of great significance touching on war, social upheavals, disease, hunger and destruction of the environment, all that he has managed to convey in his poems is a vague sense of his desire to be seen expressing socially approved sentiments on these subjects and, in consequence, be regarded as a praiseworthy fellow. His lack of care in the use of language ensures that he can have little awareness of the details in argument and imagery sustained by the words he uses and, thus, little control over whether they actually support the broader sense of what he wishes to convey in his writing. That he stands in unshakeable belief in the importance of what he says is indication of how badly he is deceived by his own words.

As examples of the kind of mis-communication I am referring to, I shall draw only on the poems in the most recent volume *Refugees and Other Despairs*. Examples similar in kind can be found in such abundance both in that volume and in all of the others published by the poet that I feel I should be saved the trouble of having to rummage over the entire uninviting dumping ground of his work in order to pick them. The volume, in covering such of his preoccupations as war and economic exploitation and the victims thereof, preservation of the environment, and love, both domestic and illicit, is characteristic of much of his other work.

The most ambitious poem in *Refugees and Other Despairs* is "Inhospitality as a Medium of Destruction". From the title, the ostensible theme of the poem is the cruelty of man to man arising, in the present instance, from indifference of people in general to the suffering of "neighbours" or fellow humans. In the poem the suffering is intended to be particularised in Vietnamese refugees who have crossed the South China Sea to land on the East Coast only to be met by hostile reception from the local inhabitants. If the poet's expectation of his poetry is to be believed, the suffering of the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese themselves should elicit the required pity from the reader.

What perception, however, is there in the poem of the actuality of the suffering of the Vietnamese? We have:

a) . . . . . we discover
the awful cruelty of our neighbours

b) The common factor
in all their receptions
was unmitigated hostility

and

c) The result of these meetings
was often blood and terror.

What we have are such banalities as "awful cruelty", "unmitigated hostility" and "blood and terror", all of which point to the unoriginal observation that people can sometimes be pretty awful. What really happened on the East Cost, as far as the poem in concerned, remains a blank, and this is only because Rajendra's own experience of such "blood and terror" is also a blank. Since he is totally innocent of the experience which is supposed to have aroused in him so much pity that he feels compelled to bear witness to it to the whole world, he has to resort to cheaply won phrases to substitute for his lack.

As often happens with people who make up unlikely stories, Rajendra is not wholly consistent in the details of what he is telling. Even where "bodies of the children were cast/to join the fish and coral series" (whatever "coral series" may be), it is not clear whether the perpetrator of the act is the sea or the East Coast natives. Consistency in the story demands that it be the latter, but nowhere in the poem is there any description of people doing anything other than purposing "to impregnate/The refugees with fear". The sea, on the other hand, is more active:

Buffeted by unsympathetic waves
Dreams are torn, pulped. . . . . .
And hopes, like cockroaches, go under

Yet even with the sea, something strange is going on. For if Rajendra has ever tried to flush a cockroach down his toilet bowl, he would soon have discovered that the cockroach would remain stubbornly afloat when everything else would have gone down the bowl. So much for Rajendra's veracity.

On closer examination, the void in the poem is much larger than a mere absence of experience. Something more solid is also missing — the Vietnamese! In the poem they are only a number, "2504", not even "2504 men, women and children", but "2504". And a sure sign that the poet has no people, no human beings in sight when he talks of suffering is when he refers to the (absent) refugees interchangeably as "we" and "they", pronouns whose focus shifts easily around a hollow centre. If the poetry is in the pity, then it is a pity that is literally for nobody.

If suffering is not what the poem is about, what then is its real theme? This comes out in the last stanza, without, perhaps, the poet himself being aware of it:

So tell me how to be stimulated
By coral, sea, rock, tree and cloud
When a shoal of pale corpses form
grotesque patterns on the plage
. . . . . .
The environment, culture and un-
natural, affects and shapes my art

Through the "awful cruelty" and "blood and terror" we have at last been steered to the real subject, his fascination with "grotesque patterns of pale corpses". The imagery of the corpses, which is oddly treated as something picturesque (otherwise why the Shelleyan "pale", the stilted "plage" and "shoal" as a collection of corpses?), betrays the poet's real interest, which looks suspiciously akin to Ruskin's

> Does a man die at your feet, your business is not to help him but to note the colour of his lips; does a woman embrace her destruction before you, your business is not to save her but to watch how she bends her arm.

I suppose the irony of this disclosure of his real unconscious interest is lost on the poet, who so loudly decries art for art's sake.

By his misguided attempt to imitate the form of Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" in alternating stanzas composed by himself with those cribbed from Chew Teng Beng's essay, "Hand Made Paper was Creative Medium", to make up his poem, he is also saying what a fine compassionate fellow he is in contrast to Chew, who could take such an enthusiastic interest in the art of making paper by hand while Vietnamese drowned. He succeeds only in telling me and, I hope, Chew Teng Beng that his performance is merely that of a man of coarse sensibilities.

In "Poppies and Refugees", Rajendra's perception of the plight of refugees is given as follows:

> Yet no tickertape welcome
> awaited the vanquished
> when they crossed
> high seas for freedom
> peace and neutrality
> Instead the heavens
> rained angry stones
> The ocean frothed
> and on the stems of
> foam flecked waves
> poppies were seen to sprout

By "the vanquished" he means the refugees, though most refugees have only been non-participating civilians who fled their countries in the hope of finding a better material standard of life in host countries. It is interesting to note, in passing, that elsewhere in the poems on the environment the poet condemns economic progress and development for no better reason than that they involve the construction of tall buildings and roads, offering as alternative,

> . . . . . days of gold and green;
> with lush fringe of palm
> and cashew and coconut trees

If he had considered carefully what he was writing when composing "Poppies and Refugees" he would have asked why the refugees should expect the kind of welcome accorded only to victorious generals and presidents elect and in such places as Wall Street. He would have asked why it is really a hardship not to be given such a reception, and if the heavens rained "angry stones" (hail stones in the South China Sea?) why man's inhumanity to man should be blamed.

The word "yet" at the beginning of the first line of the first stanza quoted from "Poppies and Refugees" implies that when "foreign ambassadors exchanged pledges of solidarity" as referred to earlier on in the same poem, refugees would be given good reason to expect tickertape welcomes. This is essentially a nonsense argument of the same class as that which asserts, "Mr. Ponampalam kissed Mrs. Ponampalam to-day. *Yet* the headmaster (who is not Mr. Ponampalam) did not give me a sweet for running away from school", or some such thing Rajendra could have said when he was a schoolboy and not yet a poet. That the argument in the poem does not seem as absurd as this is due only to the tone of high solemnity which the poet affects to give the illusion that some large political truth is about to be revealed. Only

the unwary and, of course, the poet himself can fail to see the essential absurdity of the poem's argument.

What war (really) means to Rajendra is set out in "Of War, Grass and Flowers":

> I found myself in our garden
> relating to flowers the insanity
> of war, the pain and the horror
>
> In the middle of a story about
> a child who lost her mother. . . . .

The above stanzas belie any claim which he might make to personal experience of war apart from his remembering enough from his newspaper reading to be able to tag the shop-worn label "insanity" to it. Since people must die in wars, there has to be some child somewhere who has lost her mother, but what child is there in the poem whom the poet knows and therefore for whom he could feel genuine compassion? If he has not said the subject was war he could be telling the flowers in his garden the story (telling stories to flowers?) of Cinderella, who, the poet should do well to remember, had also lost her mother.

To write of pity growing out of such a perception of war and of pity for refugees who have not been given tickertape welcomes by their hosts must surely be to debase the meaning of the word. For Rajendra, the word might well have lost its meaning. He cannot equate whatever there is in his poems with the pity, and the pain and horror growing out of war, in lines like these:

> If in some smothering dream, you too could pace
> Behind the wagon we flung him in,
> and watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
> His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
> If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
> Come gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
> Bitter as cud
> Of vile incurable sores on innocent tongues,
> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest . . . . .
>
> "Dulce Est Decorum Est" -
> Wilfred Owen

In a few of the poems in *Refugees*, the poet is merely working up a sweat to find words for a passion he might or might not have felt. From the results, he might have done better to have remained mute and inglorious over it. Consider this short poem in which he attempts a Chairil Anwar intensity only to end up talking nonsense.

FLASHBACKS

> Flashbacks of you
> your departure . . . . .
> stain
> the
> brain
> like a spray of blood
> as when a bullet
> rips through the jugular

I do not think that he has really paused to consider that when a bullet rips through the jugular vein there is no way the resulting spray of blood will fall on the brain, much less stain it, unless the poet has, with previous foresight, exposed that organ of his for the event. Even if that impossibility does happen, it would not be possible for the poet to see his brain being stained, unless, "unless" again, he contrives to have mirrors arranged in the right places to catch the image of his exposed brain and at angles which render their reflecting surfaces accessible to his line of vision before he has his flashbacks. Is a blood-stained brain such a pretty sight that he wants to see it? He might well have lost consciousness before he sees the stain, or perhaps after (from the shock of it)? Rajendra's mind was simply not on his hand in the heat (or sweat?) of composition. How else could he, as lover and poet, be so cruelly deceived?

Another feature of the language of *Refugees* is the frequency of occurence in it of words used by the poet with little regard to meaning. These words, which may have been used because they seem vaguely right for the poet's general meaning may be regarded as a species of nonsense words. Though having meaning as they stand by themselves, they come to a parting of ways with meaning when used by the poet in the context of what he is attempting to say. Since these words are richly strewn throughout the volume, they deserve to be listed by themselves (though not exhaustively) in an Appendix. My commentary on each of these words is also given in the Appendix.

The real point to be made about Rajendra is not so much whether his poems are good or bad (they are so obviously bad that there is no need to make a point of that) as whether, in making so much effort at getting his readers to share his delusions, he is not being merely foolish but also potentially dangerous. For what he really wants of his readers is that they suspend all critical judgement and give full assent to even the most foolish things that he might have to say. What he is asking for are conditions wherein writers receive acceptance for any propositions they advance, be they half-baked, fantastical or even destructive, as long as they are clothed in language which feels vaguely right. Before he has his wish granted (however trivial or harmless his real motivations may be), he should well pause to consider that at different times and in different places in the world when emotions were allowed to cloud critical judgement on vital issues, people did terrible things to other people because they could be persuaded to accept propositions tending to justify the killing of millions in the interest of the success of a 5-year Plan, torture of unbelievers for the good of their souls, the clearing away of entire populations from choice lands to make room for the Master Race and so on. Rajendra might think that he is well clear of the shadow of any ivory tower, but in wilfully allowing his language to go to seed, he is taking a step, and advocating others to do so, toward the darkness which also has ro‘ .n for arguments supporting actions that may well foster the very conditions which he seems so much to deplore.

APPENDIX

A SAMPLE LIST OF RAJENDRA NONSENSE WORDS

		Comment
1.	inanities: "A refugee from the granite inanities of my fellowmen" "Refugee" — page 3	An inanity is a void, a lack of solidity. Granite lack of solidity?
2.	spit: "Turn the eternal conundrums on the *spit* of a searing mind" "Exile" — page 4	A spit is used for roasting meat or drying or smoking fish. It is not the instrument one would use to sear with i.e. to scorch, char, cauterise flesh among other things. If the poet intends "searing" to mean "withering" no spit or any other instrument need perhaps be used.?
3.	hackle: "I notice the newly-mown grass beginning to *hackle* in terror" "Of War, Grass and Flowers" — page 15	Surely one cannot expect grass to cut itself, roughly or otherwise. There are two other "hackles" and both are nouns. The verb derivative of one of them means "to dress (as of a fishingfly) with a hackle".
4.	putrescent: "*putrescent* fruit, faeces and urine" "Cheap Pineapple and Sand" — page 28	Some people would say that "putrescent faeces" is arguable. But "putrescent urine"?
5.	history: "and four hundred and forty million years of *history* of stalactite and stalagmite are blasted into obscurity "Kali and the Caves" — Pages 32 & 33	A history involves a *written* record. Is there a continuous record of events involving the stalatite and stalagmite mentioned? In what sense are they blasted into obscurity?
6.	unkempt: "unwashed, *unkempt* arms . . . ." "Fixing Their Dreams" — page 46	We have unkempt (uncombed, untrimmed) hair, beards, or unkempt (untidy with uncombed hair) appearance. But unkempt arms?
7	puncture: "their hopless dreams *punctured* like sieves" "Fixing Their Dreams — page 46	Sieves are not punctured. Tyres, tubes and balloons may be. One can perhaps puncture a piece of metal to make it into a sieve.

8. animals:
"the birds and insects
started migrating south
the *animals* went north"
"The Animal and
Insect Act" — page 48

If "animals" is used in a sense which excludes birds and insects, it does not mean "quadrupeds" or "mammals". It means human beings of a bestial nature. Surely the poet has quadrupeds in mind?

9. shards:
"And the darkness
crumbled like *shards*
of stained glass"
"Thread of Pain"
— page 53

A shard is a fragment of pottery. I wonder if the poet has in mind fragments of pottery of stained glass. If darkness crumbles, would light or some phenomenon new to physics emerge? There is no sign in the poem of the poet considering what follows on darkness crumbling.

10. ferment:
"jungle and sea
meet in ritual
ferment of fire"
"Primitive
Dipsomania" — page 55

I would like to see yeasty fire. In any case, when sea and jungle meet we get a flooded jungle, not fire.

The Mutes in the Sun and *Flowers in the Sky:* A Relative View

K.S. Maniam

> ". . . what is man then hating? But the answer admits of no doubt; the *decline of his type*. He hates then from out of the profoundest instinct of his species; there is horror, foresight, profundity, far-seeing vision in this hatred — it is the profoundest hatred there is. It is for its sake that art is *profound* . . ." (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ,* Penguin rep. 1975, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, p.79)

Lee Kok Liang's *The Mutes in the Sun* (first published in 1964, rep. Heinemann, 1974) and *Flowers in the Sky* (Heinemann, 1981) reflect Nietzsche's complex attitude towards creative motivation. Kok Liang deals, basically, with "the decline of his type" in the former, a novella of 18 chapters, and in the latter, a compact, slim novel. The interval of some seventeen years between the two works indicates a significant development in Kok Liang as a Malaysian novelist writing in the English language. To be Malaysian and to write in English can be frustratingly opposing activities. Kok Liang, however, links the two in an imaginative manner. The novella/novel, until Kok Liang appeared on the Malaysian literary scene, did not attempt to go beneath the tensions of everyday living, banal social encounters, historical impact and inter-cultural reactions in order to mine a deeper core of experience. In other words, something extraordinary was not made to emerge from the mundane, the ordinary.

The trickle of postwar prose works, between 1945 and 1958, depended on the disruption of daily routines for their impact and thrust. And as the immediacy and interest in the Japanese occupation of the country (1942-1945) receded, these autobiographical/biographical and semifictional works too attracted less and less attention. The works that succeeded them, in the early 60s, had more order or structure, were inventive rather than imaginative, and explored the existing cultural backgrounds from a need to see richness instead of portraying them from the inside. Kok Liang brought a much needed change to the surface structure of the somewhat descriptive, voyeuristically cultural exposé. *The Mutes in the Sun* and *Flowers in the Sky,* hereafter referred to by their abbreviated titles *MS* and *FS*, respectively, testify to an integrated approach towards the materials of fiction. The two are inter-related and an understanding of *MS* leads to a fuller experience of *FS*.

If in *MS* Kok Liang experiments with a novelist's ability to reach into his materials and fashion a compellingly revealing technique, in *FS* he uses that very skill to fathom hitherto barely approached shades of Malaysian realities. In the former the structure gives the novella a closed-in framework of meaning; in the latter the implications reach beyond the novelistic edifice.

The contents of the story and technique of unfolding it in *MS* suggest a reaching into the stillness of an understanding after a frenzied search for comprehension. The protagonist in *MS*, named once as 'Met', exhibits strange and divergent behaviour. The reader is aware that the protagonist is looking for a moment of revelation that will unlock his personality and also provide the code for understanding life. This emerges only after one has gone through the bewildering and irrational experiences of the protagonist.

The story itself is fairly straightforward. The protagonist is hostile towards his father's plans for him — the reasons are not explicitly presented — but suppresses his reactions most of the time. It is only when the father disrupts the protagonist's friendship with his friend Kee Huat that he openly subverts his father's intentions. The events become increasingly violent and climax in the protagonist killing his father's second wife, Gaik Lang, who is in fact Kee Huat's girl friend. Then after his trial and stay in the Home for Juvenile Delinquents, he renounces his own family and takes to the streets. On one of his excursions into the city entertainment spot he comes upon Kee Huat. The long search for his friend ends. The two, moved

by some long submerged motivation, set fire to the protagonist's father's saw-mill and stride "up the street like two buccaneers adventuring into the unknown." (*MS*, p. 128).

It is the structure of the novella that yields the writer's objective and the message of the work. Kok Liang's organization of the events, the style, character, portrayal and the use of certain literary motifs give the novella an intensity that become transformed as social comment and psychological insight in MS.

The events in this novella fall into two categories. The first consists of episodes and happenings that the protagonist is an unwilling witness to or participator in; the second is made up of those over which he wields some control. Not surprisingly, therefore, the change of pace in the novella occurs when he ceases to be a victim of circumstances and instead becomes responsible for some of them. This happens in the third chapter and Kok Liang subtly destroys the chronological order of events so as to emphasize the psychological thrust of the work. From then on the novella takes on the incisiveness of a scalpel and cuts into the past, personal blindness and social diseases. Such a sentence as, "The road was long and narrow and was pockmarked with two lamps, one at each end" (*MS*, pp. 42/3) takes on added meaning in retrospect.

This significant multiplicity of meaning emerges because, with the destruction of the line between past and present, Kok Liang dramatises thought and emotion even while the experience is only a recollection. Through this technique Kok Liang invests *MS* with a literary lustre so long absent from Malaysian fiction in English. The dramatisation of past experiences that motivate and influence present behaviour is also largely responsible for giving the novella its organic and at the same time a closed-in texture of meaning.

Kok Liang prepares his reader for this approach to the materials and considerations of the novella in the first six paragraphs of the work. The vision presented in these two pages gradually narrows from the extensiveness of a landscape reaching to the horizon down to "the flickering of . . . children's shadows" (*MS*, p. 44) in a cubicle. The need for such a focus is also justified by the quality of the world-view held by the inhabitants of the dehumanized and dehumanizing, mainly, social environment. Kok Liang works in this implication in the description of the landscape and social mores:

> All through the week the vast dark cloud with silvery scalloped edges sat over the city by the sea, slowly showering and depositing particles of heat. The tar on the road burnt the soles of the feet. Sweat lacquered the features of the inhabitants. The leaves on the trees grew waxy and yellowish and dropped in large indolent spirals. In the evenings when the sun filtered in beneath the edge of the cloud as through the bottom of a closed door, the men drew out their stools and sat in the open, fanning their armpits, like doctors dabbing swabs on an open wound. Faces blank, eyes drooping, they breathed in shallow gasps, waiting for the hot season to end. (*MS*, p. 42).

It is clear that Kok Liang is exploring a sick social and individual landscape. By closely aligning himself with the perceptions of the protagonist, when he appears, Kok Liang, as author, tacitly gives support to his character's attitudes and as yet undiscovered sense of values. In fact, Kok Liang already is beginning to consider, in Nietzsche's phrase, "the decline of his type."

To make this consideration clear and challenging, Kok Liang has chosen a range of characters that immediately draw attention to themselves. Through the protagonist's unpredictable, abnormal behaviour Kok Liang questions the accepted code of ethics. The gap between the protagonist's behaviour and that of his father and other adults further underscores the moralistic implications of the work. Kee Huat and Gaik Lang, the other two juvenile characters (the writer's choice of youths must comment on the demoralizing, corrupt world of the grown-ups), in the conflict-ridden story, are also compelled to deviate from their own personalities and ambitions.

What emerges, by the end of the novella, is that Kok Liang has referred the reader to the corrupt, brutal centre of society. He does this by creating circumstances that force the protagonist, Kee Huat and Gaik Lang to bypass the development of their particular personalities.

These characters are seduced, the gentlest form of adult pressure, or simply coerced into satisfying perverted desires. The protagonist's dislike of Gaik Lang is an instinctive disgust of anything that smacks of love. When he kills her it is to wipe out that tarnished image of adult love. The writer hints, and forcefully, that the protagonist harbours resentment towards his father because he, in some manner, abused his mother.

Kok Liang exposes a complex, subconscious world of the individual. He uses a consistently developed technique to bring to the surface the struggles a young man undergoes in order to discover himself and also a set of values that will restore health to life. The bizarre (the protagonist infuriating the gibbons at his father's saw-mill), the down-to-earth (Kee Huat, much older now, sexually assaults beggar women), the repulsive (the protagonist cohabits with a crippled woman of indeterminate age in a decrepit house) all fit into the picture of a society denied its healthy existence.

There is little communication between people: father and son, friend and friend, lover and loved. This point is made clear throught the letters Kee Huat and Gaik Lang write to each other and the diary that Gaik Lang records in broken English, in place of a person to person encounter. All these, the letters, the diary, the cardboard cubicles, the prostitute's steaming room, the beggars huddled into their scanty coverlets under the cold night sky, and finally, the large, dilapidated house that the protagonist occupies together with the ageless beggar woman portray a terrifying picture of life without direction, without human warmth, gaps in understanding, social decay, and most of all, lack of coherence.

MS, therefore, is an indictment on society, written from deep within the perceptions of the vagrant, victimised healthy young who are condemned into serving the corrupt morals of the society in which they live. It is not life that they lead but a muddling through a form of existence less than human. That is why the images of people shut in rooms, closed cars, large rotting houses proliferate and gather an anger both in the reader and in the protagonist and lead to an explosion of protest. Man has not been allowed to move towards the freedom that permits the discovery of the dignity of his species. That is why, too, that *MS* can be said to be created out of the profoundest hatred there is, so that there can be that profound beauty, art.

In this short work of Kok Liang's one discerns a built-in system of responses that does not extend beyond the literary structure. At most, it is cathartic, both for the protagonist, who at the close of the novella burns down the saw-mill of his father — a symbol surely of all that is depraved and confining — and through this action, for the reader. *MS* is a dramatised study of abuse, hatred, brutality, callousness and the lack of dignity in man, framed by an almost pure literary structure.

Flowers in the Sky (FS), published seventeen years later, retains the fine concern for structure and consciousness for style. But in *FS*, Kok Liang has outgrown a merely literary impression of the work. He functions more as a Malaysian novelist, meaning that he confronts issues that affect the average Malaysian, but at the same time devotes himself to developing a novelistic edifice and texture that possess coherence, integration, and a more lucidly worked out interconnecting system of literary motifs.

The structure of *FS* opens up several experiences, instead of, as observed in *MS*, closing in on one. In *FS*, too, Kok Liang consciously revokes time by, ironically, insisting on chronological demarcation. The entire novel's events occur within a period of six days, each of which is further marked off by an apparently important subdivision in terms of hours. Again Kok Liang obliterates awareness to the passage of time by calling attention to it. The function of such a device is, in keeping with the theme of the novel, to reveal other forms of progress: experiential, reflective or philosophical, and spiritual. The constant intrusion of temporal consciousness is meant to jolt the reader into philosophical and spiritual forms of consciousness. This is one way of affirming that materialistic progress is only the outer shell of our experience of daily life.

In *FS*, Kok Liang attempts to dramatise, ironically, the conflict between materialistic and spiritual values. Though he does not successfully resolve this two-way stretch in a man's life, he nevertheless portrays man's attempts to break down the limits imposed on him by society, accepted philosophical attitudes, individual ideas of self-image and spiritual rigidity. From

the epigraphs down to the choice of the two principal characters, Mr. K and Venerable Hung, a doctor and a monk, respectively, there is evidence that Kok Liang sees Malaysian life as bifurcated, fragmented, and sometimes even atomised.

The novel, therefore, tries to provide a coherent picture, artistically structured, of Malaysian society. One of the responses that the reader can make to this work, consequently, is to evolve for himself a fuller, more organic view of struggle and existence in a multi-racial society, in which parochial, communal thinking and feeling may blind one to the more valuable, integrated approach to culture. The novel resonates on a still point of calm yet with vibrant involvement in the daily demands of living in a frustratingly hot country, riddled again by divisive attitudes. This is made clear not so much in the epigraphs as in the opening paragraph of the work:

> His eyes watered with softened intensity, between unfocused gaze vagueness gathered an enlarged emptiness, and finally an immobility, the like of which he had sought in vain, washed and carressed every pore and entered and remained in his flesh.
>
> (*FS*, p.1)

This description does not only refer to the effects of anaesthetics on a patient about to lose consciousness but also to that calm point mentioned above, to the synthesis, through a deliberately directed vision, between the materialistic and the spiritual, and the immediate and the eternal. The attempt to understand contrast in life will, it is implied, lead to a transcendence over petty professionalism, communal loyalties, materialistic greed and social conformity.

The objectivity of the dramatic analysis in *MS* is now converted, in *FS*, to an acknowledgement of the real, the socially accepted and the need for a spiritual set of values however abstract. Where in *MS* the objectivity remains as detached incisiveness, in *FS* it is given individual and social backgrounds. Mr. K's and Venerable Hung's thoughts, feelings and desires are recorded in detail down to the last swish of lust (Mr. K had always hankered for large breasts in women).

The movement of the novel, appropriately enough, begins from opposing directions: a monk needs surgical repair, a doctor desires spiritual ballast. The achievements of the doctor reach a materialistic apogee and he inclines now towards some form of philosophical or religious development. The monk's spiritual progress now lands him in the terrain of wealth and personal comfort. With the meeting of the two then, the novelist introduces that hourglass of coincidence necessary, may be even inevitable, for the initiation into new forms of understanding. And because the shape and texture of that awareness is yet inaccessible, the novelist ends on a note of ironic reflection: "And then Mr. K. smiled. He saw that the monk, whom he had discharged that morning, was getting into a Mercedes, helped by a chauffeur. The monk looked tiny beside the car." (*FS*, p. 157) The car's number plate carrying the figures 666 also connotes, in Cantonese, triple joy, which for the monk or Mr. K, is not available.

Here in *FS*, then, "the decline of his type" is examined within a socially relevant Malaysian context. While the two-fold direction the novel develops comments on the spiritual progress of man and his development as a member of a complex, multi-racial society, it at the same time maintains that gap between reality and the extensions that men make of it within themselves. An awareness of this tendency in the writing explains why some characters are not fully entered into, why the sensual aspect of man receives repeated treatment, and why the novel seems to veer from following Venerable Hung's and Mr. K's preoccupations and into the farcical religious incident, the discovery of the Ganesh statue washed up to Mr. K's house facing the sea. The diversion is deliberately sketched in to provide a contrast in the quality of different men's approach to fame, success and spiritual satisfaction. In the structure of the novel there has to be a departure from the tenacious following up of a particular development. For is that not the theme of Kok Liang's novel? There are many detours in man's pursuit of the ideal life, many layers of responses to reality and one cannot be sacrificed for another, or allowed to lapse for the sake of another.

Kok Liang has succeeded in shaping a novel, distantly different from his earlier work, *MS,* to elucidate the idea that it is possible to enlarge the dimensions of man's dignity; that everything else, be it political, social, communal, has to give way to the healthy development of an integrated, inclusive mode of perception. Some of the details (Swami Gomez, it is pointed out, cannot be a valid name because Gomez, having a Eurasian ring about it, cannot be a swami, only a padre!) may not have been accurately assimilated but the intention is to show that a breaking down of one's reserves is more improtant than an insistence on formal, exclusive correctness.

He has also harnessed to a style that is at most times skilfully expressive (with some lapses here and there) another element which reflects and synthesizes the several imaginations behind the many languages spoken and written in this country. Venerable Hung's letter to his Master in China has the formality of carefully practised Chinese calligraphy; the file on Mr. K's patient, Ah Looi, possesses just that number of grammatical errors that reflect present day developments in English in this country. Mrs. K, Inspector Gopal, Inspector Hashim, to mention only a few, speak in a language the nuances of which are affected by their mother tongues, namely, Tamil and Malay.

The resemblances between *The Mutes in the Sun* and *Flowers in the Sky* have been pointed out. But what is more important and significant is the development that is discernible in *Flowers in the Sky*. While the former is iconoclastically literary, the latter is literary, artistically seminal and, in the development of the Malaysian novel in English, a quietly but daringly experimental work. *The Mutes in the Sun* celebrates the energy of man; *Flowers in the Sky* finds ritual passage for the dignity of man in that energy.

Sampling Clifford's and Swettenham's 'Malayan' Writings: Towards a Close Hard Look

Ooi Boo Eng

As in Swettenham's 'charming picture' of a royal outing on the Perak River — 'A scorching sun shines down on the gaily-clad figures with their background of dark jungle, on the yellow sands and sparkling river, with its burden of picturesque boats, . . .' ('With a Casting-Net', *Stories and Sketches by Sir Frank Swettenham,* ed. W.R. Roff, O.U.P. 1967, p. 140) — the sun, brightly cheerful or glaringly ghastly, is an insistent reality in Southeast Asia; infiltrating its presence, as Clifford remembers with delight in his 'galaxy of Malayan scenes', into even the heart of darkness of the jungle : 'Here, for near a mile, there is cool, deep shade, that would almost be gloom, were it not that the fierce Eastern sun will not suffer himself to be altogether defeated, and still finds means to dust and powder the running water with little shifting flecks of light and colour, and, here and there, to cast broad belts of glimmering brilliancy on the surface of the stream' ('On Malayan Rivers', *Stories by Sir Hugh Clifford,* ed. W.R. Roff, O.U.P. 1966, p. 181). With impressions of sunniness and openness, as in the Swettenham passage, or of depths illuminated by light, as in Clifford's impressionistic yet patiently detailed description, Maugham's Neil MacAdam would agree despite the different aura, soaked up from his immersion in Conrad, which he expects to see the East pervaded with: 'Neil . . . devoured the scene with eager eyes. He was surprised. He knew his Conrad almost by heart and he was expecting a land of brooding mystery. He was not prepared for the blue milky sky. Little white clouds . . . shone in the sun. The green trees of the forest glittered in the brilliant light. . . .' ('Neil MacAdam', *Maugham's Borneo Stories,* ed. G.V. de Freitas, H.E.B. 1976, p. 176).

Three against one — the response of commonsense realism or observation against the response of imaginative interpretation: which is more appealing, or truer and therefore more appealing? Few if any will argue against the judgement that of the four authors Conrad has the finest sensibility and that it is not to be doubted if he is credited with having produced much the more significant perspective on alien experience. Nevertheless the other three do have something to be said for them: there is after all a good deal more of plain light and colour and liveliness in the East than there is of 'brooding mystery'. We cannot of course make much if anything of this against Conrad's truth and imagination — not at any rate without going thoroughly into that fascinating matter summed up in Wallace Stevens' happy phrase 'the supreme fiction' in relation to the whole of Conrad's Eastern tales. But though the question as summarily put by Maugham's Munro in 'Neil MacAdam' — 'But does it matter? I don't know why fiction should be hampered by fact' (pp. 185-186) — can be pertinently asked, asking it can't totally ease the discomfort that some readers must have felt with the sort of criticism voiced by the character Darya in the same story: 'That stream of words, those involved sentences, the showy rhetoric, that affectation of profundity: when you get through all that to the thought at the bottom, what do you find but a trivial commonplace?' (p. 185). Sweeping away all of Conrad with such facile summariness is of course being sweepingly unfair to his achievement as a whole. Some readers, though, may be reminded of the nagging thought that, yes, Conrad does sometimes try a little too strenuously to make his matter and language support more than they will bear: is there not sometimes in his closely wrought prose, or in the significance or effects worked for, a note of strain, of excess?

Maugham strains in the opposite direction, the strain being in the lack of strain of the kind exhibited, for instance, in the *Borneo Stories* volume. It is difficult to escape the impression that here is a writer so practised in producing only relatively simple, clear-cut verbal structures that the result tends towards only a perfunctory precision which is sometimes actually realized when a paragraph or even a page seems produced by a machine designed to generate sentences and phrases limited to certain specification of length and pattern. It is true that his brief

sentences in their innocent simplicity can in context often achieve not only clarity but also a remarkable expressiveness. But sometimes what results is no more than the clarity of explanation or information-giving or, even worse, of cliché.

As for the *Borneo Stories* considered as wholes, it is difficult with them in mind to warm to what the editor of the volume claims for Maugham as a short-story writer — 'Maugham raised the technique of the short story to the level of art' (Introduction, p.9) — unless art is taken to mean expertise. The *Borneo Stories* are all professional jobs, immensely readable, but I am not sure of their having compelling imaginative qualities to any appreciable degree.

And even their professionalism unaccountably falters here and there. But enough has been mentioned for my purpose. The reservations I have raised, particularly with regard to Maugham, may seem harsh and, in the absence of exemplification and analysis (which another paper hopes to pursue), merely assertive. I have referred to them simply because all I want to do is to suggest sufficient general specification for the point that despite such and perhaps other likely reservations about their achievements, names like Conrad and Maugham can become automatically idealized into norms of great and minor perfection respectively when they are associated with the likes of Swettenham and Clifford as writers with works having to do with the East, Southeast Asia or Malaya; and then it becomes correspondingly easy, even inevitable, to underestimate the latter pair considerably.

Or to make, or let pass as not worth querying, judgements which, quite apart from whether or not they are fair to Swettenham or Clifford, show something questionable in the terms of their formulation. In his Introduction to *Stories by Sir Hugh Clifford* W.R. Roff claims a high value for Clifford's stories and sketches considered as historical documents, but if they form, as Roff says in the same breath, 'a moving record of the early days of colonial rule' (p. viii), they must have some quality of vitality or imagination which makes them 'moving' and gives to the value they have a significance over and above their being simply socio-historical documents, however important.

In the same breath is also thrown out the defensive concession 'whatever their short-comings as fine literature . . .' (p. viii). It would be churlish to ask what and how many shortcomings there are or may be found, but without any attempt at specification such a remark immediately characterizes itself as the sort of empty, conventionally acceptable gesture to make — and perhaps particularly safe to do so in this case because well-informed readers can be expected to sense a Conrad or a Maugham with their Eastern tales inviting comparison. As for 'fine literature': if Clifford's efforts aren't fine literature, so much the better for them. It is always better to hope to have contributed to *literature* than to *fine* literature.

It is no great loss to be 'no great literary artist' not only because not many are anyway (very few are for a critic like Yvor Winters), but also because if to be one is to be concerned, as an 1895 reviewer of Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* seemed to think, with correct punctuation or the crafting of quotable quotes : 'Mr. Swettenham is no great literary artist. His style is open to reproach on many counts . . . Punctuation . . . he seems to think an unnecessary evil, but the lack of it in involved sentences is an evil to the reader . . . Yet we could ill spare Mr. Swettenham's rough descriptions for the elaborate paintings of an artist in word. . . . It would be difficult to recall a single phrase which is memorable from the point of view of style; but, on the other hand, it would be difficult to forget one of the powerful sensations of reality which each succeeding character creates in the mind'. From this judgement we are separated by about eighty-six years in time but not in respect of the general critical tendency manifested, one to which even the best of critics sometimes succumb : the giving of approval if at all grudgingly to a work which falls foul of one's consciously held ideas of excellence despite one's finding oneself greatly engaged by it. This is especially likely to happen when one is dealing with the work of an author with no established reputation, and if the work happens to have established models of excellence with which consciously or unconsciously it is held in comparison such a likelihood becomes greater. In 1895 this seems to have happened, as crystallized in this sentence : 'The literary incapacity of the man makes you marvel more at the fascination of his book'; and it can be said to have happened again, in effect at least,

in 1967 in Roff's Introduction to the Swettenham volume, in which the 1895 comment is quoted and endorsed as 'on the whole fair' (p. xvii). The endorsement comes too easily, too quickly, as if what is endorsed is only too self-evident or has all along been generally accepted as valid in most respects. One reason which suggests itself for the perfunctoriness of the endorsement is that the reviewer's comment happens to apply to an author whose work has never been looked at closely enough with a view to assessing its literary value. Imagine someone saying of Hardy, for example, that his diction is sometimes queer, his syntax sometimes lumbers stiffly, and yet, despite the literary incapacity, the effect is often compelling. Such a commentator's critical capacity would immediately be held suspect, his notion of literary capacity objected to as narrow or strange.

Whatever works effectively — to create, say, 'powerful sensations of reality' — through words and the patterns and impressions which words articulate and evoke *has* style in the dynamic sense, the only sense which matters in the end. Good style is not 'fine' writing, 'the elaborate paintings of an artist in words'; such elaborate word-artistry being conceivable neither as the height nor the whole of literary excellence but only as an element of style which can be used as occasions demand for some special purpose. The alledged absence of it in Swettenham's writing does not thereby argue the presence of 'stiffness and awkwardness' in it; and, in any case, even if there is awkwardness, 'reprehending' it can only be justified on grounds other than those precious to 'literary penmanship' (p. xvii). In fact, though, I cannot find any awkwardness that at all approaches reprehensible proportions or irritating frequency. Hunting for it at random I find instead sentences like the following : 'So, in January, 1871, at the age of twenty, I found myself where I would be; . . .' (p. 1) — lively, casual; 'I was one of the large party of guests from Singapore and, being of no account, was lunching in a side room when, without previous notice, I was summoned to the banquetting hall and told to stand by the Maharaja and interpret the Malay speech he was then going to deliver to welcome His Imperial Highness and propose his health' (p. 3) — anecdotally rambling but not sloppy, with rather a lot got into it (including a self-deprecatory comment), and with the sequence of what happened nicely controlled for emphasis though allowed to run on in its natural order; 'The boy was taken into a field and *kris* — ed' (p. 32) — laconic, the horror of the deed allowed to speak for itself; 'On the 2nd November 1875, Mr. James Wheeler Woodford Birch, British Resident of Perak, was assassinated by Malays at a place called Pasir Salak on the Perak River. I propose to describe why and how this murder was committed' (p. 74) — business-like, the when, who, what and where of reporting calmly stated, the purpose clearly and firmly announced; . . . Where, just where, is the stiffness, the literary incapacity? In desperation I have to make do with this : 'The combatants moved but little, with heads down, forehead to forehead, horns locked, fore legs spread out and hind legs tucked in, each bull exerted all his might to overpower the other by weight and strength' (p. 158) — a neat sentence which would have been elegant and forceful in the way the sense of mass and movemenmt checked into momentary stalemate is articulated but for the lapse towards the end: 'exerted' should be 'exerting' to keep up with the phrase patterning set up. Such a lapse is regrettable because it spoils a good thing but in itself is not the sort of ineptness which damns a writer with literary incapacity.

I believe a similar quick sampling of the Clifford volume will result in a similar impression — of his being surprisingly a better writer than one would expect from one's routine acceptance of him as at best no more than a second-rate Maugham. The surprise, and with it the pleasure, will be greater for those who share with the 1895 reviewer of Swettenham's *Malay Sketches*, or with Conrad — whom Roff quotes as saying, with reference to Clifford, 'One cannot expect to be, at the same time, a ruler of men and an irreproachable player on the flute' (p. xvii) — the notion that action and contemplation, management of human affairs and cultivation of the aesthetic sense, or leading a busy life and writing well go very badly together or even not at all. The surprise may be less but not the pleasure for those who think this a romantic myth, or who, like Thoreau, believe that a hard day's work nerves mind and hand to write straight with body, vigour and clarity in one's words and sentences. Clifford does not always write like this — certainly not when, for example, he goes in for facile or

lame phrases like 'the magic of the East' (p. 2), 'The wonder of the East', 'The magic and mystery of Asia' (p. 3), 'land of a thousand beauties' (p. 186). But he is not incapable of coming up with much better stuff. Begin the piece on 'The East Coast' (p. 10) — 'In these days, the boot of the ubiquitous white man leaves its marks on all the fair places of the Earth . . .' — and you know at once, going no further, where you are with him, and not only as regards the theme but also his attitude to it : progress or civilisation, its dead-metaphor (ical) march called into life only to be accused of callousness by the image of 'the boot' marking 'all the fair places of the Earth', and there is more : it is not only just progress in general that Clifford is concerned with; it is progress of the Western-colonial variety. All this sense is got into a sentence which runs straight and clear. The next sentence picks up this sense, encased in 'the boot', and pursues it hard : 'It crushes down the forests, beats out roads, strides across the rivers, kicks down native institutions and generally tramples on the growth of nature, and the works of primitive man, reducing all things to that dead level of conventionality, which we call civilisation'. The marching boot of progress takes on a life of its own, unstoppable, unthinking; it is power and efficiency unleashed and exercised without discrimination, gaily lumping into the same category things as different as the demolition of forests and the destruction of indigenous traditions. This latter sense is clearly implicit in the exactly comparable way in which the two activities are referred to. At the same time, though, Clifford is also questioning — the verb is 'crushes', not 'clears' — whether the demolition of forests is not in its way as reprehensible as the detribalization of local custom and ceremony.

There is more to the shaped significance of the sentence in itself and in the context of what follows it, but enough has been pointed to, vis-a-vis the purpose of this essay, to give an idea of what a Clifford sentence can be up to without any rhetorical strain. Whether or not the reader identifies with the politico-moral persuasion of the point of view expressed, he cannot but acknowledge the clarity and force with which it is done. Whether the language which represents colonialism as a destructive phenomenon is emotional to the point of emotionalism; whether, or to what extent, Clifford is fair in stressing the debit column of the colonial account; how best to sum up the sensibility which the point of view expressed gives a glimpse of; what basically motivates the kind of judgement pronounced upon what 'we call civilisation' — these are matters for a full assessment of Cliford as a writer and a sensibility to reckon with.

Such an assessment, to be scrupulously fair, may even need to decide what to do with things of the order of, say, coconut palms which implore heaven for relief: 'A scene within a few miles of the seashore on the eastern side of the Malay Penninsula. A river measuring near two miles across, its waters running white in the aching midday heat, their glaring monotony relieved by a number of islands smothered in vegetation, every leaf motionless in the hot, still air, each frond of the coconut palms stretching impotent arms heavenward in a mute prayer for coolness . . .' This comes at the beginning of 'At the Court of the Pelesu' (p. 40), its intention declared with implicit directness. It is easy enough to see that intention deftly realized, the stage-direction mode dispensing with both 'dummy' word-sequences (like 'There is . . .') and principal verbs in an effort to focus on the details, the nouns and their modifiers. And '. . . waters running white . . .' is a fine bit of description. But the figure of the prayerful coconut palms is something else — something that has come off effectively, or something indifferent, or literary in the pejorative sense? Whatever the verdict, it cannot afford to be aware that the metaphor is the one and only expansive gesture into which the carefully observing mode of the opening of the story relaxes.

Clifford's descriptive power is, to say no more, not negligible. Can anything of its kind be a finer example of a process precisely frozen for contemplation than his description of a stretch of the Lipis River? Leading up to what I have in mind is a passage which approaches being as good as the kind of thing it does can be : 'This is the Jeram Besu, the great rapid on the Lipis River. At this point the waters of the Lipis, which have hitherto meandered through a broad green valley, dotted with nestling villages, and gay with the vivid colouring of the standing rice, suddenly becomes pent, in a narrow bed, between grim walls of granite' ('On

Malayan Rivers', *Stories*, p. 182). Here is the carefull eye at work, picking off details patiently, accurately. But more than accuracy of eye seems involved in what comes next: 'The stream above the rapid runs smooth and even, growing more oily to look upon, as it combs over, in a great curved wave, at the head of the fall'. Here, one feels, the observer is one with the object of attention, the result of observation going beyond description to achieve identification with the object as the sentence goes along in one relatively brief yet seemingly unhurried sweep with the stream in its texture and the clearly phased continuum of its flow.

Both — Clifford more than Swettenham — are capable of more than 'rough descriptions' (to use the phrase of the 1875 reviewer of Swettenham). This ability can be too easily taken for granted. Really good description, especially the kind that is touched pervasively or even fitfully with the quality of empathy, is more difficult to do than it looks when done, as Swettenham, interestingly enough, is acutely aware of :'Any very beautiful sight almost instantly raises a wish, in the . . . beholder, that his joy should be shared by those he loves . . . If he can dabble in colours, or feebly outline a word picture, he very probably tries to put on canvas, or paper, some semblance of the beauty which has so stirred his feelings. In either case the result can be little more than a caricature of what he saw' ('Local Colour', *Stories and Sketches,* p. 206). It would be more than interesting to characterize and evaluate Swettenham's aesthetic ethos from such a passage as this, including what follows it, and implicitly from the manner and matter of his writing but in this sampling I limit myself simply to stating that he apparently attributes the inadequacy of the beholder's effort to render 'what he saw in paint or words' to lack of executive expertise ('. . . dabbles . . .'; '. . . feebly . . .'). But when he goes on to say that 'no brush, no pen, can reproduce nature', is he aware that he has got on to a different idea? Or is the difference only apparent? Here I can only state categorically that the difference is real, the view now being that no technique can ever capture reality exactly. But this, it is implied when he next brings up the comparison between a photograph and an artist's rendering, does not matter : 'the comparative exactness of photograph often conveys a poorer idea of a scene than a very indifferently-painted sketch . . .'. What matters is the 'reading' of reality, not the reproduction of it.

I am not sure whether it can be said that Swettenham is aware that any artist in his reading of reality, if that is to come to anything of value, has first to have an imaginative sympathy with the reality he confronts. Such an awareness he seems to have, though, as regards the 'reading' of people, including those of a different nationality or race. When he doubts 'whether the Eastern is any more difficult to understand than the Western' ('Local Colour', *Stories and Sketches,* p. 208), he does so confidently but not because he regards European intelligence as more than equal to getting to know non-Europeans. It all rather depends, he is quite sure, on one's willingness — and no doubt on one's possessing sufficient imaginative sympathy to be able to profit from the attempt — to identify with other people : 'if you lie on the same floor with them, eat out of the same dish with them, fight with them and against them, join them in their sorrows and joys, win their confidence and regard — then the reading of their characters is no longer an impossible task . . .'. The man who can do this is one who is able, as Clifford puts it, 'to place himself in imagination in all manner of unlikely places, and thence to instinctively feel the native Point of View' ('Up Country', *Stories,* p. 207).

Both Swettenham and Clifford have the quality which they write enthusiastically about. Yet even in a sampling such as this one issue cannot be avoided, though it can only be raised here without entering into the thorough discussion it deserves : how 'sincere' are they in urging the great human value of imaginative sympathy, or to what extent do they think people in their situation should be prepared to exercise it and for what purpose? For is there not in the midst of their urging itself a note which jars? The clause 'win their confidence', for example, may make it seem as if Swettenham means no more by going native than a method for winning friends and influencing people. Clifford talks about entering with feeling into 'the native Point of View' and then suddenly pronounces : 'That is really the whole secret of governing natives'. That hurts — that may sound typically white-colonialist.

Those who care to see justice done to Clifford or Swettenham can urge the consideration of a number of explanations for what may seem grating or unacceptable to an enlightened view, taking care not to explain away what is really there. Thus, for one thing, one can try to see whether there are grounds for saying that when Clifford, for example, comes up with that 'offensive' thing about governing the natives, he does not mean to sound like that; he is only looking at the matter from the point of view of the administrator-manager-governor, and that can often sound superior or calculating. For another, what Clifford says sounds unforgivable only to over-sensitive post-colonial ears.

The most valid way, however, of dealing with what is or seems unacceptable in Clifford or Swettenham is to judge it in the perspective of the total sensibility emerging from his writings. And by this I do not mean quite the same thing as the drawing up of a list of faults and another list of virtues, such as in effect results, for example, from what Roff does in summing up Swettenham : 'Judgements such as those that the Malays lacked political institutions, or that Europeans were innately more intelligent than Asians, would scarcely have commanded universal assent in his own time, let alone today. But with gaucheries of this kind went a frank and often fond personality, a good deal of sound (if cynical) common sense, and an enormous fund of practical knowledge about the people and events of whom he was writing' (Introduction, *Stories and Sketches*, pp. xvii-xviii). Realism is the strength of this method in the sense that far from playing down what faults there may be in the subject it lists them out item by item. Its fundamental inadequacy is that faults and virtues simply lie side by side, the relationship between them unanalysed. The judicious objectivity does not cut deep; the balance which is supposed to come out of inspecting the creditable with the discreditable falls short of anything approaching a probing, a considered, understanding.

Much the same sort of inadequacy marks what Roff says about Clifford and Malays : 'Hugh Clifford certainly came out to Malaya possessed of ideas roughly of this kind [i.e., preconceptions concerning 'natives'], and to some extent he subscribed to them for most of his life. at the same time, he discovered . . . that the Malays, though they might not be 'civilised', though they might require 'regeneration', were an extraodinarily attractive people, and that it was a source of endless fascination and reward to live among them' (Introduction, *Stories*, p. xii). What's happening here is typical of the balance-of-faults-and-virtues approach : Clifford's living well with the Malays makes up for his thinking badly of them. There is no indication of Roff's being aware that the question may be raised as to how valid, in this particular instance, such a compensatory strategy is. What is also typical of the approach is that Clifford's reprehensible preconceptions are so quickly admitted to (in a mood of concession : 'though they might . . . though they might . . .'), in order just as quickly to bring up the compensatory consideration, that there is no time to pause and wonder, however fleetingly, whether it can be said that Clifford subscribed to any extent at all to the preconceptions he couldn't escape being in contact with when those preconceptions did not at all prevent him from finding the Malays 'an endless fascination and reward to live' with. Perhaps he *thought* he subscribed to them, and then, put to the test, found that he couldn't **really** have done so after all. In any case, did he not have doubts about the value of being civilized?

To mention an idea or a view as held by a writer is to isolate it from other relatable ideas of the writer as well as from the words used in stating it. That Clifford associates Malays with the adjective 'unregenerate' is an isolatable item of information — of the kind, unfortunately, which can be held against him, though on the basis of it alone no firm conclusion can be drawn regarding his attitude to Malays. What precisely does he intend by the term? In one place where it occurs the context clearly rules out any possibility of its being used in any derogatory sense : 'Such changes have been wrought in the condition of the Malay on the West Coast, during the past twenty years of British Protection, that there one can no longer see him in his natural and unregenerate state' ('The East Coast', *Stories*, p. 14). The changes brought about by 'twenty years of British Protection' are not matters deserving nothing but praise. This is especially clear in the total contextof the essay but even without that the implication is there in the contrast with a pre-existing state pointed to by Clifford more positively ('natural') than negative-

ly. The implicit becomes explicit when in the next sentence the changed state is described as 'sadly dull, limp, and civilised'. To be 'unregenerate', then, is no bad thing.

How 'natural' is something which is to be thought of as naturally right and good? By what norms can something be felt or judged as 'natural'? To what extent can it be said that Clifford has wished upon the Malays an unchanged state of being as good for them? If this can be said to be his wish, what right has he to make it for another people? What, to turn to the other, is Swettenham's 'wish'? These and other questions lie outside the scope of this paper, which has confined its attention to only sampling Clifford's and Swettenham's selected Malayan stories and sketches with the purpose of showing that even within such a restricted reading can be found enough of merit and interest to call for a full revaluation of them as writers and sensibilities responding to the Malayan world of their time.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF BRITISH EXPANSION IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA: SOME REMARKS ON THE USE OF ENGLISH

S.N.R. Kazmi

A popular encyclopaedia says: "Sarawak was a dependency of Brunei until 1841, when the sultan of Brunei *gave it* to an Englishman, James Brooke, for his help in putting down a rebellion" (italics added).[1] An authoritative English dictionary carries the following entry: "Brooke, Sir James (1803-68). First English rajah of Sarawak (1841-63); travelling there privately, he found it in revolt against its ruler, the Malay sultan of Brunei; he restored order and *was made rajah by the sultan* and *acclaimed by the people*" (italics added).[2] An official handbook, prepared for the British Information Service on the eve of the independence of Sabah and Sarawak within Malaysia, states: "Rajah Muda Hashim persuaded Brooke to help defeat the enemy. When hostilities concluded Rajah Muda Hashim *offered Brooke the territory of Sarawak*. On 24th September, 1841, James Brooke was ceremoniously proclaimed Rajah of Sarawak. . ." (italics added).[3] A modern historian has this to say about what he himself terms the "private coup" by Brooke: "In compensation from the grateful Sultan, he *received in 1841 a grant* of powers of government over Sarawak (as a kind of fief)."[4] A guide to Kuching speaks of "the problems [Brooke] had taken on his shoulders when he had *accepted the Raj*" and his "not very sociable" early years in Sarawak (italics added).[5]

The above statements reflect the slight colouring often given to events in the history of British expansion in South-East Asia through an insidious choice of words or of syntactical devices. In the above quotations the verbs "gave," "was made," "offered," "received," and "had accepted," and the adjective "grateful" combine to insinuate in the mind of the unwary reader the impression that Brooke merely played a passive role in the transfer of power in midnineteenth-century Sarawak. The dictionary entry even implies that the common people of Sarawak had something to do with the coming of Brooke rule. Writing in 1935, Ranee Margaret, wife of the second Rajah Brooke, made the remarkable claim about the first Rajah that "the people loved him and elected him their king."[6] The claim exceeded James Brooke's own, made on 6 January 1866: "The principle of the Government of Sarawak is to rule for the people and with the people, and to teach them the rights of free men under the restraints of government."[7] Lincoln had given his Gettysburg Address, echoed here, on 19 November 1863 and died on 15 April 1865.

[1] "Sarawak," *Illustrated World Encylopedia* (Woodbury, NY, 1974).

[2] *The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary* (London, 1962; 2nd ed., 1964).

[3] *North Borneo and Sarawak*, Prepared for the British Information Service (London, May 1963), p. 12.

[4] John F. Cady, *Southeast Asia : Its Historical Development* (New York : McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 439 (italics added).

[5] Elizabeth Pollard, *Kuching Past and Present* (Kuching, Malaysia : Borneo Literature Bureau, 1972), pp. 4,5.

[6] Ranee Margaret of Sarawak, "Foreword," *Rajah Brooke and Baroness Burdett-Coutts*, ed. Owen Rutter (London, 1935), p. 7. In his own "Introduction," Rutter echoes that Brooke was "not merely a philanthropist, but one who had devoted years of his life, as well as the whole of his fortune, to the primitive people whose adopted ruler he had become" (p. 22).

[7] "Introductory Remarks," in Charles Brooke, *Ten Years in Sarawak . . .*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley, 1866), p. xiv. In 1869 Alfred Russel Wallace asserted that the Rajah held Sarawak solely by the goodwill of the native inhabitants, "not for his own advantage but for their good" (*The Malay Archipelago. . .* London, 1906), p. 72.

The facts of the case, even as presented in the letters and journals Brooke rushed to the press to justify his campaigns in northwest Borneo, seem to have been quite different. Brooke not only provided Hashim military help in putting down the rebellion but rushed back to Singapore to bring goods to exchange for antimony ore. When there was delay in the supply of the ore he took offence at something, brought up his armed yacht *The Royalist* in position to deliver a broadside of six twenty pounders on Hashim's plank-and-timber palace.[8] The Rajah Muda had no choice but to sign the transfer of government. It is another question whether he had the right to do so. Brooke himself seems to have been in some doubt, for he was anxious to get the Sultan to acquiesce in his claims.

The series of treaties changing the nature and extent of Brooke's title, which were negotiated in Brunei with the support of British "fire-ships" or armed steamers, have not so far received fair treatment from popular historians. An eyewitness to the signing of one of these treaties, Frank S. Marryat, records how the island of Labuan was taken from the Sultan with brass guns trained on him at close range while "a man held the lighted tow in his hand. Every European on board had his musket ready loaded." This admirer of Brooke adds, "By dint of threats he had gained his point."[9] Further evidence suggests that Brooke's policy was to divide and rule, or to set up a puppet Sultan in Brunei. As early as 1842 he was proposing, perhaps to the British government, to raise Hashim to the throne of Brunei.[10] Hashim was finally taken back to Brunei in the Royal Navy vessel *Samarang* in November 1844 to lead the "English party" against what Brooke liked to call the "piratical party." To give Hashim more than moral support, Brooke brought a force of eight naval vessels (including three steamers) commanded by Admiral Cochrane; to avenge Hashim's death in 1846 he persuaded Cochrane to occupy Brunei and make the Sultan agree to fresh treaties. Historians still sometimes refer to Brooke's acquisitions of territory as "cessions," not as "annexations." For example, Owen Rutter simply states that in August 1846 "he secured from the Sultan a deed which acknowledged his absolute sovereignty of Sarawak" and that "the Sultan . . . had ceded [Labuan] to Great Britain in 1846."[12]

In their view of British acquisitions of territorial rights in South-East Asia historians seem to show at times an unusual resemblance to Stamford Raffles, whose *History of Java* (1917) has a passage like the following:

> Marshall Daendels [in 1808] . . . marched to [Jogjakarta] with a considerable force, and a negociation being opened, *a treaty was entered into*, by which the reigning sultan *consented to resign* the administration of the country into the hands of his son, who was appointed to exercise the same under the title of regent, and *to cede certain provinces* (italics added).[13]

In spite of the brief allusion to the presence of "a considerable force," the above passage puts its emphasis on the sultan's consenting to abdicate in favour of his son and to cede ter-

[8]See Rodney Mundy, *Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebes* . . . 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1848), vol. I, 268-71. *The Private Letters of Sir James Brooke* . . ., ed. J.C. Templer, 3 vols. (London: Bentley, 1853), I, 117-18.

[9]Frank S. Marryat, *Borneo and the Indian Archipelago*, (London, 1848), p. 115, See also pp. 104-14.

[10]See Mundy, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 275. The person to whom the idea was suggested is only identified as "N — ." During his mission to Siam, Brooke contemplated the same policy of "indirect rule" in Siam; see N. Tarling *Imperial Britain in South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, 1975), pp. 144-46.

[11]See Brooke, *Private Letters*, vol. II, pp. 151-52.

[12]Owen Rutter, ed., *Rajah Brooke & Baroness Burdett Coutts*, London, 1935, pp. 33, 35.

[13]Vol. II, p. 229.

ritories, not by any means on the Dutch Governor-General's forward policy. In his account of Brooke's early campaigns Hugh Low shows a similar bias: "By this time [1841] the Rajah [Muda Hashim] was *tired of Sarawak*, the government of which *he handed over* to his valuable associate in the extinction of the civil war" (italics added).[14] To the portrait of the native Rajah we find added here a fresh stroke of the brush which makes him look tired as well as grateful.

Other early accounts of British expansion in the religion often present the native chiefs as unable to rule. It is often mentioned that Brunei was in a sorry state, with the Sultan powerless to control his numerous *pengirans* (rajahs/chiefs) in their exploitation of *kuripans* (fiefs held as appanages of office) and *tulins* (private inheritable property). The result of this power vacuum, it is argued, was widespread piracy and the slavery that accompanied it. Until recently historians were content to note the weakness of the native rulers without going into the factors which may have caused it. It is heartening to find a distinguished historian from Borneo itself emphasizing that "the era of piracy and slavery that went with it was caused by the dominating and mercantilist activities of the Westerners."[15] As long ago as 1849 an English observer remarked that the mass of people in the Archipelago remained in nearly the same condition in which they were found by the earliest European sailors:

> But, as nations, they have withered in the presence of the uncongenial, greedy and relentless spirit of European policy. . .[Long] overawed and restrained by the power of Europeans, the national habits of action have, in most parts of the Archipelago, been lost, or are only faintly maintained in the piratical habits of some . . .[16]

Even earlier, Raffles had observed that "the terror of the Portuguese arms, and the restrictions of the Dutch paralyzed the native energies of the Archipelago."[17] Chinese labour could be imported into Penang and elsewhere at twelve Spanish dollars ($2.8s) per head passage money, which was to be reimbursed with free labour for three years. This could not fail to have a tendency to reduce all labour to the level of slavery, as under the Speenhamland System of parish relief introduced in parts of England in 1795.

Raffles also noted that the Dutch policy of destroying native trade in the Archipelago "may be considered as the origin of many of the evils, and of all the piracies of which we now complain."[18] Unfortunately, Raffles himself continued the Dutch policy of monopolizing commerce during his control of Java and the surrounding islands, even at the risk of displeasing his Governor-General, Lord Minto.[19]

In accounts of the coming of the British to South-East Asia the native ruler is not only painted as weak and tired but as piratical. One of these accounts says, "Piracy was a very ancient occupation of the seafaring peoples of South-East Asia. It was regarded as late as the nineteenth century as a quite reasonable one for a gentleman."[20] Another waxes eloquent, "There

[14]*Sarawak; Its Inhabitants and Productions* . . . (London: Bentley, 1848), p. xix.

[15]James P. Ongkili, "Pre-Western Brunei, Sarawak and Sabah," *Nusantara*, no. 3 (Jan. 1973), 67.

[16]J.R. Logan, "The Present Condition of the Indian Archipelago," *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, 1 (1847), 17-18.

[17]Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* . . . (London: Murray, 1830), Appendix, p. 5 (separate pagination).

[18]Ibid., Appendix, p. 10.

[19]See John Bastin, "Raffles and a British Indonesia," *Essays on Indonesian and Malayan History* (Singapore: Donal Moore, 1961), pp. 122-23.

[20]Dartford, *A Short History of Malaya*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1958), p. 122.

[21]Lennox A .Mills, *British Malaya 1824-1867* (1925).

were pirates in fleets, and in single praus, pirates in big hundred-oared galleys, pirates in small galleys, pirates in row-boats, and solitary pirates in tiny skiffs."[21] The official handbook *North Borneo and Sarawak* asserts that in the early nineteenth century "the seas around [Borneo] were a pirates' lake."[22] It even reprints an 1846 illustration with an altered caption: "The *Dido* under fire: piracy was once common on the Borneo coast." The *Dido*, captained by Henry Keppel, was a Royal Navy steamer which carried eighteen 32-pounders and several little gunboats.[23] The original caption to the illustration had read: "Attack on the DIDO'S Boats off Sirhassen."[24]

European concern about possible acts of piracy had already been reflected in article 5 of the treaty signed on 17 March 1824, engaging the Dutch and British Governments "to concur effectually in repressing Piracy in those Seas . . ."[25] The aim of the provision was to seek increased security for British commerce, but in the long run it led to "operations undertaken allegedly for the suppression of piracy."[26] British merchants and officials in the area took recourse to the charge of piracy as "a major means of securing the interposition of British power."[27] Raffles was perhaps the first to emphasize the suppression of piracy with a view to gaining sympathy from superior authorities in Calcutta and London for a forward policy in the area. James Brooke, who often quoted Raffles in support of his own policies, used the piracy charge rather freely to include any native stand against territorial claims. For instance, in 1844 when the Honourable Erskine Murray lost his life in Kutai (southern Borneo) trying, with the help of 60-70 English seamen in two armed vessels, to have territory ceded to him by the Sultan, Brooke attributed the death to the "piratical habits" of the Sultan of Kutai and his pengirans. Brooke's own accounts of Murray show that the unfortunate Englishmen wanted to follow Brooke's example in acquiring a country of his own. He had even written several times to Brooke on the subject of joining him before fitting out tow vessels, well-armed and manned with Englishmen.[29] In spite of this evidence to the contrary, a modern historian sees Murray's armed negotiation in the innocuous light of an "attempt to open a communication with the Sultan of Kutai and the Kayans."[30]

A similar bias may be noticed in the treatment of two other British adventurers acquiring territorial rights. Alexander Hare, who had ideas similar to Raffles' about the setting up of "an Empire of Colonies" and "a range of possessions" extending from the Bay of Bengal to Australia, was despatched to Banjirmasin as a fully accredited British agent. On 7 April 1812 Hare received permission to negotiate an official treaty to "check piracies, regulate trade, and effect the general ends of civilization." By October 1812 he had acquired a large part of the Sultan's territory. One modern historian simply states that the territory "was ceded." Afterwards Raffles claimed that the grant was made to the British Government but Hare himself protested that he had occupied Banjirmasin as a private individual, at the Sultan's invitation.[31]

[22]*North Borneo and Sarawak*, cited above, p. 12.

[23]See Brooke, *Private Letters*, vol. II, p. 216.

[24]See H. Keppel, *The Expedition to Borneo of H.M.S. Dido for the Suppression of Piracy* . . . 2 vols. (London: Chapman, 1846), vol. I, facing p. 8.

[25]Quoted in N. Tarling, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World: A Study of British Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century South-East Asia* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1963), p. 19.

[26]*Loc. cit.*

[27]Ibid., p. 13.

[28]Brooke, *Private Letters*, II, 15. See also pp. 16-17.

[29]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[30]Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, p. 114.

[31]See Bastin, *Essays*, pp. 129-42. See also Raffles, *Memoir*, pp. 61, 69.

Another historian takes a more defensive attitude to Hare: "In addition to his official duties, Hare obtained a grant of land from the sultan and set himself up as a local chief, with a large harem as one of its most conspicuous features."[32] Wurtzburg is here absolving Hare's ownership of some 200 slaves by presenting him as "a local chief." He does not see anything wrong in Raffles' sending from Java long-term prisoners, along with their wives and families, to work under Hare for the period of their sentences. The later history of these Javanese prisoners is interesting but not easy to come upon.

Hare and Clunies-Ross jointly built and owned the *Borneo*, a little ship of 428 tons employed in transporting indentured labour from Java to Banjirmasin. When the Banjirmasin settlement was wound up (on 9 November 1816) as a prelude to the Anglo-Dutch treaty, Hare looked around for "new heavens, new earths." The search took him and his associate to the Keeling-Cocos Islands. In their rivalry for control of the coral islands (600 miles to the south-west of Java) John Clunies-Ross expressed much disgust at Alexander Hare's treatment of his slaves but when Hare died, he refused to set them free. One account says, "By some strange misconception, not intentional act of injustice, Mr Ross refused to give Hare's slaves their freedom . . . but he paid them each two rupees a week, in goods (at his own valuation), provided that they worked for him, both men and women, as he thought proper."[33] The work generally consisted of husking a hundred coconuts a day for women, and extracting a gallon of oil from every ton of nuts for men. The colony of course thrived. It still does.

A recent book on the so-called "Kings of the Cocos" goes to the point of declaring that John Clunies-Ross "founded the settlement which, under his government and that of his remarkable descendants, developed in the people . . . perhaps as high a degree of contentment, well-being, usefulness and happiness, as human mortals may have anywhere attained and maintained."[34] This is judging by results, and exaggerating the results at that. The last Clunies-Ross, the fifth in the line, recently rejected the Australian Government's offer of US$3.5 million as compensation for handing over control. "I'll fight to the bitter end," he said. "The Australian government can't come here and decide the future of the islanders."[35] Referring to the succession on Keeling-Cocos, John Scott Hughes says that the third Clunies-Ross had himself elected to the governorship. The issue of the "election" was doubtless inevitable but it was "a considerate way in which to bring it about."[36] Once again conquest and hereditary rights are here defended as popular with a native population *so* grateful for their well-being.

[32]C.E. Wurtzburg, *Raffles of the Eastern Isles* (London, 1954), p. 266. See also pp. 124-25, 147-48.

[33]Captain R. Fitzroy of H.M.S. *Beagle*, quoted in John Scott Hughes, *Kings of the Cocos* (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 47.

[34]Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[35]Quoted in "King of the Cocos Plans his Last Battle," *New Straits Times*, 18 June—3 July 1977 (precise date not available).

[36]Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Review

***English in Singapore and Malaysia, Status: Features: Functions,* John Platt and Heidi Weber. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980. xxix + 292 pp.**

ENGLISH IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA, STATUS: FEATURES: FUNCTIONS covers a fairly wide range of issues which are rather loosely linked to one another by the common denominator that the book's title represents. The very subject of the book is wide indeed, and besides, relatively little has been published on it; its publication is therefore most definitely welcome in this part of the world. Yet, many Malaysian readers may feel mildly irritated by the fact that the authors, while displaying the diversity of their subject, seem to avoid committing themselves to enlightening viewpoints or substantial conclusions. In other words, Platt and Weber give their readers few guidelines to help them through the mass of information that is gathered in the book.

A quick perusal of the table of contents will show that the very form of the book is simply determined by a rather neat classification of the issues involved. The book opens with a discussion of 'The Growth of a Complex Multi-ethnic Multilingual Network' (Chapter 1), in which the authors look back on early colonial times in the region; this is followed by a Chapter on 'The Development of Singapore-Malayan English' and one on 'The Spread of English'. In these early pages Platt and Weber often base their discussion on scanty evidence, and they tend to amalgamate, without any qualms, what happened decades ago with what is happening in contemporary Singapore and Malaysia. For example, in Chapter 2, 'The Development of Singapore-Malayan English', they mention, with a past reference, 'the petrification of the interlanguage' and they go on with an example taken from an article published in the *Straits Times* on August 22nd, 1975! This does not deter them from supplying us with this literally head-spinning conclusion : 'It became the appropriate thing to use this kind of Singapore-Malayan English in informal situations, instead of a more 'correct' English even if one could speak it' (p. 20). Are they referring to the past, or to the present, or to both at once? Leaving muddled facts aside, Platt and Weber seem happily oblivious of an essential force in the history of English in the region, namely the amazing rapidity with which sociolinguistic factors shift and evolve. One would tend to think, in fact, that 'evolution' should have been the key note of the chapter in question!

In the last few chapters of the book, one gets an equally strong impression that the authors have made hasty patchwork of superficially related and relevant topics. The broadsweeping view they take of their subject is clearly reflected in the chapter headings: 'Implications for Applied Linguistics', 'Implications for English Teaching Programmes', 'The Place of English in the Media' and 'English Literature in Singapore and Malaysia' (Chapters 10-13). One instance of the 'decorative' function of a fairly large number of pages in the book may be found in Chapter 12, which opens with these words :

> The media, along with education, holds an important place in the dissemination of ideas, shaping societal thoughts, opinions, attitudes and even actions (p. 205).

Having laid down the premises of their discussion with a flourish of generalities, the authors briskly announce, in the next paragraph, that the aim of the chapter is to examine the 'quantitative share' (p. 205) of English in the media. Then, for thirty long pages, the reader is supplied with relevant facts and figures. Below is an example taken at random of the general-interest level of it all :

> The EMS (Educational Media Service Division) is administered by the Ministry of Education but it is a joint service involving the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of

> Culture. Schools radio broadcasts are on week-days, except Friday, the languages used being Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and Tamil. Education Television, ETC, was officially launched in Malaysia in June 1972. In 1975, twelve television series were broadcast to Malaysian Primary Schools. Of these series two were on English language, aimed at Standard 4 and Standard 5 and totalling nine programmes each, with each programme being broadcast four times (p. 225).

The information given is useful, but it would perhaps find its more rightful place in the publication of a tourist organisation.

Fortunately, however, the central chapters, the core of the book as it were, are appreciably more substantial and it is now time to turn our attention to them. These chapters (Chapters 4 to 9) deal fairly specifically with the 'Linguistic Features of English in Singapore' as well as 'The Functions of English in Singapore' and 'The Functions of English in Malaysia'. Generally speaking, the writing-mode is descriptive rather than argumentative; and numerous examples are provided, which will delight all those familiar with the variety of English used in this region. Amusing comments are made, for instance, on words which are used differently in Singapore English and Standard British English, as in the following:

> Cosy
> Visit our cosy coffee house
> (in the advertisement of a hotel)
>
> Comfortable, intimate. In SBrE it means' comfortable, snug' and has nearly always connotations of warmth in contrast to the cold outside. This particular coffee house (like many others) had the air-conditioning turned full on and was extremely chilly.
>
> dialect
> Because for my dialect once the daughter marries ah — is consider(ed) lost
>
> In SE dialect can mean the group of people who speak the dialect as well as the dialect itself (p. 87).

Also, in this part of the book at least, Platt and Weber do try to base their description on fairly specific premises. They use Standard British English as a standard of comparison in order to highlight 'the diagnostic features of Singapore English (SE) i.e. features by which it may be recognized as SE!' (p. 49). Their overriding aim is to attempt a description of SE as a standard variety in its own right. The task, however, implies the consideration of intertwined and complex sociological and linguistic factors. And the book certainly succeeds in presenting its readers with a general picture of some of the complexities involved in this field of study.

Chapters 6 and 8 are particularly interesting in this respect. In these, the authors consider the place of English in Singapore and in Malaysia in various domains, namely : Family, Friendship, Transactions, Employment, Education, Media, Government, Law and Religion. They define *domain* as 'a class of related speech situations in which a *certain combination of speech variation is used'* (p. 116). Many useful tables are provided in which observed facts are interrelated along various axes. Among the most interesting are tables 7.6 and 7.7 which show code combinations for some of the major domains in both countries (p. 143—144):

It is quite amazing that, with such an apt presentation of facts, the authors should not also attempt to suggest some interpretation. Here again, as already observed regarding the peripheral chapters, they let their readers draw their own conclusions, as shown by the strikingly flat remark they make on the tables shown above :

TABLE 7.6 CODE – DOMAIN RELATIONSHIPS IN MALAYSIA

Polyglossic Codes		Domains								
		Family	Friend-ship	Trans-actions	Employ-ment	Edu-action	Media	Govern-ment	Law	Religion
Arabic		(X)	(X)	(X)						X
Bahasa Malaysia	F				X	X	x	X	X	
	SF		X	X	X	X	X			
Regional Bahasa dial.		X	X	X	(X)					
Bahasa Pasar			(X)	X	(X)					
Mal. English	F				X	X	X			X
	SF			X	X	X	X			
	Coll.	(X)	X	X	X					
Mandarin	F=					X	X			(X)
	SF			(X)	(X)					
	Coll.		X							
Indian Lang	F					(X)	X			X
	SF			X	X		X			
	Coll.	X	X	X	X					
Hokkien		X	X	X	X		(X)			(X)
Cantonese		X	X	X	X		CX)			(X)
Teochew		X	X	(X)	(X)					(X)
Hakka		X	X	(X)	(X)					(X)
Hainanese		X	X	(X)	(X)					(X)

Sub-varieties:
F = Formal
SF = Semi-formal
Coll. = Colloquial

TABLE 7.7 CODE – DOMAIN RELATIONSHIPS IN SINGAPORE

Polyglossic Codes		Domains								
		Family	Friend-ship	Trans-actions	Employ-ment	Edu-cation	Media	Govern-ment	Law	Religion
Arabic		(X)	(X)	(X)		(X)				X
Malay	F			X		X	X	X	X	
	SF			X	X	X	X			
	Coll.	X	X	X	X					
Bahasa Pasar			(X)	X	(X)					
Sin. English	F				X	X	X	X	X	X
	SF			X	X	X	X			
	Coll.	X	X	X	X					
Mandarin	F				X	X	X	X	(X)	X
	SF			X	X	X	X			
	Coll.	X	X	X	X					
Indian Lang.	F					X	X	X	(X)	X
	SF			X	X	X	X			
	Coll.	X	X	X	X					
Hokkien		X	X	X	X		(X)			(X)
Cantonese		X	X	(X)	(X)		(X)			(X)
Teochew		X	X	(X)	(X)		(X)			(X)
Hakka		X	X	(X)	(X)		(X)			(X)
Hainanese		X	X	(X)	(X)		(X)			(X)

> As can be seen from the above Tables, the sub-varieties of English are, amongst other sub-varieties, appropriate codes for all of the main domains in both speech communities, serving many different functions (p. 144).

As might well be expected, however, Platt and Weber's broadsweeping approach and their laxity as far as scientific exactness is concerned, open them to the danger of misrepresenting facts, the most serious example of which is to be found in Chapter 9: 'Types of English in Malaysia'. Here a distinction is made between Malaysian English I (ME I), which is equated to Singapore English, and ME II. While the distinction may sound acceptable to anyone familiar with the situation in the area, Platt and Weber's detailed discussion of ME II distorts facts to the point of becoming obnoxious. They base their description entirely on an analysis of 'the English of forty Malay-medium educated Malays in the age group 18-26' (p. 169). That the authors should present some data that are limited in scope in terms of the number, the ethnic background and the age of the subjects studied is fair enough. What is simply objectionable is the fact that they totally overlook the very limitations of their data, and use them as a basis for a broadsweeping generalisation, which anyway does not match their premises, as shown in this conclusion : 'All this suggests that ME II (the English of the Malay-medium educated) has a definite foreign/second languge appearance (p. 182)'. Did Platt and Weber, in the course of their investigation, really fail to realise that in Malaysia to-day, the Malay-medium educated come not from just one, but possibly from several, ethnic backgrounds?

Should one conclude that *English in Singapore and Malaysia* presents too many of the features of high-pressure journalism to be worth more than an absent-minded glance? It is true that while reading the book one often tends to react rather strongly to its very content. But perhaps the true worth of the book is to be found there : unlike long-overdue essays and dissertations on the subject, promised and intended by people who ought to be better informed, *English in Singapore and in Malaysia* has the essential quality of being simply available; and it is this very availability which may force Malaysian readers to ponder on a subject of great interest to them. In all, there is much to be gleaned from the book, which the tolerant reader may well find worthy of his attention.

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Reporting

Informally

MACLALS Teaching of English Literature 'Forum' : 20 February 1982

A participant took off immediately from President Dr. Lloyd Fernando's (hereinafter LF) opening remarks, seizing the opportunity to ask what really, specifically, MACLALS can do for the English-Literature teaching situation. We can make recommendations, said LF. ... Apropos of something this scribe didn't catch, Puan Fadzilah Amin brought out, as a reminder, that the Exam. Council has ruled that English Literature shall stay. This and/or something else prompted LF's remark about something defeatist in our attitude to the situation. At this point the "HM theme" began its first but by no means tentative note: the HM, the HM, that's who is defeatist, blocking English Literature interest! No, someone said, the problem is the time-table: science periods look better on the time-table. No one mentioned that the HM, or whatever is behind the HM, is the time-table. But perhaps this was implied in what someone else said: HM should be made aware of the value of English Literature. Then fewer students would be arm-twisted to enter the science stream. Someone else or the same person noted another complication: between Bahasa Lit. and English Lit., students would choose the former. Do they, LF asked, have to choose? Why not both? Both indeed! Why, someone brought up, zero literature is the horrendous state of affairs in her school! At this point the struggling scribe could only manage to catch phrases like the lack of expertise, of teachers who can explain metaphor, etc., the burden of too many texts. That, LF pointed out, is why some body, association or persons with professional interest in literature should take over or help in the running of the Literature programme. What was the response to this? Was there any? The next thing the srcibe became aware of was J. Augustin (hereinafter JA) attempting to identify some 'realities' of the situation: some students want literature but schools not sympathetic; insufficient 'counselling' — motivation necessary for there to be more literature takers to make their demand felt; urban schools more likely to respond to motivation than rural schools; poor-family students more likely to be influenced by their parents to leave literature alone, even if they opt for the arts stream. This two-stream — LF didn't say, 'babarism' — system excludes a (humanistic) possibility: what about a third stream of arts and science? Fine, someone said, but even then English Literature may not be among the arts subjects chosen — or may be chosen by the 'dumb ones' if the present arts-stream people are any indication.... Wong Phui Nam tried steering the discussion to consider whether there wasn't a connection between the lack of interest in English Literature and Malay Literature being badly taught — 'narrowly' taught, that is: far too much compartmentalization, no flow-over of interest to English Literature. Isn't it high time some sort of comparative approach was practised by way of having *Literature* classes focus on different-medium literature? ... Then, the scribe not knowing exactly how, two local university projects came into the picture. First, Josephine on the Universiti Sains Malaysia programme leading to a version of an English degree: an 'extremely interesting formula' made up of, among other things, appreciation of poetry as one component and also excerpts from novels; next, JA on the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia programme starting June, looking for Malay-medium students with or without HSC English (Literature) qualification, any sub-standard level of English to be remedied as the candidates go through the 4-year course leading to B.Ed. TESL in which there will be a 30% English Literature component. LF brought the discussion back to the upper secondary school and more immediate problems. Someone immediately took the opportunity to wish for there being 6 periods allocated for English instead of the 5 there are now; one of the six to be given to literature which should be compulsory for all. This to be pressed for by MACLALS, which should also see to it that the literature period be assigned to an English Literature graduate. Someone sang or moaned the time-table theme again: too many subjects competing for time.

After the coffee-break, LF isolated 6 problems/topics for coming to grips with: (1) The system — i.e., the HM and the time-table (and, someone added, the syllabus); (2) The science-or-arts division; (3) The teachers, and education or re-education in English and Literature; (4) The question of competence in the English Language; (5) A 'Third Stream'; (6) Career guidance, and the usefulness of expertise in English. Of these, with time running out, topic (1) monopolised the rest of the discussion. It was generally felt that re-educating and motivating HMs would be the thing to do. Meet them, then, talk with them on 'The role of literature in education': the meeting, Phui Nam suggested, to be master-minded by MACLALS. But suppose they won't come? Go get them, LF said. Or, someone said, have a Ministry man in the meeting and a CDC representative, and see whether they won't come running. At this point, Siew Mun came out with the suggestion that the way to the heart of the matter is to get the status of English recognized in real terms (e.g. the University or the Ministry specifying some English qualification for University entrance in relation to certain courses of study), but, it was felt, this would be getting involved with 'policy'; the more practical concern should be with 'implementation'. Towards this end, a paper would be prepared for the HM-meeting project, with a draft first to be circulated to teachers, by a committee comprising Mrs. Balakrishnan, Mrs. Yong Chong Hee, See Hong Choo and Victoria Yan. Topic (3) managed to get a look in: JA suggested organizing a workshop for English teachers on the teaching of English Literature in schools. Professor S.N.R. Kazmi committed the English Department to hosting/holding a seminar to be offered as 'English Literature in Schools'. ... Near the end of this Forum someone suggested we should bring about the inclusion of teaching-literature methods in faculty of education and TTC programmes.

A lively meeting, a fruitful one in terms of exchange of views and reinforcement of common interest as well as regards some decisions taken, and what with seeing again "long time no see" faces, nice kueh-kueh and a simple but appetising lunch a good time was had by all.

OBE

light
verse
in
comment

Love Song of a Committed Lecturer

'The banking concept of education, which serves the interest of oppression, is necrophilic . . .'
— Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

'The modern university has forfeited its chance to provide a simple setting for encounters which are both autonomous and anarchic, focussed yet unplanned and ebullient.'
— Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*

'. . . an introspective analysis of my experience obliges me to say that appreciation of poetry involves a felt change of consciousness.'
— Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*

'He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.'
— George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*

Poetry's my pedagogic joy,
Especially when the poetry's Donne's;
If only my girls weren't so coy,
Liking the puns but not the fun.

Their minds haunted, their eyes blear;
Not for them the passionate lay.
They prefer a learned queer
Who can groom them for Judgement Day.

Hum, Humbert, hum! Hum, Humbert, hum!
Give us this day our daily crum!

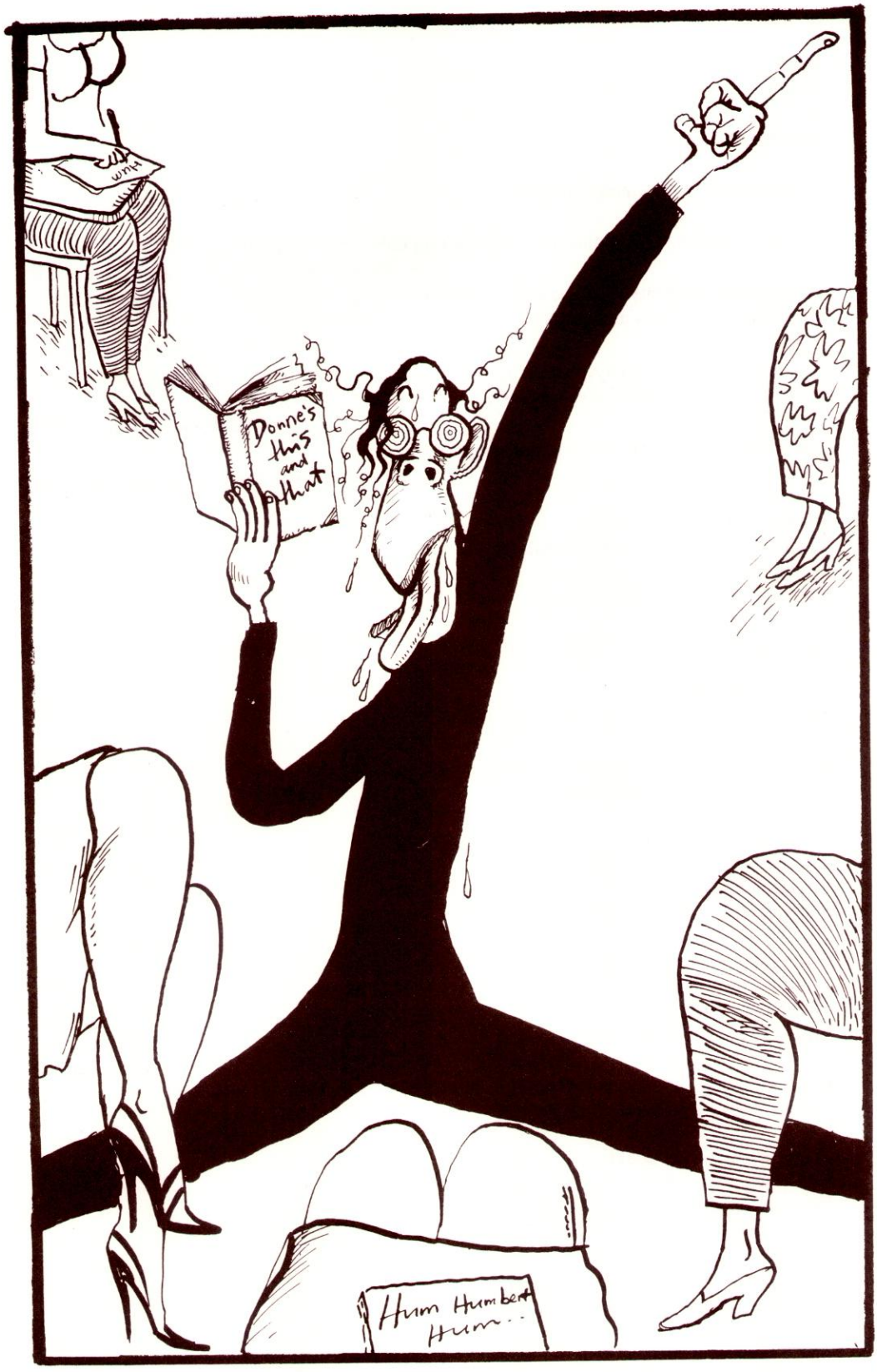
Inscrutable giggly cuties
Scribble slavishly as I drool,
Menstruating civilities
Subversively on hard stools.

I curse this academic morgue
And the thing called Education,
My libido's running amok,
Lifting the skirts of the Nation.

Hum, Humbert, hum! Hum, Humbert, hum!
Get on with the job you crazy bum!

Come, baby, come! Make your heart think!
And teach your mind the art of play;
To save you from coughing in ink
Should great Nabakov walk your way.

Come, baby, come! It's time for play!
Our secret dreams twist and do thread
Your beady cliches of ecstasy
With silken lines divinely red.


Donne's this and that
Hum Humbert Hum..

Hum, Humbert, hum! Hum, Humbert, hum!
Exams next month you bloody bum!

Come, baby, come! Down with your pens!
O, come with me and be my love!
On this teacher you can depend:
Where the bee sucks there suck I.

Listen to your blood's vibration,
Not all this necrophilic crap!
Fuck the Voice of Education,
Carnival of knowledge's in your lap!

Hum, Humbert, hum! Hum, Humbert, hum!
Exams next week you dirty bum!

Inscrutable giggly cuties
Go on scribbling the unscribbleble.
I'm lost in my sense of duties,
Trying to speak the unspeakable.

I feel the sun burning the day
Beyond these walls that freeze the id,
Dreaming of Lolitas for a lay
From period to bloody period.

Hum, Humbert, hum! Hum, Humbert, hum!
Hum, Dumpty, dum! Hum, Dumpty, dum!

(Tune for chorus: 'Three Blind Mice')

Salleh bin Joned

Dicetak oleh Jabatan Penerbitan Universiti Malaya, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 22-11.